



United Nations  
Educational, Scientific and  
Cultural Organization

## LANGUAGES MATTER

*“The first instrument of a people’s genius is its language,” said the French writer Stendhal. Literacy, learning, social integration... Everything transits through language, which embodies national, cultural and sometimes religious identity for each person. It constitutes one of the fundamental dimensions of a human being. Yet specialists estimate that within only a few generations, more than half of the 7,000 languages spoken in the world face extinction, because they are not represented in government, education and the media. For this reason, the United Nations had declared 2008 the International Year of Languages, to be launched by UNESCO on 21 February, International Mother Language Day. Produced with the support of UNESCO’s Intersectoral Group for Languages and Multilingualism, this year’s first issue of the Courier is devoted to languages.*



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**Multilingual mural.**

A crucial concern for the writers Boubacar Boris Diop and Jean Portante who “migrate” -happily but also painfully - from one language to another. Language is also a “visa” for immigrants who have to adapt to a new society for French-Serbian psycholinguist Ranka Bijelac-Babic. Her thoughts are completed by Afghan novelist Spôjmaï Zariab: “A brutal separation from one’s linguistic and cultural context evokes in my mind the image of a tree cut down one fine day to be planted in different earth.”

Safeguarding knowledge and know-how is also intrinsically linked to local and indigenous languages. Examples include the Machaj Juyai, “secret language” of the Kallawayas, Bolivian herbalists, whose story is told by Carmen Beatriz Loza, researcher at the Bolivian institute of traditional medicine in La Paz, or the

This document may be accessed online: [www.unesco.org/courier](http://www.unesco.org/courier)

► language of the Ainu people in Japan, described in the process of dying out by Kaori Tahara, historian of Ainu origin.

Some languages are disappearing while others are emerging. Often they are ancient but only now beginning to show up in public life, like the ones in the former Soviet Union, for instance. Our colleague Katia Markelova has decided to tell you about Kirghiz.

Finally, education is a crucial factor for safeguarding or developing a language: the Indian linguist Appasamy Murugaiyan examines the relationship between language and school, which is unusually complex in India, a country that is home to 1,650 languages and over a million educational institutions.













This year, the UNESCO Courier celebrates its 60th anniversary and offers its readers something new with “Focus”, announcing in this issue the International Year of Planet Earth (to be launched at UNESCO on 12 February) and “Landmarks” where you will find portraits of personalities who have had significant impact on the history of literature, science and art around the world.

More big news, for the International Year of Languages: Portuguese is being added to the Courier’s six linguistic editions, and will soon be available on line.

Last but not least, your magazine is becoming interactive! Starting with this issue, you can express your opinions and have them published on line. Share your thoughts!

*Jasmina Šopova*

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# Preaching in the wilderness or banking on the future?

*After prolific production in French, the Senegalese novelist Boubacar Boris Diop decided to write in Wolof. For a poor, multilingual population with an oral tradition, books are not a priority. Yet African writers who express themselves in their national languages are becoming more and more numerous.*

*Interview by Jasmina Šopova*



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**Boubacar Boris Diop.**

***You wrote a dozen books in French before choosing Wolof, your mother language. Why this reversion?***

Actually, my language was always there, inside me. The only problem I faced was the ability to write in my language. I was “corrupted” by French. I spoke everyday Wolof, but I didn’t possess it intimately.

Then there was Rwanda. A group of writers I belonged to went there after the genocide, in 1998, as part of the operation “Rwanda: writing as a duty to memory”. I said to myself that if we’d let 10,000 Rwandans get killed per day for three months, if nobody had done anything, this conveyed a certain contempt for Africa...

At that moment I felt even more strongly the desire to write in my mother language. It became essential. Oh, at first it was painful...I was very afraid of writing a French novel in Wolof. I had to fight against myself, but the Diops are stubborn! Then I began to hear voices – voices that came up out of the past. And writing became very easy. I am certain that my first novel in Wolof, *Doomi golo* (the she-monkey’s young), is my best piece of writing.

***Is writing in Wolof therefore also a political act?***

Absolutely. Coming back to the title of my novel *The she-monkey’s young*: what’s a monkey? It’s an imitation of the other. The passage that best sums up the book is the one in which you see a huge mirror in the middle of nowhere. Two gorillas find themselves in front of the mirror and they see their own images. They start fighting their reflections and as a result of hitting the mirror, they hurt themselves and die. What we call hatred of the other is in fact self-hatred. You have to be able to tolerate your image in the mirror, assume your identity.

At the moment I’m translating this novel into French. It will be published in France in September 2008.



► **Why didn't you decide to publish it in French in Senegal?**

Because now there are only publishers in national languages. That's good news, anyway... even if their tongues are hanging out! They work with enthusiasm, but with immeasurable difficulties too: no way to make a profit, no distribution... True, the state occasionally steps in. The "Direction du Livre et de la Lecture" (book and reading administration) funded, for instance, a second edition of my book *Doomi Golo* after the first run of 3000 copies was sold out.

Besides my publisher Papyrus, there's the « Organisation Sénégalaise d'Appui au Développement » (OSAD) that does remarkable work. And also ARED publishers, but they're specialized in research and in education for development.

**How many readers can you have in Wolof?**

If I'd asked myself that question, I would never have started writing! It's true that where I come from, many people don't know how to read and don't buy books. And they have other priorities: their children's health, feeding their families... There's also another phenomenon: rich people who live in poor societies generally prefer buying a fancy car, because you can't show off a book...

We have to accept this situation and bet on the long term. It will take a while for books written today in the African languages to prevail, but they'll eventually find acceptance. Thirty years ago, literature in national languages didn't exist, except for a few isolated cases. Today the situation is the opposite: hundreds of books have been published in Wolof and Pulaar, definitely more than in French.

There are two writers' organizations in Senegal, one composed of writers in French, the other of writers in national languages. The latter are far more numerous, but they have no visibility, because we live in a society where French is the language of prestige.

**Do you count on diaspora readership?**

A great deal. But although the younger generations of the diaspora speak their mother languages, they don't know how to read or write them. This is why I had the idea of organizing a Wolof workshop with young people whose background is Senegalese immi-



© UNESCO/Papyrus

**Cover of *Doomi Golo*, book by B.B. Diop in Wolof, at Papyrus.**

gration in France. At first the parents didn't necessarily see any benefit in their children learning their mother language, but there was great demand from the young people. We're starting in Bordeaux on 25 February. It's an idea that seems odd initially, but if it works I'll be very proud of it.

**Often when one travels from one African capital to another, one has to stop off in a European capital. Does this also happen in the world of African literature?**

It would be fantastic if I could translate the Kenyan writer Ngugi wa Thiongo directly from Kikuyu into Wolof, without going through English and French... To my knowledge there's almost no translation from one African language into another. My novel *Doomi* ►

► *Golo* is translated into Pulaar now. But who will translate it into Swahili? Do we have to wait two or three centuries? Not necessarily, but that's what I fear, alas.

You know, Africa was divided up by the colonial powers in Berlin in 1885. Africans speak to each other through the colonial languages. And me, making fun of it, referring to the Berlin Wall of the Cold War, I call it our "Berlin Wall". It is invisible but terrible – it separates the English- French- and Portuguese-speaking countries in Sub-Saharan Africa.

With Moussa Konaté, Malian writer who heads the French-speaking festival "Etonnants voyageurs" (Amazing Travelers) in Mali, I've often discussed the idea of organizing a big meeting of African writers who write in national languages. A way of at least making cracks in this wall. But it's easier to find sponsors for French-language writers than for those who write in national languages. UNESCO could be the perfect venue for such a pan-African



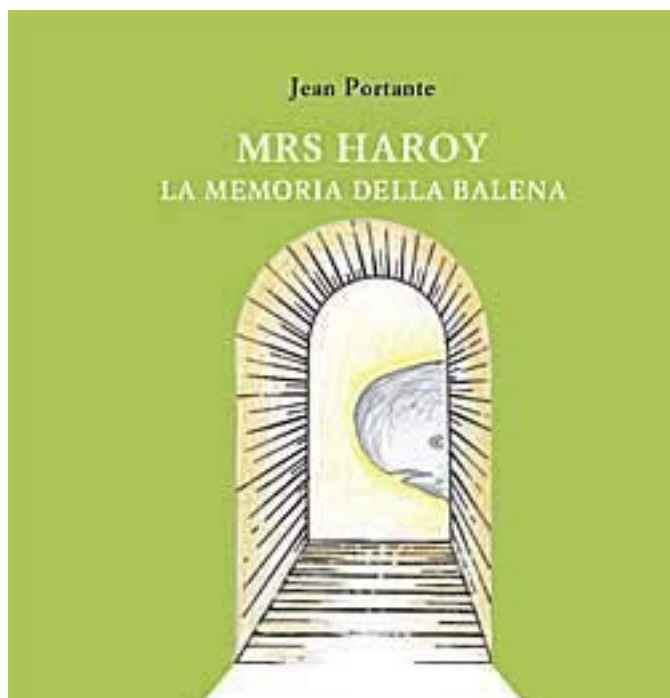
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In 2006, UNESCO took part in the 50th Anniversary of the 1st International Congress of Black Writers and Artists. Group photo of the participants in 1956.

encounter, particularly this year, international year of languages. And it's an international space. Without walls.

.....

## Strange language. Let's say it's a whale....



*Born in Luxembourg into an Italian-speaking family, having spoken Luxembourgish in the street, studied in French, German and English, improved his Spanish in Cuba, poet-novelist Jean Portante tells us here about his "strange language", a medley of foreign languages jostling each other inside his head.*

© UNESCO/Éditions Empiria

Italian translation of *Mrs Haroy or the Memory of the Whale* by Jean Portante.

► Languages, in my head, are nebulae intermingling and giving birth to the “strange language”. Whenever, for instance, I say or write the word “bougie” (French for candle), like a very close echo the Italian “buggia”, its enemy brother, appears. And while the French evokes illumination – light no matter how feeble or fragile its shine – and also to some degree truth, in Italian “buggia” means, with no ambiguity, “lie”, absence of light. When I say or write the word “bougie”, there breathes within it, colliding with the light, the lie that brings darkness.

The whale works like that. Invisible at first glance, the lung of terrestrial memory has worked its way into what is apparently the body of a fish. Similarly, within itself my “bougie” conceals that which erases it. Or “shaperases” it. Shapes it as it erases it. Because while my “bougie” is no longer clarity, nor is it yet concealment. It’s the path leading from one to the other. Just like the whale, an animal neither terrestrial nor aquatic, is the voyage setting out from the mammal trying to reach the fish.

All this had little impact when as an adolescent and then a young man I was passing my exams, flirting or doing my job as professor (of French, already). The new country, Luxembourg, had made me the gift of three languages. I used them according to circumstances. True providence! To read Goethe, Rilke, Musil and Celan in German, Voltaire, Baudelaire, Rimbaud and Proust in French, is a blessing. I am indebted to the country chosen by my family.

Things started going wrong when I turned (belatedly) to writing. Suddenly trilingualism was no longer of any use to me. Suddenly it was time to choose. You can’t write a book in several languages at once. And yet...

Suddenly too I realized that despite the linguistic plurality that was mine, none of the tools I had forged for myself allowed me to really work. The inside language was missing, the one that came from farther away and being of course on my lips, had made me discover Dante, Leopardi and Pavese, but was too dead to be able to enter my books.

Therefore I undertook that other voyage, the long conquest of the written word, by setting my sights on a cousin of that language, French. And at the

beginning, to be honest, I felt at ease. Like a fish in water, far from the whale. The inside animal said, that’s it, the conquest is finished, you’ve arrived in your new home. Alive.

## A not insignificant anecdote

Anecdote. It takes place where long ago the journey began, in Italy. In the spring of 1995, my book *Ouvert fermé* (Open closed) had just been translated in Italian and the philology college in L’Aquila, in the Abruzzi, invited me to come and present it. There we were, my translator and I, in the aula magna of the university, sacrificing to the ritual of a bilingual reading, as is fitting. The translator, Maria Luisa Caldognetto, first read the Italian version and I then continued in French, to allow the melody of the original to be heard. Nothing but well-rehearsed time-proven routine. Yet at a certain point, an inexplicable stir started up within the audience. The buzz of a bouquet of murmurs began to accompany the reading, like a disagreeable echo, every time it was my turn. Feeling it would break my concentration, I raised my eyes to identify the source. And a student sitting in the front row took that opportunity to interrupt us.

*Signor Portante* (he pronounced it Portante in the Italian way, accentuating the second syllable), *lei è italiano, no?* (You’re Italian, aren’t you?)

I shook my head no, then corrected myself and nodded yes.

*Ma allora, perché non legge lei in italiano?* (Then why don’t you yourself read in Italian.)

The thought had not crossed our minds, the translator and I, when we started the presentation. For us it was normal for the author to read the original and the translator the translation. The student’s comment troubled me. I looked questioningly at my translator, who answered with her own look that she didn’t mind switching roles. So we did. I took hers, and Italian verses started coming out of my mouth. The audience was won over. They were touched that one of their own, an expatriate, had returned to the homeland to read to them, in their language, verses written elsewhere. ►





© UNESCO/Stella Portante

**Jean Portante during a recent lecture in San Demetrio (Italy).**

## ► The moment everything switched

Inside me, however, it happened very differently. The animal inside began protesting. I felt something unprecedented was taking place. I was moved, and couldn't hold back tears. And then a great sadness crept in, and it would not go away.

What had transpired? As I went along in my reading, I discovered with astonishment that what I was in the process of reading wasn't the translation of my text. That in fact, just before, when French words, therefore the original, were coming out of my mouth, this translation had done its work. That the translation was the genuine original version of my poems, and not the text I had written before and which in her mouth sounded suddenly like a translation. Everything had switched.

Thanks to the interjection of that discerning student, to whom I owe this revelation, I had just realized that everything I believed up until then about my writing was false. That I was lying when I said I wrote in French. That what was claimed about me wasn't true, namely that I was a Luxembourg writer

of French expression, according to the accepted formula. That like the whale, my writing, which appeared to be French, concealed within itself the lung of another language. That my writing took a French form, but had another breath, of which the text's material nature was nothing more than a more or less effective translation. That I wrote in "strange language".

*Jean Portante,  
Italian and Luxembourgish writer*

*"Who am I? This is a question that others  
ask,  
but has no answer.  
I am my language,  
I am an ode, two odes, ten.  
This is my language.  
I am my language.  
I am words' writ:  
Be! Be my body!  
And I become an embodiment of their  
timbre,  
I am what I have spoken to the words:  
Be the place where my body joins the  
eternity of the desert.  
Be, so that I may become my words".*

**Mahmoud Darwich** (Palestinian poet), "A Rhyme for the Odes," 91, *Unfortunately, It Was Paradise*, Regents of the University of California, 2003.

# Languages and immigration: bilingualism is an asset

*To deprive immigrant children of their mother tongues is to create situations of conflict between the family model and the social model, which is to scorn their identities. If their languages and cultures were respected by school systems, they would develop a better esteem of themselves and of others.*



© UNESCO/Fyona Ryan

**Welcome to the Island of Gorée, Senegal.**

A large number of “developed” states have official languages, but their populations of various ethnic origins speak a number of other languages every day. “It has been estimated that in the year 2000 more than one third of the population under the age of 35 in urbanized Western Europe had an immigrant minority background”, said a UNESCO document about language diversity (see link), which notes that that “the biggest immigrant groups in the European Union are

Turkish and North African and live in France, Germany and Britain”.

Politicians in western countries are today drafting laws to tighten immigration conditions and are introducing language and culture tests. To ask applicants for immigration to know the rudiments of French, Dutch or English, as well as the basic rules of how the host countries work, does not seem absurd.

But when they arrive, there is often an attempt to “erase” their mother tongues from their heads, especially if these are considered as “minor” languages. We only need to remember the October 2004 report about internal security in France (see link to Report about the prevention of delinquency). “[For children from 1 to 3 years old], only parents, and especially mothers, have contact with their children. If the children are of foreign origin, the parents should force themselves to speak French at home, in order to get the children used to having only this language to express themselves in” says the report, noting: “But if, in certain cases, they feel the reluctance of their fathers, who often insist on the use of the dialect of their countries of origin at home, they will be dissuaded from doing so. It will then be necessary to take action to encourage fathers to go in the right direction”.

*“Like a sleepwalker, along the paths taken by smugglers, I was passing from my childhood language to the language of my chosen country.”*

**Hector Bianciotti**, French writer of Argentinian origin



► In the original French passage the word 'français' (French), designating a language, was written in capitals, which is contrary to the rules of French spelling. It may be supposed that 'speaking a dialect' is understood as speaking Arabic, Chinese, Serbian, etc.

According to this report, the cognitive, educational and social development of children that are not forced to speak French at home would be compromised, as they would inevitably have language disorders, leading to behavioural disorders, later resulting in delinquency!



© UNESCO/Niamh Burke

**Mother and child in Ireland.**

## The mother tongues of immigrants under accusation

This absurd position reflects a flagrant ignorance of language development and of the role of the mother tongue in the psychic, cognitive and cultural construction of an individual. How for a moment could one imagine that a mother might speak a language that she did not master well to her child? How could one be ignorant of the fact that the mother tongue conveys affects, that it enables the organization of cognitive faculties, that it symbolizes – for children of immigrant background – the continuity between the country of origin and the family.

To deprive the child of the mother tongue at home is to create a situation of conflict between the family

model and the social model and between family and school, with the further risk of impoverishing cultural references and weakening socialization.

This also implies that bilingualism is not considered as an asset but as a handicap, as an obstacle to successful education and integration, above all when the languages concerned, such as Arabic, Chinese or Russian, are, ridiculously, called 'rare'. When the languages concerned, such as English or German, are 'socially valorized' languages, bilingualism becomes a symbol of the elite!

The arguments and proposals for the use (or rather non-use) of the mother tongue in the 2004 Report about the prevention of delinquency have many supporters in political and academic circles in France, but the report gave rise to violent reactions: associations, NGOs, trade unions and intellectuals were mobilized, and the wording of the report was modified. In the 2005 version, the following can be found: 'Recognition of early bilingualism as a factor of integration. After many debates, the commission has considerably changed its position on the subject. It also seems that maintaining both the mother tongue and the dominant language enables children to have better results at school (...).'

## Conflict or dialogue of languages?

The last twenty years of research into psycholinguistics and sociolinguistics has unequivocally shown that the acquisition and learning of several languages by children, no matter what their socio-cultural background may be and no matter which languages may be concerned, does not hinder the cognitive and educational development of these children in the slightest. On the contrary, bilingual children show a greater speed and flexibility in certain learning situations, and develop better communication skills. If they are slightly deficient in the second language, this is often temporary, and they compensate for this by a richer mental system, cognitive skills that are often more efficient and a richer vision of the world.

When educational difficulties affect children of immigrants, most teachers in France place the blame mainly on the conflict of languages and cultures. However, if the languages and cultures of immigrants were ►



© Chinese Embassy in France

**Ceremony conferring François Cheng of the Académie française (right) the title of Professor honoris causa of the Tongji University, China.**

- ▶ emphasized more, taught to all pupils in schools and respected by the school system and by the dominant society, individuals would develop a better esteem and respect of themselves and therefore of others.

François Cheng, a Chinese author, who arrived in Paris at the age of 20 without knowing a word of French, and who has been a member of the Académie Française since 2003, wrote in his book *Le Dialogue* (2002): “fate made that from a certain time in my life, I became the bearer of two languages, Chinese and French. Was it only because of fate? Unless, all the same, there was a part of deliberate free will in it? The fact remains that I tried to take up the challenge, by coming to terms with the two languages in my own way, with the most extreme consequences. [...] It is not surprising that since then, in the heart of my linguistic adventure, which is directed towards the love for an adopted language, one theme has had pride of place: dialogue...”

Dialogue between communities, dialogue between languages - linguists know and emphasize the fact that immigrants contribute to the dynamism and enrichment of languages such as English or French. As an example, the mixing of Chinese, Korean, Japanese and Vietnamese with English is a worldwide phenomenon, which immigrants of various Asian origins use to communicate with each other, therefore making their own linguistic contributions. It is the same for “Spanglish”, a hybrid language that mixes English and Spanish, which is very popular with young people in United States, and is one of the most striking examples of changes in a language faced with immigration and globalization.

*Ranka Bijeljac-Babić, Franco-Serb psycholinguist,  
Université de Poitiers et Paris 5 - CNRS.* ▶

## Babylon reconquered



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A brutal separation from one's linguistic and cultural context evokes in my mind the image of a tree cut down one fine day to be planted in different earth. The tree that until that day had run its roots in its own soil and stood firm and solid on its roots found itself suddenly uprooted, and made an effort to put down its roots again in other soil and to remain standing.

The image of this tree in its earth and in this different earth inflames my heart and I think of the tree's distress and solitude, and I know very well those who at some point in their lives were forced to leave their linguistic and cultural territory, to establish themselves in another linguistic and cultural territory, know very well this distress and solitude. They fully conceive the wrath of God and they live the story of Babylon and its tower. The story of those people who wanted to be God and devoted themselves to building a tower. From day to day the tower took shape and

gained in height, it approached the sky and these people became God... So God became angry and took away the unity of their language. No one could understand the other's language. The tower remained unfinished and the desire to become God even more so. Every language became a wall and people found themselves alone and powerless. Behind the wall, they isolated themselves and the desire to become God left them.

Possibly it was these same cries of solitude, this absence of anyone to speak to intelligibly, that took form and gave birth to poetry and literature... and each language became a treasure of unconfined unlimited riches.

While God took linguistic unity away from humans, they on the other hand created the diversity of translation. Every translation opens a door in the wall, a door that gives onto another language, another culture, another existence and another wealth, so that every reader of another language may go through these doors, forget Babylon and divine wrath; so that another language may become their language, another culture their culture, another existence their existence and another wealth their wealth.

*Spôjmaï Zariab, Afghan novelist*



# The secrets of Machaj Juyai-Kallawayaya

*Developed down through the centuries, Machaj Juyai is a “secret language” still spoken by a few families of traditional herbalist healers, the Kallawayaya, who live in the Bolivian Andes. They propagate a now-threatened ancestral knowledge, which UNESCO is working to safeguard.*



© Ministerio de Cultura, Bolivia

## Kallawayaya ritual.

The Kallawayaya, itinerant herbalist healers from Bautista Saavedra province in the state of La Paz, have developed down through the centuries a “family language” in their kinship groups (ayllu), within which they have transmitted their holistic medicinal know-how from generation to generation. They named it *Machaj Juyai*, the “folk language”, still spoken today by the eight ayllus of the Kallawayaya in a province where the language of social relations and daily life is Quechua.

Already colonial administrators were curious about this language and writers of Hispanic and mixed origin testified to its “rareness”. As early as the 17th century, information circulated regarding the existence of a specialized language of herbalist healers who spent their time concocting remedies for Inca kings and their entourage.

## The Kallawayaya and the Eiffel Tower

Scientists in the 19th century, however, would not recognize the Kallawayaya as having their own language, and questioned them on their knowledge of

herbal medicines in the dominant language of the high plateaus, Aymara. The Kallawayaya speak it, in order to communicate with a larger number of patients and to enlarge their sphere of activity.

With the aim of publishing a list of medicinal plants with industrial properties and present it at the 1889 Universal Exposition, the one for which the Eiffel Tower was built, Bolivian scientists and civil servants asked the Kallawayaya to describe in Aymara the properties of more than 100 plants brought to France for this great “celebration of civilization”. This was the moment the idea spread that the Kallawayaya were Aymara.

Another half-century had to elapse before the Kallawayaya were accepted as a specific group with its own language and forms of expression. The Machaj Juyai-Kallawayaya language was heard by scientists in ceremonial and healing contexts, and it was also proven that it was used to a great extent as a language of communication within the group.

There was thus, mid-20th century, renewed interest in the Kallawayaya’s language as an expression of their know-how. According to some, Machaj Juyai-Kallawayaya was the secret language of the Inca kings and those closest to them.

Other experts attempted in vain to find parallels between Machaj Juyai and the ancient Puquina language, or the Uru from the Andean high plateaus. Others imagined a possible link to languages of the



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**The Kallawayaya’s cosmivision was proclaimed a masterpiece of the oral and intangible cultural heritage of humanity by UNESCO in 2003.**

- ▶ Amazonian forest, where the Kallawayas traveled to seek out the herbal, animal and mineral resources they used to prevent and cure illness. The Kallawayas' role as intermediaries between the Incas and the Amazonian populations may have influenced their language.

## Chronicle of a death foretold

Obviously the Kallawayas' language was subjected to the influence of Quechua, which was the instrument of their forced conversion to Catholicism. The Kallawayas elite were persecuted in the 17th century in the battle led by the Catholic Church known as "extirpation of idolatry". Children were separated from grown-ups, to be brought up by Spanish people or Quechua Catholic priests. Quechua exerted further influence on the Kallawayas in the 19th century, when the latter emigrated massively to Peru, where they found numerous clients and even became in the early 20th century the official doctors of President Augusto Bernardino Leguía. On their own territory too, the Kallawayas felt the demographic pressure of neighboring ayllus, who spoke Quechua. This is why today Machaj Juyai-Kallawayas has absorbed nearly all the phonology and grammar of Quechua.

More recently, Machaj Juyai-Kallawayas' vitality was sorely tested during two historical events. The first was the Chaco War (1932-1935) between Bolivia and Paraguay. The Kallawayas were mobilized as aides to the doctors responsible for giving care to the enormous contingent of indigenous Bolivians, comprised of Aymaras and Quechuas. Kallawayas lost their lives in great number, which would have serious repercussions on subsequent demographic development.

The second event was the 1952 revolution led by the National Revolutionary Movement (NRM), which led to structural social change: the right to vote was extended universally, the biggest national mining companies were nationalized and agricultural lands were redistributed. The Kallawayas' traditional nomadic way of life gave way to settlement in cities, where they became herbalists or jewelers.

The idea of sending young Kallawayas to medical school, sparing them criminal prosecution for practicing indigenous medicine outlawed by Bolivian law, came out of this urban environment. This has created

space for the struggle to decriminalize indigenous medicine in Bolivia. The Kallawayas are becoming professionals within the framework of Western university knowledge, but they are doing so at the cost of a crucial cultural dimension: the Machaj Juyai-Kallawayas language. These days a large majority of Kallawayas is trilingual – Castilian, Aymara and Quechua – but few of them are fluent in their original language.

During the 2001 census conducted by the Bolivian state, the existence of the Kallawayas ethnic group and its language was not recognized. Nor is UNESCO's proclamation of the Cosmovision of the Kallawayas as a masterpiece of

the oral and intangible cultural heritage of humanity legally recognized. At present, the Kallawayas are taking steps in order to obtain legal recognition from the Bolivian Parliament for themselves and their language. The new Constitution (currently in the making) could prove them right.

*By Carmen Beatriz Loza, researcher at the Bolivian institute of traditional Kallawayas medicine (El Alto, La Paz, Bolivia)*



© Flickr/Alex Shtrahman

**Witch market where the Kallawayas get their supplies. (La Paz, Bolivia).**

# The saga of the Ainu language

*Several thousand years old, the Ainu language spoken in northern Japan was dying out due to political pressure from the central government. At the end of the 20th century, this trend was reversed. While Ainu's future is still not guaranteed because it isn't taught in schools, the resurgence of interest is undeniable.*

A true linguistic enigma, Ainu (*Ainu Itak*) can't be linked with certainty to any family of languages. Yet, as numerous specialists agree that the Ainu people are descendants of populations from the Jōmon era (11,000 to 6,000 B.C.) that inhabited the Japanese archipelago, it is very probable their language finds its origins in Neolithic languages.

According to historical sources, the Ainu people first settled the northern part of the Japanese archipelago. The inhabitants of the Tohoku region (in the north of Honshu, the largest Japanese island) gradually had to abandon their language and culture starting in the 14th century, due to pressure from the central government. But further north, in Hokkaido, as well as in the southern part of Sakhalin Island (the north belonging to Russia) and in the more isolated Kuril Islands, they were able to preserve them until the islands were annexed by the new Meiji government in 1869.

Not long after, following the signing of the 1875 "Treaty for the Exchange of Sakhalin for the Kuril Islands" between Japan and Russia, most of the Ainu from southern Sakhalin were displaced to Hokkaido. Epidemics decimated the population. The same fate befell the Kuril Islands Ainu, who died out entirely after being forcibly regrouped, for national security reasons, on an island off the coast of Hokkaido. Japanese authorities feared that these Ainu, some of them converts to Orthodox Christianity, would serve as spies for the Russians established in the Kurils.

At the end of the Russian-Japanese war, as of 1906, a good number of the Ainu from Sakhalin returned, because Japan controlled the south of the island. But on Stalin's orders all were expelled in 1945 and they settled in Hokkaido. Sakhalin's tradition and dialect disappeared as the expatriates died



© DR

**In the past, the Ainu occupied the northern part of the Japanese archipelago.**

– generally, they hadn't transmitted their knowledge to the next generation.

Beginning in 1868, the Japanese government imposed a new way of life on the Hokkaido Ainu. A series of prohibitions concerning hunting and fishing, for instance, traditional Ainu resources, profoundly undermined their culture. The community was stigmatized, considered savage and inferior. ►





© Flickr/Mistah Sinclair

**The exact number of Ainu speakers is unknown.**

- ▶ Officially, the new Hokkaido authorities never intended to eradicate the Ainu language. But they did everything to that end, notably by building schools specifically for the “natives” in which they were taught Japanese. In order to survive in this new Hokkaido society, irrigated by continual waves of Japanese immigrants, the Ainu gradually gave up their customs and their language. Today, for new generations, Ainu is a second language, if they even speak it.

## The last Ainu is not dead

The exact number of Ainu speakers is unknown. Only surveys conducted every seven years since 1972 by the Hokkaido government, concerning living conditions among *uteri* (compatriot, in Ainu) people, allow an approximate assessment of the Ainu language situation. The 2006 poll shows that out of 23,782 Ainu, 304 know the language, and among these 4.6% feel they master it to the point of being able to teach it. But we mustn't forget these answers are subjective

and don't necessarily correspond to reality. Furthermore, much of the population doesn't participate in polls and hides its identity.

This said, assertions that the Ainu language is becoming extinct must be understood in relative terms. Since the 1990s, whenever an Ainu dies, the media announce the death of the last Ainu speaker, forgetting that more and more Ainu are starting to relearn their language, inspired by elders or linguists.

To replace the 1899 law supporting assimilation policies, the Ainu demanded the promulgation of a new law in the 1980s. The law for the protection and promotion of Ainu culture was finally promulgated in 1997, facilitating, for instance, language instruction.

## A law can change everything

Founded in 1946, Hokkaido's Ainu association, the largest in Japan, gives free language courses in 14 regions in Hokkaido, to both Ainu and Japanese students. No statistics on attendance are available, however. The foundation for research and promotion of Ainu culture, created by the 1997 law, has a section for training Ainu language teachers; it accepts seven students a year.

The publication of dictionaries, textbooks and bilingual Ainu-Japanese collections of Ainu oral literature is increasing year by year. A private radio station in Sapporo has been broadcasting a weekly Ainu language class program over Hokkaido territory since the 1980s. In April 2001, Shigeru Kayano, activist for Ainu identity and first Japanese parliament member from this community (1926-2006), financed the creation of a radio station, FM Pipaushi that airs a show in Ainu locally in central Hokkaido two Sundays a month.

It must be recognized, however, that for now the Ainu interested in their language are from relatively affluent backgrounds. The Ainu are for the most part marginalized and have little time to devote to learning their language. Despite the upsurge of interest, as long as Ainu is not part of the curriculum in Hokkaido schools, its future is uncertain. This ▶

- ▶ language is part of Japanese intangible heritage and is entitled to government protection, notably through its official recognition as a second national language.

*By Kaori TAHARA, historian of Ainu origin, graduate of the École des hautes études en sciences sociales, Paris.*



© Flickr/Jens Mattow

Post card representing a group of Ainus, around 1990.

## Kyrgyz: an “emerging” language

*In the streets of Bishkek, two languages are found side by side on advertising billboards, at newsstands and in conversations. After gaining its independence in 1991, Kyrgyzstan adopted Kyrgyz as its national language and kept Russian as the official language. Linguistic results are mixed.*



© UNESCO/Katerina Markelova

Russian and Kyrgyz newspaper stand in Bichkek, the capital of Kyrgyzstan.

Out of the 15 former Soviet republics, Kyrgyzstan is the only one – along with Kazakhstan – to keep Russian as its official language in addition to its national language, Kyrgyz. Yet the latter, a member of the Turkic group of languages, is spoken by 73% of the population (amounting to 3.7 million people). At the same time, in the capital Bishkek, center of Kyrgyzstan’s public and cultural life, Russian remains present if not dominant.

The generations educated in Russian at the time of the Soviet Union, notably in urban areas, speak Kyrgyz without mastering it entirely. Often it’s a language they learned in school. “If tomorrow the government decided to switch to Kyrgyz, I’d never make it in my professional life,” says Jyldyz Asanbayeva, program assistant at the Public Policy Institute. She’s among the 2 to 3% ethnic Kyrgyz who don’t consider Kyrgyz their mother language. ▶

▶ The language has a long oral tradition, with its famous epic bards called *akyns*, but the today's alphabet, starting with Latin characters and then changing to Cyrillic, dates back only to the 1920s. And for the duration of the Soviet period, its use was limited to rural areas (within families and between friends) or in certain circles of the intelligentsia (concerned about the preservation of the language), even if Kyrgyz is used for teaching in most schools and is studied at the highest level in Moscow and Leningrad (now St Petersburg).



© Kyrgyz National Commission for UNESCO

**The art of the Akyn was proclaimed by a masterpiece of the oral and intangible cultural heritage of humanity by UNESCO in 2003.**

## Russian: back and forth

Shortly before independence, with the impetus of perestroika, local authorities imposed Kyrgyz as the national language, by passing the 1989 law on the national language of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Kyrgyz. But political will is one thing, reality another. Due to insufficient means, the law was not applied; very quickly, funds were reduced and the civil servants in charge dismissed.

Interest in the language fluctuated according to the numerous changes in government in the coun-

try, where the political situation was in frequent upheaval. Different decrees came one after another in support of Kyrgyz, but this protectionist linguistic policy only exacerbated tensions in the country, which is home to 80 different ethnic groups who use Russian to communicate among themselves. Concerned to see Russian-speaking people leaving the country in droves, deputies in 2000 voted a new law on the official language: Russian and Kyrgyz from then on had equal status, the first as official language and the second as national language.

Good news for Russian speakers in Kyrgyzstan, who in 16 years of independence had not felt the need to learn Kyrgyz, for lack of a coherent linguistic policy.

Authorities wanted to “create a necessity” to speak Kyrgyz, but didn’t allocate the resources. “Our Institute doesn’t have the funds to publish our scientists’ research. The manuscript for the Great Russian-Kyrgyz dictionary, which has 250 pages, is sitting in a cupboard covered in dust,” laments Kadyraly Konkobayev, director of the Linguistic Institute of Kyrgyzstan’s Academy of Sciences. While during the Soviet era more than 30 fundamental texts on the Kyrgyz language were published, almost none have been produced since the country’s independence.

Konkobayev sounds another alert: “The literary and artistic situation is dire. In the literature department, we don’t have enough authors to study in the area of Kyrgyz national literature and, I have to say, many of our contemporary writers are practically illiterate.” It isn’t only the authors, he adds; one only has to look at the poor quality of the newspapers.

“The work accomplished since independence regarding the development of the language is unsatisfactory,” explains Tachboo Djumagulov, president of the Commission for the Development of the National Language. But since the March 2005 revolution (which ousted President Aska Akayev) efforts are increasing: “Before 2005 state subsidies amounted to US\$ 35,000; now they’re US\$ 170,000.” ▶



- ▶ Even if that's nothing compared to the US\$ 30 million spent in neighboring Kazakhstan to promote Kazakh, results are tangible. Television is the best example: before 2005, there was only one Kyrgyz-language channel; now five out of ten devote 60% of air time to programs in Kyrgyz.

## Education: the weak link

Education seems to be the main element missing from the national language battle. "On one hand the number of hours of Kyrgyz instruction is increasing in schools and universities, but on the other hand there are very few qualified teachers," explains Konkobayev. Indeed, all universities have established a new post: vice-rector for the Kyrgyz language, responsible for promoting it and encouraging professors to give courses in it (including within Russian-language universities).

Thanks to the Commission's efforts to develop the national language, new teaching methodologies for Kyrgyz have been developed. They replace the old ones, often very cumbersome and ineffective, and introduce short dialogues, games and concrete examples. With 3,000 copies of the course in circulation, it is nonetheless difficult to meet the needs of the more than 2,100 schools (1,700 of them entirely Kyrgyz) and the 40-odd universities across the country, some of which give Kyrgyz classes. Besides, the state funds the publication of



© UNESCO/Katerina Markelova

**In one of the country's biggest libraries, the most recent textbooks in Kyrgyz date back to 2002.**

textbooks for schools, but not for universities. Result: university textbooks simply don't exist.

The mixed linguistic results in Kyrgyzstan bring up questions about the methods employed. Is it really useful to impose a language without developing the educational infrastructure? Measures taken to preserve the Kyrgyz language must be entirely revised, in the context of globalization, which here too is knocking at the door with English and becoming more and more of a threat.

*Katerina Markelova, journalist for the UNESCO Courier*



# The Indian dilemma

*With some 1,650 languages and more than a million schools including all levels, India faces a serious challenge: to ensure national cohesion without compromising the interests of regional languages. It has invented the “three language formula”, difficult to implement.*

The Indian tower of Babel takes the shape of a pyramid, with Hindu and English at the top, both of which remain foreign languages for two-thirds of the population. Then come the official languages of the States and Territories (regional languages), followed by minority languages, spoken by more than a million people, but with no administrative function. Hundreds of others are located at the foot of this imposing linguistic edifice, under the aegis of a linguistic minority commissioner whose mandate is advisory and not legally binding.

In all: 1,650 languages, with 400 used as languages of communication. Among the latter, 22 are spoken by 75% of Indians and are listed in the Indian constitution. It guarantees the protection of languages that are not listed, but only 60 of those are taught in schools, 11 of them registered as minority or tribal.

An odd fact: Hindi, the official Indian union language along with English, is spoken by only 40% of the Indian population and is therefore a minority language. The issue of minorities is extremely complex, insofar as language is an element closely related to ethnic and religious identity. Muslims, for instance, speak Urdu, Sikhs Panjabi, and Anglo-Indians English. While their languages are recognized by the constitution, more than 600 tribal minorities from the mountains speak languages that are not taught in schools.

## The trilingual formula

The sub-continent counts more than one billion inhabitants, 35% of them under 15 years of age. The Indian government has the onerous task of managing an education system that dates back about 150 years and today comprises 664,041 primary schools,



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**All languages are good enough for advertising!**

219,626 upper primary schools, 133,492 secondary schools, 297 universities, 8,737 university-level general education colleges and 2,409 professional institutes.

Since its independence in 1947, the country has been putting into effect educational policies aimed at mass literacy and economic development – key factors to unite a people split into a multitude of religions, languages, castes and cultures.

Beginning in 1952, the Indian government’s secondary education commission put forward the outline of a multilingual educational policy including the mother language, the regional (or State) language, Hindi as the language of general communication and one of the classical languages (Sanskrit, Pali, Arabic or Persian).



© Flickr/Uba Devesh

**Primary school in western Rajasthan.**

- ▶ Revised in 1961, the proposal was named “three language formula” (TLF) including the regional language, Hindi in non-Hindi-speaking areas or another Indian language in Hindi-speaking areas, plus English or another European language.

Finally, between 1964 and 1966, the Education Commission proposed a modified version of TLF: the mother language or regional language; an official language, Hindi or English; and another modern language, Indian or foreign.

Over the 12 years of primary and secondary school, instruction is given in the mother or regional language from the first to the fifth year, and TLF is introduced in the sixth year.

## No magic formula

Recognized as the national norm, TLF is nonetheless not applied to the letter in all states. It is more hypothetical project than social reality. Although priority is given to the mother language at least at the start of formal education, if not throughout schooling, it is not obligatory. Certain states, such as Tamil Nadu, have opted for two instead of three languages; in others, instead of learning a modern language, a classic language is substituted, like Sanskrit or Arabic. In some schools French or German is taught instead of Hindi.

Failure of state policy? Or instead, as we would say, a dynamic and flexible linguistic policy in education, which seeks to reconcile tradition and modernity on one hand and institutional and civic responsibilities on the other.

Because it must be understood that although tribal/minority languages are closely linked to cultural, religious and ethnic identity, at the same time they are “useless” in contemporary life. Minority communities are torn between two trends: some

demand their rights and struggle to obtain an official status for their language, while others choose assimilation with the majority instead.

In order to protect minority languages and safeguard the thousand-year-old heritage they contain, there is talk of turning the three language formula into a four language one. Nothing is yet certain.

The state may well guarantee schooling in a minority language whenever a class contains 10 pupils who speak it as their mother language, but the fact is most parents would prefer their children to learn English or be educated in English. The “unconstitutional” languages have no “market value” and social upward mobility often comes before socio-cultural identity.

*Appasamy Murugaiyan, Indian linguist, teaches at the École pratique des Hautes Études, Paris*



© UNESCO/Mani Ngonekeo

**The Venerable Chandaratana, in Sankassa, India.**



# Hubert Reeves

*Engaging geosciences in the service of humanity is the aim of the International Year of Planet Earth, launched on 12 February at UNESCO. This year, UNESCO and the International Union of Geological Sciences have taken the initiative to place sustainable development and the promotion of Earth Sciences (geology, geophysics, palaeontology, meteorology...) at the top of their priorities. This is a true pact for a better world. To announce the launch of this International Year, to which it will devote one of its next issues, the Courier interviewed the famous Canadian (Québécois) astrophysicist Hubert Reeves*

*Interview by Jasmina Šopova*

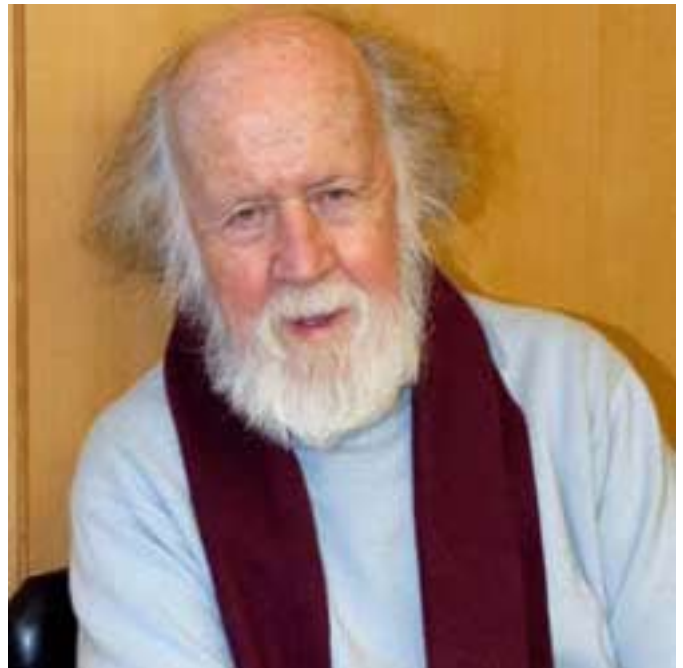
***Why have you gone from the immensity of the universe to the fragility of the earth?***

Because if astronomy teaches us how we came to exist on earth, ecology teaches us how we can stay here. We know the wonders of the stars and the galaxies, which are linked to our past and our presence here – atoms that are formed in the stars and so on – and we discover that our survival on earth is threatened. How could one not be concerned?

People often say to me “Before, you talked about galaxies, you made us dream, now you’re telling us unpleasant facts.” I answer that we have to be realists. We can’t spend our time dreaming. We can’t play ostrich. We need solid knowledge of the situation on earth to know what to do.

I came to the issue of the environment gradually. During the lectures I gave in the 1980s, I started bringing up the problem, which became more and more present as time went by, until it became a crucial issue. But I still give lectures about astronomy too.

I try to speak usefully. That is to say, not to preach to the converted, but to address groups that are less involved in environmental issues. I’ve given lectures to real estate agents, for instance, and notaries, truck drivers....They’re flabbergasted when you explain to them what’s going on.



© UNESCO/Michel Ravassard

**Hubert Reeves**

***Are you alarmed?***

Not as much as I was a few years ago. But there’s been such a change all over the world that today I’m more encouraged. I’m often asked if I’m an optimist or a pessimist. I answer with a quote from Jean Monnet, one of the founders of Europe, at the time when nobody really believed in Europe. He used to



© Stock.xchng/Terri Heisele

**The rapid disappearance of bees causes a decrease in tree pollination.**

► say, “What’s important isn’t being optimistic or pessimistic, it’s being determined.”

It has to be said that in the last two years, awareness of environmental problems has come a long way, thanks to people like the American Al Gore (2007 Nobel Peace Prize), the French ecologist Nicolas Hulot, whose *le pacte écologique* (ecological pact) obliged politicians to take positions, or the British economist Nicolas Stern, who evaluated the cost of global warming at several thousand billion dollars (Stern Review on the Economics of Climate Change, 2006).

***In 2001, you became president of the ROC.***

The “*Rassemblement des Opposants à la Chasse*” (Union of Opponents of Hunting) was founded in

1976 by Théodore Monod, at a time when there were no controls at all on hunting in France. He was the president, and after he died in 2001, I was asked to replace him. The problems have since changed, and so have the aims, along with the organization’s name, which became the *Ligue ROC pour la préservation de la faune sauvage* (ROC league for the preservation of wildlife).

Today we’re very concerned by the disappearance of natural habitats and by pesticides, which contribute to what is called “biodiversity erosion”. The speed at which we are exterminating animal and plant species represents one of the most disturbing aspects. In nature, species are not independent. Each disappearance of a species causes that of many others and thus weakens the ecosystem.

A very striking example is bees. The rapid disappearance of bees causes a decrease in tree pollination. And without pollination, there’s no fruit. And fruit contributes in an essential way to the survival of humanity.

When one element in life’s edifice - built over millions of years, whose solidity rests on the interdependency of species - disappears, the whole is impoverished. Biodiversity, we have to stress this, is our guarantee of survival.

***Do you think political decision-makers are taking action quickly enough?***

The “*Grenelle de l’environnement*” (French government forum on the environment) held last October in France is a good example. French President Nicolas Sarkozy promised it and he did it. It’s not every day politicians keep their pre-election promises.

The originality of Grenelle was to bring together partners with opposing convictions: for example, farmers who defend agriculture relying heavily on pesticides, and environmental groups in the name of productivisme. This Grenelle represents real progress. I have reasons to believe that there will even be action to follow the words. Because fundamentally people aren’t crazy. And even those who couldn’t care less about butterflies or wildflowers dying out are beginning to understand that if they don’t invest now in positive action, it will cost them a lot more in the future.

► **And in other countries?**

The United States are really on the move. George Bush blocked everything, but states such as California or those in New England have become extremely “green”. In Europe, the countries in the North are generally much more active. France is waking up, Spain is starting to move. But what’s very important is that China is also beginning to react. Meanwhile we don’t have very good news from India, but I think it will come because once again people do realize what’s going on.

***Is it utopian to imagine a Grenelle on an international scale, organized by UNESCO, for instance?***

That would be brilliant if governments would listen to constituents of civil societies so that they can participate in the world’s evolution, and why not overseen by UNESCO.

***And to end the conversation on another seemingly utopian subject: do you believe there’s another planet that will welcome humanity if we destroy ours?***



© Flickr/Jens Trebtow

**A truck on a road in China. The future of the earth is everyone’s concern!**

I have no idea. There are people who believe that if things get too bad on earth, we’ll go to another planet. For me, that’s not a good solution, because if we turn out to be incapable of safeguarding our planet, we will only be transporting our problems to another one.



## Landmarks

# The “Doctor Prince”

***Born two hundred years ago, Prince Wonsa Dhiraj Sanid, son of King Rama II of Thailand (1809-1824), devoted his life to promoting peace, health and culture for the benefit of his country. In recognition of his achievements, UNESCO joins in the celebration of the anniversary of his birth. He is the 17th Thai national to receive this honour.***

Phra Chao Barommawongse Ther Krom Luang Wongsas Dhiraj Sanid (H.R.H. Prince Wongsas Dhiraj Snid) (1808-1871) was a son of King Rama II (1809-1824), whose contribution in political, scientific, and cultural fields was very beneficial for Thailand. Without prejudice, he learned from foreign missionaries and used their knowledge to help his countrymen. He was hailed a great modernist in the midst of the royal family.

Prince Wongsas Dhiraj Snid dedicated most of his life to negotiating for Thailand’s peace and prosperity. His mastery of English, together with his diplomatic skill, made him the most important prince in Thailand’s international context during the reign of his brother King Rama IV (1851-1868).

Colonialism in the nineteenth century motivated European countries to acquire lands in Southeast Asia. ►



- ▶ Thailand, or Siam, was not an exception. Prince Wongsā Dhiraj Snid was appointed by King Rama IV head of Siam's negotiation team to sign several treaties with western countries, including Britain, France, Prussia, Denmark, and United States. The treaties, signed under his supervision, were aimed at tightening the political, legal and free trade links between Siam and other countries. His ability to negotiate led to the success of several agreements, creating the balance of power between each western state and Siam. This was not only the key to help maintain peace but also to open the country to the world for modernization.

## Diplomat, scientist and poet

Committed to scientific development, Prince Wongsā Dhiraj Snid was the first Thai doctor who introduced quinine, a western medicine for curing malaria, and used it successfully on Thai patients. His mother, Chao Chom Marnda Prang (Yai) was a descendant of the Bangchang Royal Family, whose role was to preserve and transmit traditional Thai medicine. He acquired his knowledge of western medicine from missionaries living in Thailand in the early Chakri Dynasty (1782-1851). During the reign of King Rama III (1824-1851), also his brother, the Prince was appointed chief of the Krom Mor Luang department (the Office of Royal Medicine) and served as King Rama IV's personal doctor. Foreigners in Thailand called him "The Doctor Prince".

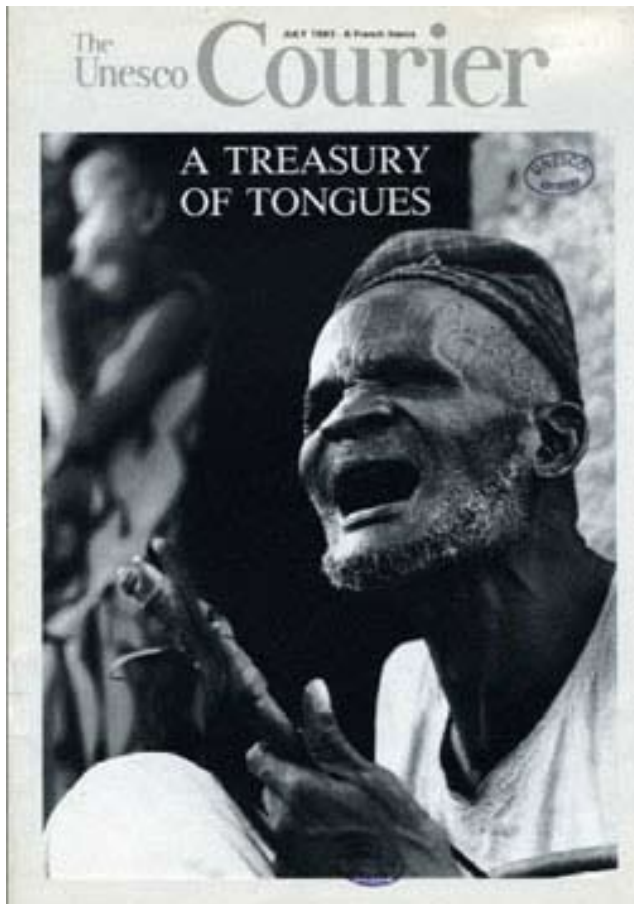
The Prince also focused his attention on Thai traditional medicine. He studied the properties of 166 herb types and wrote the first Thai traditional herbal medicine textbook. The book, reprinted several times (1922, 1984, 1991 and 2003), can be found at the Thapra Palace Library, Silpakorn university, in Bangkok. Widely recognized for his medical skills, he was invited by many European medical institutes to be an active member. He also received a Certificate of Physician from the New York Academy, being the first Thai doctor who obtained this honour.



Prince Wongsā Dhiraj Snid.

At the same time, Prince Wongsā Dhiraj Snid played a predominant role in the literary context. He edited *Jinda Manee*, a grammar-book of the Thai language inherited from the Ayutthaya period. During the reign of King Rama V, the book was included as the first grammar textbook in the nation-wide school curriculum. He revised the *Annals of Ayutthaya*, (Royal Autograph Edition) considered the first Thai history book which was reprinted in 2005. He composed Thai poems such as *Pleṅ Yao Samchai* and *Nirat Phra Pathom Pathon*, which were published in 1921 and 1922 respectively. His literary works are kept at the Chulalongkorn University Library, in Bangkok.

*Watchara Saengsrin,  
journalist at The Nation (Thailand)*



## The *Courier* looks back

Since its creation, the *UNESCO Courier* has devoted several issues and many articles to questions linked to languages.

A few examples:

<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/ulis/fre/index.shtml>

Worlds within Words, February 1994.

The powers of language by Claude Hagège - article published in March 1986.

A treasury of tongues, July 1983

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### Next month

## “Women between two shores”

From Doris Lessing (United Kingdom) to Kiran Desai (India-United States), including Véronique Tadjo (Côte d’Ivoire), several women of letters from all parts of the world express their concerns in the *Courier’s* next issue.

Issue published on the occasion of 8 March, International Women’s Day.

© Rapho/Edouard Boubat

*Sophie, Collioure, France 1954.* Exhibition « Edouard Boubat – Revelations », from 16 January to 30 March, at the Maison Européenne de la Photographie (Paris).



# Partners

## SIL International

*Founded 70 years ago, SIL International specializes in serving the lesser-known language communities of the world. SIL has conducted linguistic analysis in over 1,800 languages spoken by 1.2 billion people in more than 70 countries. A UNESCO Partner for more than 50 years, SIL International collaborates currently with the Organization in the field of multilingualism in cyberspace, multilingual education and the preservation and promotion of languages in danger of disappearing.*



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Cover of the brochure for the International Year of Languages, 2008

## Latin Union

*The Latin Union is an organization founded in 1954 by the Madrid Convention to promote and circulate the cultural heritage and identities of the Latin world. On four continents, the Latin Union strives to raise awareness of Latin cultures and languages by acting in three areas: culture and communication, promotion and language teaching, language industry and terminology.*

## African Academy of Languages

*The African Academy of Languages, established in 2001 in Mali, is a structure in charge of all questions linked to languages on the African Continent. It aims to establish a true partnership between African and other languages used today throughout the continent (English, French, Spanish, Portuguese...), with a pan-African vision.*



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