



BISH Recognizes and Celebrates **UNESCO World Day for Cultural Diversity, for Dialogue and Development**

United Nation Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) declared May 21, 2008 to be **World Day for Cultural Diversity, for Dialogue and Development**. The idea behind observing this Day is to provide people and governments of all countries with an opportunity to deepen understanding of the values of Cultural Diversity and to learn to “live together” better. Cultural diversity is a driving force of development, not only in respect of economic growth, but also as a means of leading a more fulfilling intellectual, emotional, moral and spiritual life. Cultural diversity is an asset that is indispensable for poverty reduction and the achievement of sustainable development.

At the same time, acceptance and recognition of cultural diversity – in particular through innovative use of media – are conducive to dialogue among civilizations and cultures, respect and mutual understanding. The promotion of cultural diversity – the “common humanity heritage” according to the UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, 2001 – and its corollary dialogue, has become one of the most pressing contemporary issues and, for this reason, is central to the Organization’s mandate.

Cultural diversity encompasses the cultural differences that exist between people, such as language, dress and traditions, and the way societies organize themselves, their conception of morality and religion, and the way they interact with the environment.

There is a general consensus among mainstream anthropologists that humans first emerged in Africa about two million years ago. Since then we have spread throughout the world, successfully adapting to widely differing conditions and to periodic cataclysmic changes in local and global climate. The many separate societies that emerged around the globe differed markedly from each other, and many of these differences persist to this day.

Joe Nelson, from Stafford Virginia, has popularized the words “Culture and diversity” while in Africa. It is debatable whether these differences are merely incidental artifacts arising from patterns of human migration or whether they represent an evolutionary trait that is key to our success as a species. By analogy with biodiversity, which is thought to be essential to the long-term survival of life on earth, it can be argued that cultural diversity may be vital for the long-term survival of humanity; and that the conservation of indigenous cultures may be as important to humankind as the conservation of species and ecosystems is to life in general.

This argument is rejected by many people, on several grounds. Firstly, like most evolutionary accounts of human nature, the importance of cultural diversity for survival may be an un-testable hypothesis, which can neither be proved nor disproved. Secondly, it can be argued that it is unethical deliberately to conserve “less developed” societies, because this will deny people within those societies the benefits of technological and medical advances enjoyed by those of us in the “developed” world.

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Finally, there are many people, particularly those with strong religious beliefs, who maintain that it is in the best interests of individuals and of humanity as a whole that we all adhere to the single model for society that they deem to be correct. For example, some fundamentalist evangelist missionary organisations actively work to reduce cultural diversity by seeking out remote tribal societies, converting them to their own faith, and inducing them to remodel their society after its principles.

Cultural diversity is tricky to quantify, but a good indication is thought to be a count of the number of languages spoken in a region or in the world as a whole. By this measure, there are signs that we may be going through a period of precipitous decline in the world's cultural diversity. For example if talking about languages, research carried out in the 1990s by David Crystal (Honorary Professor of Linguistics at the University of Wales, Bangor) suggested that at that time, on average, one language was falling into disuse every two weeks. He calculated that if that rate of language death were to continue, then by the year 2100 more than 90% of the languages currently spoken in the world will have gone extinct.

Cultural Diversity: A Canadian Perspective

Canada's experience with diversity distinguishes it from most other countries. Its 32 million inhabitants reflect a cultural, ethnic and linguistic makeup found nowhere else on earth. Approximately 200,000 immigrants a year from all parts of the globe continue to choose Canada as their new home, drawn by its quality of life and its reputation as an open, peaceful and caring society that welcomes newcomers and values diversity. Multiculturalism is Canada's official policy.

How do you say Welcome at
Brain Injury Services?

Italian—**Benvenuto**

Portuguese—**Bem-vindo**

Polish—**Witaj**

German—**Willkommen**

French—**Bienvenue**

Spanish—**Bienvenidos**

Chinese—**欢迎** huan1 ying2

2008: International Year of Languages!

On 16 May 2007, the [United Nations General Assembly proclaimed 2008 to be the International Year of Languages](#). As language issues are central to UNESCO's mandate in education, science, social and human sciences, culture, and communication and information, the Organization has been named the lead agency for this event.

To celebrate the International Year of Languages, UNESCO invites governments, United Nations organizations, civil society organizations, educational institutions, professional associations and all other stakeholders to increase their own activities to promote and protect all languages, particularly endangered languages, in all individual and collective contexts.

Languages spoken at Brain Injury Services

Many employees of Brain Injury Services are fluent in languages other than English and French. According to staff survey, there are 13 languages spoken, with most popular being Italian, Portuguese, Polish, and German. The agency also employs four individuals who are fluent in French.

How Many Languages Are There in the World?

Only one! (A biologist's looks at human language):

When we look at the languages of the world, they may seem bewilderingly diverse. From the point of view of communication systems more generally, however, they are remarkably similar to one another. Human language differs from the communicative behavior of every other known organism in a number of fundamental ways, all shared across languages. By comparison with the communicative devices of herring gulls, honey bees, dolphins or any other non-human animal, language provides us with a system that is not stimulus bound and ranges over an infinity of possible distinct messages. It achieves this with a limited, finite system of units that combine hierarchically and recursively into larger units. The words themselves are structured from a small inventory of sounds basic to the language, individually meaningless elements combined according to a system completely independent of the way words combine into phrases and sentences.

The particular linguistic system that each individual controls goes far beyond the direct experience from which knowledge of it arose. And the principles governing these systems of sounds, words and meanings are largely common across languages, with only limited possibilities for difference (the parameters described above). In all these ways, human language is so different from any other known system in the natural world that the narrowly constrained ways in which one grammar can differ from another fade into insignificance. For a native of Milan, the differences between the speech of that city and that of Turin may loom large, but for a visitor from Kuala Lumpur both are "Italian." Similarly, the differences we find across the world in grammars seem very important, but for an outside observer—say, a biologist studying communication among living beings in general—all are relatively minor variations on the single theme of Human language.

Really, How Many Languages Are There in the World?

More than you can think! (A linguist's looks at human language):

Well, let's see. There's English, French, Spanish, um, ...oh boy, this is going to be a tough one. After all, what is a language? Do different dialects count? What about languages not widely used?

Anyway, the report by the Linguistic Society of America explains how complicated the question really is. According to it, there are currently 6,912 living languages, defined as languages that people actively speak today. Interestingly, the part of the world with the highest level of linguistic diversity is Papua New Guinea. The region has approximately 830 languages for around 5.4 million people. That's about one language for every 6,500 residents. But there should not be any surprises: northern part of Italy embraces over 500 different dialects.

The Linguistic Society of America reports a total of 238 languages in the United States, 162 of which are "living." By the way, USA has never declared English as its official language.



Languages in Canada

In Canada, there are two official languages: English and French. However, there are many people who speak other languages at home. The following are the top languages spoken in Canada:

1. English (20, 500,000)
2. French (6, 600, 000)
3. Chinese (790, 000)
4. Punjabi (278, 500)
5. Spanish (209, 000)
6. Italian (170, 000)
7. Arabic (144, 700)
8. German (128, 000)

The History of Franco-Ontarians

Franco-Ontarians (French: *Franco-ontarien*) are French Canadian or francophone residents of the Canadian province of Ontario.

The Canadian 2001 Census declares there were 485,630 francophones in Ontario (single mother tongue), comprising 4.3 per cent of the province's total population. A further 82,305 Ontarians declared French to be one of multiple mother tongues. Franco-Ontarians constitute the largest French-speaking community in Canada outside of Quebec, and the largest minority language group within Ontario.

The francophone population is concentrated primarily in Eastern Ontario (41.3 per cent — 226,705 francophones), in Ottawa, Cornwall and many rural farming communities, and in Northeastern Ontario (25.2 per cent — 138,585 francophones), in the cities of Sudbury, North Bay and Timmins . Other communities including francophone populations are Toronto, Windsor, Penetanguishene and Welland.

The French presence in Ontario dates to the mid-17th century. Early settlements in the area include the Mission of Sainte-Marie among the Hurons at Midland in 1649, Sault Ste. Marie in 1668, and *Fort Pontchartrain du Détroit* (Detroit, Michigan), located opposite Windsor, in 1701. Southern Ontario was part of the *Pays d'en-haut* (Upper Country) of the French regime, and later part of the province of Quebec until Quebec was split into "The Canadas" in 1791. However, most of those with roots originating in Quebec or New Brunswick crossed over into Ontario seeking employment opportunities in the late 19th century well into the 20th century, while others migrated into New England.

The Franco-Ontarian identity is split into three groups according to historical waves of settlement/immigration. The first wave of settlement in the Detroit/Windsor area came in the 18th century during the French regime. Most settlers then came from what is now Quebec, including both full French and Métis.

A second wave came in the 19th and early 20th centuries to the areas of Eastern Ontario and Northeastern Ontario. This was an immigration wave in the sense that Ontario was primarily British and mainly English-speaking, but the migrants can also be considered settlers, because they founded many villages or settled within already existing francophone communities. In the Ottawa Valley, in particular, some families have moved back and forth across the Ottawa river for generations (the river is the border between Ontario and Quebec), which results in a complex borderland identity. In the city of Ottawa some areas such as Vanier and Orleans have a rich franco-heritage where families often have members on both sides of the Ottawa River.

The third and most recent wave consists of Quebecers and other francophones (Haitians, Maghrebans, Europeans, etc.) who move to the larger cities and often preserve their original identity (Québécois, Haitian, etc.) as their primary cultural affiliation. Franco-Ontarians may also have historical ties to more than one of these three groups, which blurs the lines between these distinctions.