

TERRALINGUA NEWSLETTER #1

News and Views from Terralingua: Partnerships for Linguistic and Biological Diversity

September 1996

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WELCOME

Greetings to all Terralingua members! Welcome too to those of you who have not yet joined, but have contacted us with an expression of interest. This is the first issue of our quarterly newsletter, to be published both electronically and in hard copy. The newsletter is intended to be one of the principal means of communication among our membership. The first two issues will be sent to all those who have expressed an interest in Terralingua, regardless of whether they have joined as members. Subsequent issues (i.e., those beginning in 1997) will be sent to members only as a benefit of their membership. For more on how to join, see the instructions further along in this issue.

We want to say right up front that the newsletter is YOUR publication; that is, it is an open forum for Terralingua members to post news items, discuss issues, request information, launch letter-writing campaigns--in short, to communicate about anything and everything that has to do with our purpose: the preservation of the world's linguistic diversity, and the investigation of links between biological and cultural diversity.

How do you contribute? Send your item to:

Terralingua
P.O. Box 122
Hancock, Michigan 49930-0122 USA
or by e-mail: gws@mail.portup.com

ORGANIZATIONAL UPDATE

Trial Structure in Place.

You may remember from the Prospectus sent out in April that the Ad Hoc Organizing Committee proposed a trial organizational structure under which Terralingua would get up and running. In brief, the trial structure called for the creation of an Interim Board of Directors, whose officers would be drawn from the Ad Hoc Organizing Committee; for the drafting of a Constitution to govern the organization; for the incorporation of Terralingua and the pursuit of tax-exempt status; and for the creation of a membership system. We asked for comments on this; since no negative comments were received, the trial structure has been activated. It will be in place through 30 June 1997, at which time the structure will be opened to review by the membership.

Interim Board of Directors Formed.

In line with the trial organizational structure, an Interim Board of Directors has been formed, and the Ad Hoc Organizing Committee dissolved. The Interim Board will serve until our first Board elections are held, which we anticipate will be in final quarter of 1997. To date, the Interim Board Members are:

Luisa Maffi, President (University of California-Berkeley, USA;
maffi@cogsci.berkeley.edu)

Anthea Fallen-Bailey, Vice President (University of Oregon, USA;
anfallen@ursula.uoregon.edu)

Dave Harmon, Secretary-Treasurer (George Wright Society, USA;
gws@mail.portup.com)

Martha Macri (University of California-Davis, USA; mjmacri@ucdavis.edu)

Mari Rhydwen (Murdoch University, Australia; rhydwen@central.murdoch.edu.au)

Paul Weiss (University of New Mexico, USA; pweiss@unm.edu)

Other persons, representing areas outside North America and indigenous groups, will be invited to round out the Interim Board. Again, in about a year the Board will become an elected body. Voting for the Board will be one of the privileges of Terralingua membership.

Incorporation Achieved.

In August we received approval from the State of Michigan of Terralingua's application for incorporation as a non-profit corporation. Dave Harmon, Martha Macri, and Luisa Maffi acted as incorporators. With this official recognition under our belt, we can now set our sights on applying for tax-exempt status under US federal tax laws. Such status would open lots of funding doors to Terralingua because many foundations will not make grants to organizations unless they are recognized as tax-exempt. We will be moving forward with this application (it's quite complicated) during the next couple of months.

Constitution Drafted.

In July the Interim Board completed a draft Constitution to govern Terralingua. This document sets forth all kinds of basic information, from our purpose to the procedures for electing our Board to classes of membership. The Constitution will be presented to the membership for approval at the time of the first Board elections. In the meantime, if you'd like to see a copy of the draft, just send a note to the Terralingua post-office box or e-mail address.

Membership Takes Shape.

The response to our invitation to join Terralingua, which appeared in the Prospectus in April, has been fairly good, though we are waiting to hear from many of you. About 40 people have joined out of the 240 or so who are on our contact list. Some of these new members have contributed money, while others have joined by virtue of contributing their effort to Terralingua (such as by translating the Statement of Purpose for publication on the Web). Thanks to all of you who have joined! And special thanks go to five persons who have joined as Donor Members (an Annual Support Contribution of \$100): Brent Berlin, Garland Bills, Nyr Indictor, Roy Iutzi-Mitchell, and Luisa Maffi. This is a real vote of confidence in our fledgling organization!

ACTIVITIES

Conferences: Arizona Desert Museum; UC-Berkeley.

Terralingua has been involved in two conferences in 1996—one in April at the Arizona Desert Museum, and one still to come the last weekend in October at the University of California at Berkeley. The 3-day April meeting, "Losing Species, Languages, and Stories: Linking Environmental and Cultural Change in the Binational Southwest" was organized by Gary Paul Nabhan, the author, ethnobotanist, and naturalist. The purpose of the meeting was to draw attention to the decline in indigenous knowledge held by peoples of the Sonoran Desert in Mexico and the USA, and to come up with strategies to redress the decline. Gary very graciously invited Terralingua to be listed as a co-sponsor of the event, even though we put up no money toward the meeting. We did contribute, however, through some personal effort: Terralingua's Secretary-Treasurer, Dave Harmon, gave a keynote address entitled "The Converging Extinction Crisis: Defining Term and Understanding Trends in the Loss of the Biological and Cultural Diversity," with a follow-up Q&A session moderated by Luisa Maffi.

The upcoming Berkeley meeting, called "Endangered Languages, Endangered Knowledge, Endangered Environments," is a 3-day gathering of scholars and activists being organized by Luisa Maffi. As some of you are already aware, this is quite an ambitious multidisciplinary meeting with several dozen participants. It is shaping up to be an exciting and stimulating event. Terralingua will be listed as a co-sponsoring organization. There will be a public lecture on the second night of the conference, and that will provide us with a chance to disseminate info on Terralingua to the audience. We will report on this meeting in detail as part of the next Terralingua Newsletter.

Silent No More / Breath of Life; other meetings.

In June, Luisa Maffi distributed Terralingua information at a workshop in Berkeley for speakers of California Indian languages, many of which have a precariously small number of speakers. Board Member Martha Macri also represented Terralingua's commitment to linguistic diversity by participating as a presenter and resource person. The workshop was put on by California Native language activist and scholar Leanne Hinton, who is with the Linguistics department at UC-Berkeley. The participants in the workshop, rather than focus on the negative aspects of declining language usage, instead adopted the name "Silent No More / Breath of Life" for their coalescing group. A refreshing approach to a situation which is all too easy to portray as hopeless! Luisa reports that the participants were quite interested in the concept of Terralingua, and stressed, quite rightly, the importance for Terralingua to serve the needs of people in communities who are working to on behalf of their language. This is a salutary reminder of where our focus should be. We will be sending copies

of this newsletter to the participants.

Luisa Maffi also distributed Terralingua information at two other Berkeley conferences: the Voices of the Commons meeting in June (international meeting on common property resources), where several people picked it up, and at the Hokan-Penutian conference also in Berkeley, attended by a good number of linguists.

Translations.

We are very pleased to report that, through the efforts of Terralingua members, we now have translations of our Statement of Purpose into European Portuguese (by Ant=F3nio Teixeira), French (Virginie Mamadouh), Spanish (Guadalupe Olalde), and Italian (Luisa Maffi), with several others in the works. These translations will become part of the Terralingua Web site, as well as being available in print. We are very eager to have basic Terralingua materials translated into as many languages as possible. If you have translations skills, please consider putting them to use on behalf of Terralingua. It's a great way to join in lieu of making a financial membership contribution.

Web Site.

Dave Harmon has been working on developing a Terralingua Web site. Initially, it will contain staple information about Terralingua (our statement of purpose, how to join, etc.); the translations of our statement of purpose, and a comprehensive page of links to Internet resources on language endangerment, survival, and rejuvenation. In the future it could contain discussion papers (or summaries of them, with full papers available to members) and other substantive material. Your suggestions welcome! The Web site's home will be on a server at the University of California at Davis under the aegis of the Native American Language Center. Thanks to Martha Macri (the Center's director and Terralingua Board member) and Victor Golla (Society for the Study of the Indigenous Languages of the Americas, or SSILA) for making this happen! Much of the initial work is done, and we hope to have the site going by the end of September. An announcement to this list, and to appropriate other e-mail lists, will be made.

Contacts with Organizations.

Akira Yamamoto, who chairs the Linguistics Society of America's endangered languages committee, has contacted Terralingua to inform us that IPOLA (the Institute for the Preservation of the Original Languages of the Americas) wants to convene a kind of a summit meeting among all the groups that are working on endangered languages. When and where, nobody knows yet. We responded to Akira that Terralingua would be interested in attending, circumstances permitting.

In her role as president, Luisa Maffi has written introductory letters about Terralingua to such organizations as the LSA committee mentioned above (Akira Yamamoto and Scott DeLancey), the endangered languages clearinghouse (the official UNESCO clearinghouse at the University of Tokyo), the Foundation for Endangered Languages (based in the UK; Nicholas Ostler, president), IPOLA, SSILA, and the Working Group on Endangered Languages in Germany (chaired by Professor Hans-J=FCrgen Sasse), as well as several prominent individuals who work on endangered languages. Our goal, as we've said before, is to work with other groups without duplicating efforts.

Lost Language Day Project.

Several months ago, Terralingua member David Cheezem offered a preliminary proposal for a "Lost Language Day" through a posting to the e-mail list ENDANGERED LANGUAGES. The response to the concept of an event to focus public attention on the problem of language loss was largely positive. David's idea also generated a great deal of discussion centered upon the phrase "Lost Language" and whether that reflects the realities of how languages become endangered. David and several others are in the process of forming a Steering Committee to explore the idea in detail. For more information, please contact David C. Cheezem, Suite 2B, Sleepy Dog Coffee Building, 11517 Old Glenn Highway, Eagle River, Alaska 99577 USA; dcheezem@alaska.net.

TERRALINGUA IN THE MEDIA

Several correspondents have informed us that Terralingua was recently featured in the Cornish-language publication An Gowsva--a feature that prompted a number of contacts with us. We also provided information on language loss to the German news magazine FOCUS, at the request of one of their reporters. We have also had informal contacts with representatives of Euskaldunon Egunkaria, the only Basque-language daily newspaper.

A Terralingua announcement is also going to be in the Anthropology Newsletter, the official newsletter of the American Anthropological Association (both the linguistic anthropology and the ecological anthropology sections). We were also featured in the bulletin of the Working Group on Traditional Resources Rights (Darrell Posey, UK), and are on their Web page. We have also been listed on the Cultural Survival Web page and ... perhaps elsewhere? Please report Web sightings to the Terralingua office. Finally, Terralingua member Tony Leaver will be contacting several Welsh-language interest groups with information.

HOW TO JOIN TERRALINGUA

Many of you reading this have expressed an interest in Terralingua, but have yet to join. Of course, we hope you'll seize the moment now! There are two ways to join:

By Contributing Money. One option--and it's only an option, not a requirement--is to make a Membership Contribution. Any amount is welcome, but we suggest a minimum of US\$10 for a Regular Membership. You can be a Donor Member by contributing US\$100, and organizations can join for US\$35. Contributions will make you a member through June 1997.

By Contributing Effort. A second option is to join Terralingua by volunteering to do something on behalf of the organization. Like what, you ask?...

*** By translating Terralingua's Statement of Purpose from English into one or more languages.

*** By distributing information on Terralingua to local groups, your circle of friends, your family--to anyone who might be interested. We can provide you with text and/or a master copy of introductory material on Terralingua that you can reproduce and distribute locally.

*** By sending us the names of people or organizations we can contact to further our work.

*** By contributing one or more items to this newsletter.

*** By contributing to the Terralingua Web site.

*** By working on Terralingua committees (as they are formed).

Anything you do along these lines qualifies you for Regular Membership through June 1997. All you have to do is contact us with what you have done or plan to do, and we'll convert your name from "Interested Person" to "Regular Member" on our list. It's as simple as that!

Special Note to Supporters Outside North America. We have heard from a number of you about how difficult (and outrageously expensive!) it is to send US dollars for a membership contribution. Some of you, through heroic effort, have managed to surmount these obstacles and send contributions anyway, and for your interest and effort we are truly grateful. As far as we can tell, the only relatively inexpensive way to send contributions internationally is through a credit card. At some point down the road we hope Terralingua will be able to accept credit card payments. In the meantime, please don't let these difficulties deter you from joining--just send us a note and we'll enroll you as a Regular Member. We don't want to exclude anyone who wants to join, so let us hear from you!

THE NEXT NEWSLETTER

Terralingua Newsletter #2 will come out in December. The deadline for items is November 15. Help us make this a real forum for news--let us know what is happening in your area! Send your items to Terralingua at the address below--either regular mail or e-mail is fine.

Keep an eye out for the announcement of our Web site later this month!

That's all for now. Thanks, and best regards to you all!

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Terralingua
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A nonprofit international organization
devoted to preserving the world's linguistic diversity
and to investigating links between biological and cultural diversity

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If appropriate, please pass this information from Terralingua on to others--especially those without e-mail--or send us their postal addresses and we'll be glad to mail the information to them. We want to make sure we reach as many people as we can. So, feel free to copy and distribute the information in this message, but please cite Terralingua as the source.
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