

the Linguasphere

This first classified Register of the world's languages and speech communities is completed as a new era of global communication begins. Both serve to emphasise a major change in the human condition, for which the twin poles of society are now the individual person and the planetary community of humankind.

The concept of the individual language, as distinct and separate from other languages, is misleading. All forms of all languages are integral parts of a fluid and continually evolving continuum of human communication. The ultimate component of this continuum is the unique language or "voice" of the individual person, with an average life of only a few decades.

The concept of 'language' as a pre-programmed human capacity or gift is equally misleading. Speech is a collective and cumulative human creation, to which every communicating person has contributed her or his own voice since the invention of speech first made human beings human.

Speech, the most fundamental by-product of humankind's remarkable intellectual and vocal powers, serves not only to establish networks of communication among individual brains, and to create communities. It also serves to program those brains for participation – passive, creative or destructive – in a continuously and rapidly evolving human society.

It is the hardware of human brains and vocal apparatus which can be regarded as two unsolicited gifts, enabling human beings to design not only the subsequent software of speech but also its subsidiary hardware, such as pens, printing-presses, telephones and computers.

This human-made hardware has led to the creation of permanent copies of speech, from clay-tablets and engraved stone to print-outs and CD-Roms. Over the last five thousand years, those inherited copies have often inhibited the natural fluidity and mutability of speech within human brains, and have created prisons of the mind. Yet they have also permitted the accumulation and acceleration of human knowledge and creativity across successive generations of voices.

At the turn of the millennium, on the threshold of an era of global communication, the capacity of men and women to build on past achievements and to abandon all that is divisive will determine their children's future. It will be appropriate if the first decade of a new century can be devoted to a consideration of ways in which the education of the young and the behaviour of the old may be radically adapted to new realities and perspectives.

the publication of this register
marks the beginning of the

DECADE OF THE LINGUASPHERE 2000 - 2009

and is dedicated
to a new era of global communication

when minds are free, no longer confined
behind walls of ignorance, prejudice or dogma

when children acquire allegiance to humankind,
across frontiers of speech, community and culture

when the planet is seen as their common home,
a haven to be protected, nurtured and shared

when the freedom and health of the human mind and body
are respected everywhere, regardless of age, sex or colour

when past sufferings inflicted by humankind upon itself
are remembered without medals, weapons or flags

when mutual awareness and understanding
lead to greater justice, equality and peace

31st December 1999 / 1st January 2000