

## [Oxford University Press' redaction of Calvet's chapter about the Summer Institute of Linguistics](#)

As Sondheim said in 1962, [A funny thing happened on the way to the forum](#) . This time around, in 1998, the forum in question was that slice of public scholarship privately owned by Oxford University Press, and the funny thing was funny-peculiar but not a-laugh-a-minute like the Broadway show. Oxford and its venerable Syndics covertly censored its English translation by M. Petheram of L.-J. Calvet's 1987 book *La Guerre des langues & les politiques linguistiques* (Payot, Paris, 1987, ISBN 222814200X). Bad enough that the kack-handed translator (or his monolingual editor) rendered the title as *Language Wars & Linguistic Politics* [sic] (ISBN 0198700210/0198235984) in disregard of the gender distinction in French between *politics* and *policy*. Far worse for any user of the Oxford edition, Chapter 14 ( *Politique linguistique et impérialisme*; l'Institut Linguistique d'Été , pp. 205–14) got disappeared *in toto* (as the lawyers say), without the intellectual honesty to note the fact of removal, not to mention its cause. S.I.L. obviously prefers to run below the radar. The above link gives the original French text which was so sneakily zapped, as well as the table of contents of the censored OUP edition. (In this case at least, the Rumsfeldian dictum fails, and absence of evidence IS indeed evidence of absence .) I stumbled on this conspiratorial caper while updating the references for my squib [Bailey-bridge to oil doom: Kay Williamson reveals S.I.L.'s official role in the maladministration of the post-Biafran Niger Delta](#).

UPDATE: Prof. Calvet confirms by email (1 July 2007) that the surreptitious removal of [his Chapter 14](#) from the English translation of his 1987 book was an act of self-censorship ( auto-censure ) on the part of Oxford University Press under pressure from a host of lawyers (though precisely *whose* lawyers, it's still necessary to pin down for sake of the public record — OUP whistleblowers please take note).

UPDATE 2: [English translation](#) (6 pp. 8.5 x 11 inches) of the surreptitiously disappeared chapter, prepared and posted here at the suggestion of Prof. Calvet, who fortunately retains translation rights (email, 2 July 2007).

UPDATE 3: Petheram is untraceable, while the OUP editorial office pleads inability to access paper-based archives documenting the affair (email from John Davey, 2 September 2007).

UPDATE 4: SIL/WBT is not the only authoritarian cult that knows how to leverage British libel law, nor is OUP the only British publisher to cower:

This is hardly the first book to cast an unflattering light on the scientologists. But 'Going Clear' will garner attention if only because of the reputation of its author, who, the New York Times says, is known for his thoroughness as a reporter. He has, the paper reports, received numerous threatening letters from lawyers for the Church while the UK publisher of the book, Transworld, recently pulled out and scrapped its printing without explanation. It will be published by Knopf in the US with a first run of 150,000 copies. [source](#)

## Chapter 14

### Language policy and imperialism: the Summer Institute of Linguistics

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translated and posted by V. Manfredi (7-2007) at the suggestion of the author

#### NOTE ON THE PAPER TRAIL

This text, expanded from the author's earlier article "Évangélisation et impérialisme culturel" (*Le Monde Diplomatique* 324, March 1981), appears on pp. 205-17 of *La Guerre des langues et les politiques linguistiques* (Payot, Paris, 1987, ISBN 222814200X) under the title "Chapitre 14. Politique linguistique et impérialisme; l'Institut Linguistique d'Été". This same chapter was cut—in its entirety, and without explanation or other overt indication to the reader—from Oxford University Press' 1998 "translation" by M. Petheram, entitled *Language Wars & Linguistic Politics* [sic] (ISBN 0198700210/0198235984). -VM

In the three previous chapters [of this book, Calvet 1998], we analyzed some examples of language policy pursued for the most part by States (China, India, Guinée, Turkey, Norway) and in one instance (the Shuar) by a national minority of a State. Now I would like to consider a slightly different case study, namely of *language policy-by-proxy* [*politiques linguistiques par délégation*] i.e. policies pursued within a State and in the name of the State but by an entity external to that State: the "Summer Institute of Linguistics".

#### GENERAL BACKGROUND

The "Summer Institute of Linguistics" was founded in 1934 by the Presbyterian preacher Cameron Townsend, and chartered in the State of California in 1942. It takes its name from the fact that each summer it convenes training courses of linguistic description in different countries. Its primary goal was on the one hand to describe the non-described languages of the world—i.e. it proposed to intervene essentially in what today is called the Third World—and on the other hand to translate the Bible into these various languages. To this end, in 1942, Townsend created a twin organization, the Wycliffe Bible Translators, such that the pair SIL-WBT was devoted to the conversion and education of indigenous peoples throughout the whole world. This is illustrated in the accompanying chart (below) which summarizes its world presence as of 1978, with 3,700 persons working on 675 languages across 29 countries of Africa, Latin America, Asia and Oceania.

The Institute was placed under the scientific direction of Kenneth Pike, the American linguist and missionary. As shown in the chart, it was installed in some globally strategic spots—places from which, interestingly enough, it was sometimes obliged to leave (Brazil, Nepal, Vietnam, Cambodia...) especially whenever a pro-U.S. government fell.

In 1947, the SIL-WBT conglomerate acquired an important logistic arm, the Jungle Aviation and Radio Service (JAARS) which manages air transport, radio communication and material supply lines in all the locations where the missionary-linguists have been installed. JAARS affords SIL-WBT great autonomy of transport and communication; in certain countries it was granted the right of territorial overflight, allowing it to connect directly from the USA to missionary bases without stopover in a local airport, and consequently without passing through customs formalities.

In the countries listed in the chart, SIL works in cooperation either with the government or with a university, as its members study the local languages and publish (mostly in English) scientific studies of these languages, sometimes also providing literacy training to indigenous peoples and always, of course, translating the Bible into these languages. Taken together therefore, SIL promotes a program of evangelism, literacy and scientific activity whose results one can assess from its publications. In this respect, SIL resembles other humanitarian organizations which intervene throughout the world—or at least it *would* resemble them, if not for certain problems which we will now describe.

## The Summer Institute of Linguistics in the world

(in parentheses, date of arrival in-country)

MEXICO (1934), 372 persons.

PERU (1945), 234 persons. In April 1976, the government of Morales Bermudez ordered SIL out of the country, but reversed its decision in January 1977 and signed a new 5 year contract.

ECUADOR (1952), 100 persons.

GUATEMALA (1952), 91 persons.

HONDURAS (1960), 4 persons.

BOLIVIA (1955), 372 persons.

BRAZIL (1956), 302 persons. In November 1977, on the order of the minister of the Interior, SIL had to withdraw from tribal areas but was allowed to keep its bases at Porto-Velho, Culaba, Belem and Manaus.

COLOMBIA (1962), 217 persons.

PANAMA (1970), 17 persons.

SURINAM (1967), 20 persons.

CHILE (1977)

PHILIPINES (1953), 251 persons.

PAPUA NEW GUINEA (1956), 546 persons.

SOUTH VIETNAM (1957), 66 persons, who left the country in 1975 after the fall of the Saigon government.

CAMBODIA (1971), 2 persons, who left the country in 1975 after the fall of Lon Nol.

AUSTRALIA (1961), 82 persons.

SOLOMON ISLANDS (1977)

INDIA (1966)

NEPAL (1966), 83 persons, all expelled by the government in 1976.

INDONESIA (1971), 81 persons.

MALAYSIA (1977)

ETHIOPIA (1973)

SUDAN (1974)

KENYA (1977)

CHAD (1977)

GHANA (1962), 42 persons.

NIGERIA (1962), 71 persons, replaced with Nigerian citizens by the government in 1976.

CAMEROUN (1967), 65 persons.

TOGO (1967), 372 persons.

IVORY COAST (1970), contract with the University of Abidjan.

UPPER VOLTA (1974), 54 persons.

Figures from *Dominación ideológica y ciencia social; el Instituto Lingüístico de Verano en México* (Colegio de Etnólogos y Antropólogos Sociales, México, 1979)

## FIRST CRITIQUES

It is in Colombia that voices began to be raised against the practices of SIL-WBT-JAARS. General José Joaquín Matallana, director of the Colombian security service [DAS], declared to Congress in 1974 that the group “engages in emerald trafficking in Tunebia, in drug dealing in the Llanos Orientales, in locating and exploiting natural resources, in surgical sterilization and in forced birth control in the communities of Arauca...” A year later, on 14 October and before the same assembly, the Colombian congressman Napoleón Peralta denounced the existence of a North American army base in the Sierra de la Macarena, which received logistical support from the SIL base in Loma Linda, California.

The accusations then spread across the continent. In Peru in 1975, there was constant clamor for the government to expel SIL, following a long newspaper campaign which alleging contacts with the CIA and accusing it of having directly exploited gold and uranium resources. In Mexico on 8 October 1975, a group of anthropologists, sociologists and students working in indigenous Indian regions denounced the activities of SIL in a text, known as the Denuncia de Patzcuaro, sent to the President of the Republic. On 21 November 1975, the newspaper *El Comercio* bore the prudent headline, “Colombia terminates its contract with a U.S. organization that also operates in Ecuador” and in February 1976 the Anthropology Department of the Catholic University of Quito published a document of some ten pages “What is the Summer Institute of Linguistics?” denouncing the role played by SIL in Ecuador, especially in its Amazonian base of Limoncocha.

So far as Colombia was concerned, President Alfonso Lopez Michelsen declared on 14 February 1975 that he would gradually dispense with SIL missionaries and replace them with Colombian research staff; but a year later on 14 February 1976, the Minister of Education Hernando Duran sent to Cameron Townsend a letter of support (published in *El Espectador*, Bogotá, 20 February 1976) renewing his confidence in the organization. A similar pattern of events was seen in Peru where, after setting up a commission of inquiry in January 1977, the government declared on 2 April that the country “needs the work of the linguists of the SIL”. In Brazil however, the government announced on 23 November 1977 its refusal to renew the visas of 150 SIL-WBT missionaries. In Colombia on 20 September 1978 (IPS dispatch, Bogotá), SIL-WBT-JAARS was accused of operating airplanes supplied by the U.S. Army and piloted by veterans of the Vietnam War.

I cite here only certain notable points of a campaign which, in four or five years across five or six countries of Central and South America, accused SIL-WBT-JAARS

- of having links with the CIA;
- of organizing, under the cover of education centers, anti-guerilla training camps (especially in Colombia and Mexico);
- of trafficking in gold, uranium, emeralds and narcotics;
- of practicing the forced sterilization of indigenous Indians;
- of having links U.S. oil exploration companies, etc.

To these serious charges, ultimately based on mere suspicion, were added less spectacular criticisms which were however more important and better-founded :

- The primary and ostensible goal of SIL-WBT is to evangelise indigenous Indians and to translate the Bible, which certainly allows a degree of scientific work on their languages, but which at the same time suppresses local cultures; conversion to Christianity acts like a veritable steamroller.
- This proselytization creates factional religious conflict between evangelical Protestants and Catholics within indigenous Indian communities, whereby North American evangelicals struggle with Spanish-speaking Catholics over “customers”. In this regard, during a training session for monitors of a literacy program in Ecuador in July 1980, I myself observed that all the theoretical, political or pedagogical differences which surfaced derived in fact from religious differences, and that indigenous Indian evangelicals opposed the government policy *ipso facto* because this was supported by Catholics. Among the Shuar during the same period, I collected a song typifying this religious conflict, which had been released thirty years previously by the Catholics when a Protestant preacher wanted to set himself up there. A “war chorus” would proceed in front of the church to sing:

*Protestantes non mentalis*  
*Vuestra Iglesia no es de Cristo*  
*Cada recto que formais*  
*Obra fue de algun ministro*  
*Soy cristiano, soy catolico*  
*Apostolico hasta morir...*

Protestants, don't tell lies  
 Your Church is not of Christ  
 Every convert that you train  
 Is the product of a some [other] ministry  
 I am Christian and Catholic  
 Apostolic until death...

- SIL operates with extreme disrespect for local cultures: in Mexico, it forbids indigenous Indians from consuming “unclean animals” which happen to be their main source of protein; among the Aucas of Ecuador, they replace traditional fermented beverages (of the *chicha* type) with *Coca-Cola*, etc.
- Turning to another continent, it's interesting to report the observations of Angela Gilliam about SIL-WBT in Papua New Guinea (“Language and ‘development’ in Papua New Guinea”, *Dialectical Anthropology* 8, 1984, pp. 303-18). The author begins by describing the base at Ukarumpa, occupied by missionaries, which “resembles a U.S. Army base in that it has a PX” (a type of military canteen like a supermarket selling U.S. products). Then she analyzes the work of the SIL: “The national government has not yet fundamentally changed the colonial language policy, the goals of the pre-Independence colonial agencies—the churches and the colonial administration—that brought the WBT-SIL to Papua New Guinea in the first place, remain...” (p. 311). Above all, she emphasizes the striking disproportion between SIL publications in English and those written in the medium of local languages: “The ‘scientific’-sounding, linguistic work is written in the English language, a process which essentially enhances the international reputations of the writers as experts; the few works written in newly-alphabetized Papua New Guinea languages are sometimes basic language primers and nutrition manuals, but just as often relating to riddles or sermons...” (p. 311). On the one hand, she says, we find in English the technical jargon of linguists (e.g. the monograph entitled “*Barai Derivational Operations vs. Universal Passivization and Antipassivization*”), and on the other, in local languages, we find crude and patronising texts (*How the Jews Live and Biblical Customs*). She concludes that the work of the SIL-WBT is not to open a discussion about the language policy of the country, but only to convert the inhabitants to Christianity and to spread the Bible.

Confronted with these concerted critiques, SIL has certainly responded, in documents seeking to prove its good faith, in particular: *Exposición de la filosofía y los métodos del Instituto Lingüístico de verano en el Perú* (August 1976) and *Instituto Lingüístico de Verano en Ecuador* (December 1979). But even if the accusations summarized above are not always very precise, the responses to the “slanders” on their part are exceptionally vague.

Thus, in the document published in Quito, it is claimed

- that entry to the zones where SIL works is unrestricted, except where the safety of visitors is not guaranteed (must we remind them that this is Ecuadoran territory?);
- that internal SIL rules forbid its members from having any contact with intelligence services;
- that SIL does not seek to impose any religion (but the text fails to mention that SIL is closely linked to WBT, if not actually identical to it);
- that no SIL member is a drug dealer.

These responses, expressed in the form of general principles, leave certain questions unanswered. For example, Major Herbert Brusow was an SIL manager in Colombia in 1980: is this the same man who was implicated in the liquidation of ‘Che’ Guevara in Bolivia (according to the Mexican newspaper *El Día*, 19 July 1979)? And how about this text, published by SIL itself in 1959:

To reach the soul of the Indian one must understand his psychology, and this is done through his language. To win the East [of Ecuador], to exploit its economic riches, one must integrate the Indian into national culture. The first step in this process is alphabetization, during which the indigenes learn to write and read their own language which serves as a bridge to the learning of Spanish.

*Estudios acerca de las lenguas Huarani (Auca), Shimigae y Zápara*, SIL, Quito, 1959, p. 3.

On the one hand, it’s hard to believe that this passage reflects a lack of interest in mineral riches (the East of Ecuador is the oil-rich Amazonian region). On the other hand, one notes that literacy in indigenous Indian languages is characterized as helping the spread of Spanish. And when one reads, on the first page of the same document that “from its inception the SIL has maintained total independence from all governmental, political or religious entities”, the least one can say is that the WBT once again has been instantly forgotten: are Bible translation and conversion to Christianity really consistent with “total independence from all... religious entities”?

In fact, it’s obvious that the principal aim of SIL-WBT is evangelism, which would be beyond reproach if this proselytization was carried out with respect for local cultures. For the rest, it’s difficult to prove the different charges which, by definition, concern hazy matters. For example, where does the group get its funding from? Who finances the missionaries, their airplanes, radios and bases? Philanthropic foundations, says the Quito document, mentioning Evangelische Zentralstelle für Entwicklungshilfe (W. Germany), Canadian International Development Agency, U.S. Agency for International Development and Rotary International. However, just to consider one of these, USAID (and what I write about this one has no implications for the others), the least that can be said is that its behavior is sometimes disturbing. Philip Agee, a former CIA agent who collected his memoirs in a book, explains that the technical assistance missions of the International Cooperation Administration (ICA, which in 1961 became USAID) often included U.S. technicians who worked with local police forces. He adds: “The Public Safety Missions are valuable to the CIA because they provide cover for CIA officers who are sent to work full time with the intelligence services of the police and other civilian services” (*Inside the Company; a CIA Diary*. Allen Lane, London, 1975, p. 63). As to SIL links with U.S. oil exploration firms, the following example is somewhat instructive.

#### THE CASE OF ECUADOR

The Summer Institute of Linguistics was established in Ecuador since 1952, then in 1982 it was chased out by the government after various intrigues. It was set up in Amazonia, in the regional hub of Limoncocha, on 1,287 hectares granted by the nation of Ecuador for a period of 50 years. On this land it built housing, a library, offices, a clinic, an airport and repair shops, a radio station and a weather observation post, a golf course, a private school for children of staff members, etc—and it was a real base, importing food supplies directly from the USA in its own airplanes. The contract signed with the government of Ecuador granted to SIL considerable privileges, among others:

- unrestricted entry for SIL members into the national territory;
- full tax exemption for all present and future materiel imported from abroad;
- permission to resell all vehicles in-country after 4 years of use;
- permission for SIL airplanes (i.e. for JAARS) to overfly Ecuadoran territory;
- full tax exemption for all SIL property, etc.

[source: *Registro Oficial, organo del gobierno del Ecuador*, 19 May 1971, treaty signed by J.-M. Velasco Ibarra, then president of the Republic.]

On its part, according to the treaty's official text, SIL was supposed to work towards the development of Amazonian languages and to study folklore, flora and traditional medicine.

I have never found anywhere the slightest official evaluation of the work of the SIL, but instead I have found a document produced by the Literacy Center of the Catholic University of Quito, listing several grievances against SIL:

- Only a few, partial linguistic studies were published in Limoncocha about indigenous Indian languages;
- No adult literacy materials were produced;
- SIL commercialized local crafts, reselling artisanal items for prices three times more than what was paid to the indigenous Indians;
- SIL transformed Limoncocha into a center for tourism in partnership with the *Flotel Orellana*, a cruise ship that carries tourists along the Amazon river

But there is worse. Air transport being the only means of access to Limoncocha, and SIL airplanes having a monopoly on external links at that time, it was the Institute which introduced North American oil exploration firms into the region. In 1964 it brought in the first U.S. geological prospector, and beginning in 1972, Texaco-Gulf exploited the oil of eastern Ecuador using SIL infrastructure (especially its airplanes and radio). A glance at the map of Latin America shows, among other things, a remarkable coincidence between the zones of SIL implantation and Texaco-Gulf operations areas... Moreover, according to a text published in Mexico, SIL worked in Ecuador for four North American companies: two interested in timber exports (Georgia-Pacific and Boise-Cascade) and two interested in oil (Texaco-Gulf and Shandoah Oil).<sup>1</sup>

That's a lot of coincidences, making it hard to believe that SIL was completely disinterested in economic matters. What about the other accusations? It's true that Latin American countries are subjected to so much pressure, including *coups d'état* fomented with the help of North American clandestine services, that a certain degree of paranoia may push these countries to see the hand of the CIA in any and all U.S. organizations. But there are in these bundles of data too many coincidences for this excuse to be accepted at face value.

#### WHOSE LANGUAGE POLICY?

Our problem is however a different one: not to know if the SIL-WBT-JAARS consortium is or is not a CIA front, but rather to ask what type of language policy it produces.

First point: under the pretext of describing local languages, SIL uses literacy instruction most often as a means to facilitate learning of the official state language (the aforementioned 1959 document is quite explicit on this point). In other words, it places itself in a perspective which we can call "Jacobin", at the same time as it carries out its functions selectively: the locally-spoken language is reserved for religion (the Bible is translated into local languages), while the official state language is used for everything else. Bringing local languages into the temple, it excludes them from the city, reserving the high road for official languages.

Second point: the choice of language policy summarized above is that of SIL and not that of the individual States which signed contracts with it. This problem is fundamental. The different countries of Latin America, Asia and Africa in which SIL has set itself up are faced with a huge dilemma of language planning: whether to choose as primary national language the old colonial language (French, English, Spanish, Portuguese) or whether instead to introduce local languages—those which the masses fluently speak—into education and public affairs? We have seen some examples in preceding chapters of this book [= Calvet 1998]. Few countries having yet made their choice, mostly the colonial situation persists. In this respect, SIL could well play a central role, even though it is not really authorized to do so. I spoke at the beginning of this chapter about *policy-by-proxy*, and here we can understand the meaning of this expression: the State indirectly 'allows' to happen that which it is either politically unwilling—or does not dare—to do for itself.

The third point concerns the ideology carried by the texts of SIL-WBT, in particular those texts which are translated into local languages and distributed to the indigenous population. We find in the aforementioned work, *Dominación ideológica y ciencia social; el Instituto Lingüístico de Verano en México* (pp. 17-18), an analysis of these texts from which several constant features emerge:

- a tendency to encourage individualism, the idea of solitary effort, and to banish any notion of cooperation or social solidarity: the group exists only as a source of punishment and revenge;
- an idealized portrayal of the political, administrative and repressive apparatus of the Mexican State;
- portrayal of the USA as the most evolved expression of the ideal society, produced by "God's chosen people";

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1. *Dominación ideológica y ciencia social; el Instituto Lingüístico de Verano en México* (Colegio de Etnólogos y Antropólogos Sociales, México, 1979), reprising a text by Scott Robinson, "Fulfilling the Mission; North American evangelism in Ecuador", in S. Hvalkof & P. Aaby, *Introducing God in the Devil's Paradise*, listed as "in press" and which ought to correspond to *Is God an American? An Anthropological Perspective on the Missionary Work of the Summer Institute of Linguistics* (Copenhagen; Survival International, London, 1981), cited by Gilliam (1984).

- introduction of rigid and puritannical morality;
- the choice to look down upon “tribes” while idealizing the national society as something into which indigenous Indians ought to assimilate.

In Ecuadoran Amazonia, the aforementioned Shuar did not form any better opinion of SIL. A document of the Shuar Federation (“Solución original a un problema actual”, Sucua, 1976, pp. 109f.), after stressing the interest of the missionaries’ linguistic work, criticizes evangelical missions and SIL “for having been a factor of division and disintegration”, for having waged constant ideological war against the Catholics—the slanders were mutual, according the document, until Vatican II, after which the fault remained with the evangelicals—and in brief for having acted contrary to the goal of unifying the Shuar People. In passing it’s also interesting to note that this text never makes a distinction between SIL linguists and evangelical missionaries.

We see that it’s not easy to tie the SIL-WBT-JAARS conglomerate to the CIA directly, but it is no less the case that its activities extend far beyond the bounds within which it claims to confine itself. In different parts of the globe, the group carries out a language policy which, under color of working in favor of local languages, advances instead the interest of the central power, running roughshod over the cultures, customs and beliefs of minority groups in favor of State ideology. It moreover promotes a campaign of religious conversion and of propaganda for the “American Way”. And on all these points, it acts in the last analysis by proxy [*par délégation*], under the name of local interests, which is the dream scenario of U.S. clandestine agencies if they do indeed play any role whatsoever in this enterprise. Thus, if these linguists “rhyme” with imperialists, theirs is an ambiguous imperialism: that of the United States to be sure, but also that of the central power in each of the respective countries, which delegates to them a planning role that it can’t cope with on its own.

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