

# IHLA Newsletter



International &  
Heritage Languages  
Association

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## International Mother Language Day — February 19, 2005

IHLA successfully celebrated the second annual International Mother Language Day on February 19, 2005, at the Polish Veterans Hall in Edmonton, Alberta.

More than 400 people gathered

once again around the fantastic displays that our member schools had prepared for the event, while honoured guests and special presentations took place throughout the day. Visit the IHLA website to view snap-

shots of the day as we invite you to read more about the event, beginning with a presentation from Dr. Olenka Bilash, University of Alberta, gave towards the final section of the event. (More highlights inside this issue).

## Reflections on International Mother Language Day Dr. Olenka Bilash, University of Alberta



Today we are gathered here in Edmonton to celebrate International Mother Language Day. What does this mean? Of course we all know that languages are keys to cultures, keys to beliefs and understandings, keys to ways to experience and celebrate all aspects of being human – our emotions, our thoughts, our rites of passage – from birth to marriage to death to seasonal rituals. And we all know that when the language of the home is not the language of society that children in the home are at risk of not learning the home language and that that loss can sever family relationships, self esteem, and identity formation.

So in 1999 UNESCO declared that February 21 would be International Mother Language Day each year. Aimed to promote linguistic diversity and multilingual education, and to develop fuller awareness of linguistic and cultural traditions based on understanding, tolerance and dialogue throughout the world, this day honours people the world over who use at least one language in their home and family and another one in the affairs of daily life that take place outside the home.

Today this IHLA sponsored event is about celebrating what has made it possible to pass on to your children your home language – so that they can see, hear and understand the world through the lenses, words and

thoughts of at least two languages. Thus, we are here to celebrate families for their devotion, commitment and discipline in keeping the language alive in the home, in insisting that children use the language, in keeping the names of foods, places, and history alive for them, in sharing with them your values, your traditions, your music, and in helping them make connections with their heritage lands so that they can become more aware of the richness of the world outside Canada and our relationship to it.

We are also here to celebrate community leaders for their vision and efforts to build and maintain a network that keeps languages alive within the home and beyond – the radio programs, TV programs, newspapers, professional and business clubs, spiritual centres, community youth groups. . . Without this layer of community support, largely involving volunteers from the community, healthy multi-generational heritage language communities could not thrive. And as members of a community, let us all take responsibility for using the heritage language whenever possible so that children grow up hearing, speaking, reading and writing the language in many domains of daily life inside and outside of the home.

Today we are also here to celebrate administrators of heritage language schools who also volunteer their time and expertise in order to oversee school activities, manage finances, hire and guide instructors, organize special events and develop curricula that support language development. Their collective work insures that children not only learn language, but learn through language. These schools enable the

youngest members of your heritage language communities to learn the history, geography, literature, music, and traditions related to your language and with the knowledge and values they acquire through the years are then able to enrich the understandings of their peers in public schools, in workplaces and in social settings. The bilingual child adds to the richness of the fabric of Canadian society. Exposure to the culture of the peoples who have spoken your heritage language for generations and the experiences in heritage language schools help your child to develop positive self esteem and a strong Canadian identity, although it sometimes takes ten or fifteen years for them to realize and appreciate this.

We are here to celebrate HL instructors for their enthusiasm, passion and tireless commitment to passing on language and culture – that which is so dear to their heart – to the youngest generations of our community and society. Their preparation time, participation in extra workshops, creativity and own knowledge base all contribute to the experiences that young people grow up to reminisce upon and acknowledge as being significant in their lives.

Finally, we are here to celebrate and acknowledge students for their efforts in studying and learning their languages, knowing that their efforts and strengths are OUR future as well.

So, on World Mother Language Day let us remember and thank those who enable children to learn and maintain their mother languages in minority language contexts – families, community leaders and their memberships, heritage language school administrators, and heritage language instructors who care!



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Dr. Olenka Bilash

## International Mother Language Day (cont.)

Special guests honoured this event with their presence and their greetings. A full list of all who attended is included in the program pages available on-line. IHLA would also like to invite all to visit the Hon. David Kilgour website to read his very powerful speech about the importance of languages in today's society. Click on the link below to view the script.

<http://www.david-kilgour.com/mp/For%20Whom%20the%20Language%20%20Bell%20Tolls.htm>



For more pictures about MLD 2005 visit the IHLA website.

## "The Role of the Spanish Language in the Alberta Languages Initiative"

Magdalena Aguinaga, Spanish Language Consultant, International Languages, Alberta Education

The Spanish language always had a basic cohesion, something which fostered its growth from its inception. Castilian, the denomination Spanish speakers give to what English speakers simply refer to as Spanish, started to be predominant in the 10th century at a time when the Spanish region of Castile had little political power. This occurred for linguistic reasons such as Castilian's coherent rendering of Latin derivatives and its clear phonetic system. In contrast, the Leonese spoken in Asturias and the Aragonese of the Navarre district fluctuated in both their pronunciation and their grammar. The outstanding internal cohesion which Castilian always featured crystallized in a clear, simple vowel system containing only 5 vowel sounds as well as an easy system of consonants. This made the language simpler and clearer.

Another key factor in the unity and development of Castilian was the 1492 publication of *Gramatica Castellana* by Antonio de Nebrija, the world's first grammar book for a modern language. Nebrija was aware that a standard norm would contribute to the language's development and performance. Thanks to him, Castilian was the world's first language to be regulated grammatically and has been so for five centuries ever since. The valuable practical consequence of this unity is that it makes Spanish very easy to learn.

Castilian spelling became standardized because of the work of the Spanish Royal Academy and similar institutions in Spanish-speaking countries of the Americas which established common norms for all Spanish speakers. The increased stature of Spanish in the 20th century is doubtless linked to the

growing number of Spanish speakers worldwide. According to an article by Francisco Moreno and Jaime Otero entitled *Spanish Worldwide* (Cervantes Institute 1998 Annual Report), 346,284,000 people live in countries whose official language is Spanish. Of these, 94.7% are Spanish speakers, that is 327,956,000 people. To this figure one can add the Spanish speakers from countries where there is a different official language. Foremost among these is the United States. Other sources place the number of Spanish speakers worldwide at 401 million by taking into consideration those who claim it as their second language.

Two of the world's most multitudinous languages, meaning those with over 400 million speakers, use the Latin alphabet: Spanish and English. Spanish is the official language in more than 17 countries. From early on, Spanish demonstrated its cultural vibrancy. Its written tradition goes back a millennium to *Glosas emilianeses y silenses*. In addition, its medieval literature was immensely popular with the *Cantar del mio Cid* as a case in point. This novel promoted the spread of Castilian over and above that of other languages spoken in Spain and made Castilian (which will be referred to as Spanish here on in) more important.

Spanish literature contributed enormously to the diffusion of the language and its prestige as a universal language. There is Spanish literature written in Spain, in all of the Spanish-speaking countries of the Western hemisphere as well as in the

Philippines and New Guinea. Spanish is a universal language because it is the mother tongue of genetically distinct peoples. The Spanish, English and Portuguese languages put down roots in the New World and flourished to the point where today their heart lies not in Europe but, rather, West of the Atlantic. In other words, in the process of becoming universal these languages became American and thereby genetically distinct. Afterwards, they became the mother tongues of speakers on continents as diverse as Europe, America, Africa, Asia and Oceania. The international prestige of Spanish is further enhanced by the fact that it is the second language of the United States and Spanish speakers there have generally raised their standard of living and reached influential positions in American society. Spanish speaking people were the first minority in the USA at 35 million.

At the same time, a universal language like Spanish becomes culturally enriching. Language programs, Spanish publications, videos and study cassettes are a prosperous business because many people wish to learn a foreign language and choose those which are considered universal because they are spoken in many parts of the world.

Spanish has all the characteristics necessary to be considered a universal language because of its internal cohesion which was achieved, in large part, by the work of its language academies and the influence of television. An article published in the Spanish daily ABC on August 30, 1998, by Gregorio Salvador stated that Spanish is a unified language which has more cohesion than all the major languages of the world. Secondly, the number of people whose mother tongue is Spanish is increasing, as is the number of people who are studying it as a second

or third language. Thirdly, its cultural influence is growing throughout the world. There are, for example, more Spanish-speaking recipients of the Nobel prize for peace and literature than ever before. In the fourth place, Spanish is heard in more places in North America due to increased immigration of Spanish speakers to the United States, especially in areas which were formerly Spanish territory. Lastly, Spanish-speaking countries now have stronger economies.

(to read the complete article visit the News Room on the IHLA website—[www.nahla.net](http://www.nahla.net) )



**Celebrating Women in Canada** is a national touring art exhibition consisting of 25 original watercolor paintings, honoring the passion, pride and perseverance of Canadian women. The exhibit, sponsored by the **National Council of Women of Canada**, features the artwork of Canadian artist Larisa Sembaliuk Cheladyn. **The exhibit will be in Edmonton, Alberta from May 21 to June 5, 2005 at the Tucker Amphitheatre, Citadel Theatre. IHLA will be hosting it on May 23, 2005. IHLA will require volunteers to tend the sales tables and the exhibit.**

IHLA schools are invited to contact the IHLA office immediately to support this event with:

- Volunteers to assist during the day ( required 10 people in two shifts)
- Entertainment groups to perform during the day.

**Portion of the proceeds from the event on that day will constitute a fundraising opportunity for IHLA schools that actively participate in the event.**

## IHLA Activities and Initiatives Update

- **Alberta Education Languages Initiative Advisory Committee**— This committee will meet in May 2005— IHLA will continue to update its members with regards to developments around the Languages Initiative Implementation.
- **IHLA Annual General Meeting**— begin to plan for your attendance to the IHLA AGM that will take place on **Monday, June 6, 2005 at 7:00 p.m. at the IHLA office.** This AGM is particularly important as members will be asked to consider changes in the Constitution. (see Constitution Committee).
- **Celebration Women Fundraising Day Opportunity—On Monday May 23, 2005** IHLA will be hosting one of the celebration days in conjunction with the Edmonton Council of Women, during their “Celebrating Women Week”. This event will run all week at the Cita-

del Theatre. IHLA has offered to volunteer for the whole day and it is counting on its member schools to actively participate in this efforts. Call the IHLA office at (780) 428-5510 or e-mail IHLA at [ihla@telus.net](mailto:ihla@telus.net) to register your volunteers and actively participate in this initiative.

- **Constitution Amendments**—The IHLA Constitution is aging and needs revisions. IHLA board members have been very busy in the past few months to consider proposed amendments and revisions to this 13-year-old document. All IHLA member schools and members at large will be receiving a package before the end of April 2005, containing a copy of the old document with proposed revisions. IHLA invites its members to consider reading and reflecting on the changes

proposed as members will be asked to vote on such changes at the upcoming AGM.

- **IHLA Membership** — IHLA membership runs from September 1 to August 31. Memberships are considered completed if fees accompany applications and are received by no later than January 31. There has been some confusion on deadlines and schools have been given frequent reminders to renew their memberships. If deadlines are missed for the current year schools still have the opportunity to join the following year. Only members in good standing will receive full membership benefits. For more information visit the Membership link on the IHLA website. ([www.nahla.net](http://www.nahla.net) )

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**Established** in 1978 and formerly known as NAHLA, IHLA is a non-profit organization that actively promotes cross-cultural understanding through heritage/international language instruction and education. IHLA serves as the umbrella body for approximately 25 heritage schools involved in the teaching of international and heritage languages in Central and Northern Alberta. The Association represents all levels of language instruction and education for over 32 languages and 12,000+ students of international languages outside the public school system in Alberta.

IHLA's primary objectives include:

- supporting and promoting international and heritage language education
- assisting in the development of international and heritage language curriculum, teaching resources and materials
- supporting international and heritage language teacher training and skill development

**IHLA supports the view that international language education increases the level and respect and appreciation for multiculturalism and the diversity of Canada's peoples.**

## Language Learning Corner

IHLA continues with its Language Learning Corner, to inspire you to read on articles and information about language learning. For entire articles follow the links provided. **GOOD READING!**

(Links are easily accessible through the on-line version of this newsletter available on the IHLA website)

**Breakfast Around the World (A cultural Perspective)**- Our word for the first meal of the day, "breakfast," has almost religious overtones, as if the hours in which we sleep are a purposeful abstinence from sustenance. We get this word from the English – just as we get from them many of our breakfast habits and dishes. And, since both the US and England have unusually elaborate ideas of what constitutes an appropriate culinary opener to the day, it is not surprising that we share a loaded name for the meal. (Read about this article at:

([http://ravenclawgirl.veoc.net/HouseElves/he\\_breakfast.htm](http://ravenclawgirl.veoc.net/HouseElves/he_breakfast.htm) ).

### Mis Cositas

Here's a great site for beginning to

intermediate students of Spanish to read short illustrated stories in small chunks– ( <http://www.miscositas.com/> )

### Fonéticas

this page will take you to a fun and very detailed site about sounds and pronunciation of the Spanish language. Interactive and free, this site is a good reference for teachers as well as students. ( <http://www.uiowa.edu/~acadtech/phonetics/spanish/frameset.html> )

### A Review of Literature on Second Language Learning

This link takes you to a very thorough document prepared by the Language Resource Centre at the University of Calgary on the most current literature on second language learning. Exten-

sive and complete this document provides a basis for any language teacher as well as any stakeholder who wishes to learn more about language acquisition.

( <http://www.education.gov.ab.ca/languages/litreview.pdf> )

### Language learning should be fun and the lessons should be a highlight of life in school!

Quite a provocative statement for a practicing Modern Languages teacher, but one in which I firmly believe. I realize that I come up against several problems with this line of thinking: our widely-held belief in the UK ... (more at: [http://www.talkingteaching.co.uk/resources/show\\_resource.cfm?id=62](http://www.talkingteaching.co.uk/resources/show_resource.cfm?id=62) )