

The Study Group on Language and the United Nations
invites you to contribute to a
Symposium on

The United Nations at 75: Listening, Talking and Taking Action in a Multilingual World

on Thursday & Friday, May 9-10, 2019
at the Church Center, 777 United Nations Plaza, New York, NY 10017, USA
First Avenue at 44th Street

The United Nations Charter was signed in San Francisco on June 26, 1945, and came into force on October 24 of that year. Thus, the United Nations will celebrate its 75th anniversary in the year 2020. For the past 74 years, the United Nations has worked (in the words of the Charter) “to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war,” “to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights,” and “to promote social progress.”

In short, it has created a framework of international agreement and cooperation that, though fragile and often threatened, has endured for three generations. What can be done to secure its future?

According to Article 1 (3) of the Charter, among the purposes of the United Nations is the achievement of “international co-operation in solving international problems of an economic, social, cultural, or humanitarian character, and in promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion.”

This symposium will give particular attention to the question of language. Although the UN has always promoted dialogue, in recent years it has grown more sensitive to the need for equality in dialogue. In other words, it has become increasingly aware of the need to listen to its constituents rather than simply talking to them, and to understand as well as to be understood. Such concepts are inherent in the Sustainable Development Goals accepted in 2015 and setting the agenda for the UN as it grows closer to its first hundred years. In a world in which thousands of languages are spoken, is the UN ready for equal dialogue, now and in the future? If not, what is to be done to create linguistic readiness – both in the internal workings of the organization and in its relations with the larger world? These questions have particular relevance in 2019, the UN’s International Year of Indigenous Languages.

The organizers of the Symposium welcome proposals from scholars and practitioners for brief 20-minute papers, both applied and theoretical, on such topics as

- Dialogue in development
- Language policy in the UN and other international governmental and nongovernmental organizations
- Translation and interpretation (e.g., translator and interpreter training, working with translators and interpreters, ongoing professional development for language proficiency maintenance)
- Multilingualism at the UN and in international co-operation
- The role of language in public diplomacy, outreach, and other fieldwork
- Professional development needs for multilingual operations, including development, peacekeeping, and diplomacy

- Language and the three pillars of the UN: human rights, peace and security, and development
- Professional development for language proficiency: Building organizational language capacity as a human resource
- The role of language in negotiation
- Monolingualism and the illusion of consensus
- Language problems and miscommunication
- Language awareness among UN agencies and staff
- Language education: Preparing the next generation for international relations
- Indigenous languages and the work of the United Nations

Please send proposals (200 words or less, accompanied by a biography of approximately 50 words) to Dr Lisa McEntee-Atalianis (l.atalianis@bbk.ac.uk), by February 15th, 2019. The committee expects to make final decisions on the program by March 4th, 2019.