

The background of the cover features a long-exposure photograph of a night sky with numerous star trails in shades of purple, blue, and white. The trails are curved, suggesting a long exposure with a slow shutter speed. At the bottom of the image, a silhouette of a landscape is visible against a warm, orange and yellow sunset sky.

# **HYPIA AT ONE**

**ANNUAL REPORT 2017**

2017 annual report

**INTERNATIONAL  
ASSOCIATION  
OF HYPERPOLYGLOTS**

“

Language is the rich fabric that enshrouds all experience that is truly human. Those who are hyperpolyglots therefore adorn multiple layers of beautiful fabrics at the same time. They have multiple lives in one sense; and they certainly have multiple souls. It is my honour to welcome new hyperpolyglots to that fold so that we can attest to one another's hard work and celebrate what is likely to be the greatest achievement in each of our lives.

– **Usman W. Chohan,**  
President & Founder, HYPIA

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## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

As HYPIA completes its first year, it brings me the greatest pleasure to declare that *The International Association of Hyperpolyglots* has surpassed, in so little a time, my wildest expectations. Having been conceived in 2016, the association now boasts more than 40 hyperpolyglots, 25 of whom have had full interviews published on our website. External outreach has been very strong, with the BBC and SBS Australia (Spanish & French) interviewing us on our project and its ramifications. Our members speak a dizzying number of different languages, beyond the plain vanilla Indo-European ones, which helps to enrich our community and bolster our morale as we continue our individual and collective linguistic pursuits. Several hundred candidates have sent us their expressions of interest, and we have had to laboriously sift through and interview prospective members over countless hours. All of this effort was for no pecuniary remuneration - but for our inner fulfillment as ambassadors of global diversity. Soon after the establishment of HYPIA, the world was left in shock as it felt the tremors of a new tide of xenophobic rage. The events of 2016 served as a reminder to us that our mission becomes ever more important in repudiating that rabid impulse towards hatred and disavowal of global reconciliation, not least through the medium of language. We thus continue our mission of finding more and more talented hyperpolyglots, and welcome them into our fold. It is no exaggeration for me to hence declare that HYPIA has come to represent, at the end of its first year, the sublimest of joys in my life.

*I hereby approve the public release of this document*

*Usman W. Chohan*

*August, 2017*

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# HYPIA | SUMMARY STATISTICS

## SCALE

**Full Members: 41**

**Members with Interviews: 25**

## GEOGRAPHY

**Countries Represented: 19**

**Membership % from outside US: 83%** (includes Europe)

**Membership % from outside Europe: 71%** (includes US)

## DEMOGRAPHY

**Female-Male Ratio: 60-40** (rounded)

**Members Aged >50: 3**

**Members Aged <19: 2**

## APPLICANTS

**Application Acceptance Rate: 20%** (rounded)

## OTHER

**Founder: Usman W. Chohan**

**Global Shaper\* Members: 7**

**International Interviews in Major Media Organizations: 3**

\*Global Shapers are members of the network of autonomous hubs affiliated with the World Economic Forum (WEF) and represent a unique pool of talented individuals aged 20-30 from a diverse range of fields.

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## WHO WE ARE

The International Association of Hyperpolyglots (HYPIA) is an international body representing the unique and growing population of hyperpolyglots worldwide. We adhere to the definition of Hyperpolyglots as proffered by the general consensus to mean “a person who is fluent in six or more languages.” However, we expand our association to include persons who are conversant in eight or more languages. Although small, our association boasts some of the most talented emerging linguists around the world, and we look forward to welcoming new members all the time. Many of our members are trained linguists at the Masters or PhD level, professional translators at private or public entities, as well as practitioners who excel in up to twenty different languages (while being conversant in still more!).

We adhere to the strict principle that no language should be accorded preference over any other language. At the same time, we make an effort to respect the linguistic diversity of our community and encourage more remotely spoken languages to be included. In addition, we make core distinctions between standardized languages and dialects such that, as a simple example, American and British English are considered the same language, but Mandarin and Cantonese are not. Furthermore, we recognize pidgins and creoles that enjoy separate status in their regional or national contexts (e.g. Haitian Creole) as unique languages.

We are dedicated to a non-partisan approach to fostering and encouraging linguistic diversity. We are also committed to the preservation of moribund or dying languages which are in urgent need of interlocutory resuscitation. Furthermore, our values include a dedication to non-discrimination among and between our current and prospect members, which is why we insist on creating a respectful environment, and are committed to inviting new members regardless of age, gender, social status, geography, sexual orientation, race, or ethnicity.

We believe in fostering an inclusive and international association that brings out the very best in our members.

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## 2016-17: A YEAR IN REVIEW

HYPIA was founded in 2016 with a view to promoting linguistic diversity through the celebration of its most illustrious form: the *Hyperpolygot*. Despite its wide reception, as manifested through an unexpectedly high number of applications, 2016 would not be remembered as a year for diversity. Rather, it would be memorialized by the term *post-Truth era*. The rise of populist xenophobia in the West, including Central and Eastern Europe, Brexit in the UK, and most destructively, the ascent to power of the Trump regime in November, heralded a particularly toxic and hostile attitude towards all forms of diversity including both cultural and linguistic pluralism. 2016 witnessed the continued dissemination of acrimonious vitriol towards the “other,” and saw greater entrenchment of prejudice and contempt in both institutionalized and non-institutionalized forms.

As such, HYPIA’s creation could be seen as a small but countervailing movement against the wider tide of derision; and in stark contrast to the marked antagonization characteristic of the prevalent zeitgeist, HYPIA sought to invite the most talented, the most open-minded and exceptional practitioner linguists: the hyperpolyglots who now populate its ranks. The diversity of the organization is itself a testament to this. Above all, HYPIA takes pride in its *gender ratio* and its *country representation*. With a greater number of women than men, HYPIA’s demographics question the prevalent myth of *hyperpolyglotism* as a male-dominant trait. With nearly 20 countries and with 45% of its membership outside either the US or Europe, HYPIA is a remarkable microcosm of the diversity among exceptionally talented language-enthusiasts themselves.

HYPIA also boasts a notable diversity in age groups, and at its extremities of age, has 2 members below the age of 19 and 3 members above the age of 50, with much variance in between. The professional lives of its members are even more diverse. Some hail from language-oriented professions, such as diplomats, academics, and translators; but many more happen to work in fields that only tangentially resort to their language proficiencies. The founder of HYPIA is himself technically an economist by training. HYPIA is proud of the many accomplishments of its members, and can also lay claim to having members who are prominent in the public sphere. An example of this is Her Excellency Madam Ambassador Naela Chohan, who speaks seven Indo-European languages and learned her most recent language at the age of 51.

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## STRATEGY

As a nascent organization with limited resources and manpower, HYPIA's strategy was initially inward-bound/demand-pull, driven by word-of-mouth within groups that had a high percentage likelihood of containing hyperpolyglots, such as the Global Shapers of the World Economic Forum. HYPIA relied on external applicants reaching out to it for membership, rather than actively reaching out to them. This strategy posed numerous risks, including the possibility of not reaching a critical mass of members. However, given that HYPIA filled a very specific niche and had very high barriers to entry (evidence of fluency in 6 languages) with limited replicability, the organization found that it had more than the initially expected number of applications to be able process in a timely manner. This is because each application was subjected to review, and some applications required far more substantiation than others. Processing times extended well beyond internally set deadlines. The ultimate acceptance rate for applications was approximately 20%. A few months into its founding, a series of crucial interviews in the public sphere were conducted that directly or indirectly dealt with HYPIA's work. The three major ones are as follows:

1. The *BBC World Service* with an estimated audience of 6 million for that episode, out of which 2 million was within the UK, 4 million overseas.
2. *SBS Espanol* (Australia) with an estimated audience of 300,000 for that episode.
3. *SBS Francais* (Australia) with an estimated audience of 200,000 for that episode.

A few other factors also led to heightened interest in HYPIA, such as the fact that the founder, Usman W. Chohan, was included in Australia's "50 Top Thinkers" Yearbook of *The Conversation*, as well as when several Op-Eds were published in *BigThink*, which has more than 5 million followers on Facebook. Such circuitous approaches in outreach reflect the limited resources of HYPIA, which is a non-profit organization that does not solicit funding from any entity, not least from its own members. Such a non-monetary approach, resource constraints notwithstanding, is crucial to the maintenance of an impartial and unbiased methodology in accepting new members without the prejudicial aspect that monetary factors would entail. At the end of its first year, HYPIA does not see a reason to change its current approach, given that it is bound by the two inherent trade-offs of (1) funding vs impartiality, and (2) member growth vs operational constraints.

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## THE CHALLENGES AHEAD

HYPIA foresees several challenges at the end of its first year, which are summarized below without resorting to excessive detail:

1. *Polyglotica*: HYPIA had planned to introduce a practitioner journal in 2016 titled *Polyglotica*, which would cater to the voices of polyglots both member and non-member, and would serve as a springboard for interesting discussions on aspects of the hyperpolyglot experience. However, the successful launch of this journal would require a sufficient number of high-quality inputs at fairly regular intervals. Needless to say, such inputs were not forthcoming, even from within the HYPIA membership, which either missed deadlines entirely or produced pieces that were generally of inadequate rigour. As such, *Polyglotica*'s release remains hindered and will require much more serious attention and commitment from HYPIA's members if it is to launch.
  2. *Stalling Growth*: Even as HYPIA's membership has exceeded all expectations, there is a risk of stalling growth in 2017-2018 and beyond, as HYPIA remains passive in its outreach. However, the philosophy of the organisation is predisposed to "quality over quantity," and this precludes any obsession with forcing through inordinate numbers of candidate applications.
  3. *Resource Constraints*: HYPIA relies on the principles of trust and goodwill to have its tasks accomplished. This allows it to evade the temptations of monetary enticements, but this comes at a price. As the numbers of hyperpolyglots grow, HYPIA will face additional pressures in its work flow. However, HYPIA remains committed to a non-profit strategy and on total impartiality in its processes. As such, it will never introduce a membership fee or other monetary element.
  4. *Key Man Risk*: HYPIA relies disproportionately on the energies of its President, Usman W. Chohan, and a few highly-motivated early members, to carry on its work. This poses a *key man risk* for the organization, which it will need to address over the next few years. Leadership and responsibilities are likely to be divested over this period so as to mitigate that risk, and HYPIA members are encouraged to assume greater prominence within the organization in future years.
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## CONCLUSION

Hyperpolytism is a remarkable aspect of the human experience, and a potent testament to human potential. It warrants both greater attention and admiration from a wider audience, and HYPIA remains committed to that objective. Its necessity becomes even more evident when contrasted with the rising disdain for diversity that appears to be infecting a greater swathe of the world's population as part of a broader contempt for the trends that accompany contemporary life, particularly those associated with the umbrella concept of *globalisation*.

Cultural and linguistic pluralism thus finds itself in a state of greater precarity than was anticipated at the time of HYPIA's founding. This only serves to bolster its resolve to seek out the champions of multilingualism as embodied in the hyperpolyglot. If anything, the diversity of the organization itself is a testament to the human will to excel irrespective of nationality, race, ethnicity, age, gender, sexual orientation, social station, or geography.

"HYPIA at one" is thus a moment of deliberate reflection for the outwardly-oriented and curious minds that are already incorporated into its fold. In all likelihood, HYPIA will continue to grow at a brisk pace, not just because there are many more hyperpolyglots in the world than one would *prima facie* suspect, but more importantly, because there are many more who are on their way to becoming hyperpolyglots, as a result of many highly motivated and persistent individuals delving into linguistic experiences and enquiry.

In sum, HYPIA has much to celebrate at its very first birthday.

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# HYPIA

The International Association  
of Hyperpolyglots

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