

Online Language Learning as a Solution for Endangered Languages: The Case of Western Armenian

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In 2009, UNESCO included Western Armenian language on its atlas of endangered languages, under the category of “definitely endangered,” i.e. children no longer learn the language at home as their mother tongue. Western Armenian is one of the two standardized forms of the Armenian language, an independent branch of the Indo-European language family. Due to historical developments, the language survives in Diaspora only and has no homeland. This means children have to rely on learning the language from their parents at home, or else by attending a local Armenian school, most often a Sunday school. But what happens if such a school does not exist within reach, or when it does, the textbooks and curricula remain by and large outdated, and behind modern language-learning methodologies, let alone technology? The paper offers to present the case of the AGBU Armenian Virtual College (AVC), an online learning institution offering courses in Armenian Studies. The College has been collaborating with Armenian schools and communities worldwide since it first opened its doors to virtual students in 2009. The paper will share the experience of the College, and discuss how e-learning technology could serve as a mechanism for saving languages from extinction.