

## E-learning for Endangered Languages: What is the State of the Art?

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### Abstract

A recent contribution to the language learning discourse presents a theoretical space called the "i4" [1]. It is described as the space created when three discourses overlap: Technology Enhanced Learning, Language Education and Teaching for Social Justice. Colonialism and globalization have created a linguistic hegemony in which indigenous languages are the casualties of assimilation and of empire building. The shift to the dominant language results in the forfeiting of the indigenous language to make room for the one used in governance, education, media, and other institutions. Increasingly language loss is becoming part of public consciousness [2]. Highly coordinated efforts to revitalize an endangered language have taken place in various countries such as: Wales (Welsh), Ireland (Gaelic), the Basque and Catalonia regions within Spain and France (Basque and Catalan), Peru and Bolivia (Quechua), New Zealand (Maori) and Israel (Hebrew). While foreign language learning opportunities abound on the internet in social media and in web-based applications, speakers and teachers of endangered languages have begun only recently to make use of these same tools to reach learners in their communities as well as those who have migrated elsewhere. Mobile devices have further facilitated access to these digital resources. This paper grew out of exhaustive research into the software and hardware that are being implemented by various cultural minority groups around the globe in an effort to keep their ancestral languages alive and vital. The applications and devices which are referred to herein were drawn from academic and popular texts, all of which can be found on the author's curated content site entitled Indigenous Language Education and Technology [3]. A wide variety of e-learning strategies and media are presented in this paper, such as learning Iwaidja vocabulary on a smartphone (Australia), exploring Cree syllabics in an online classroom (Canada and the U.S), reading interactive e-books that support learning Inuktitut (Northern Canada), learning Manx with free apps for tablets (Isle of Man), consulting talking dictionaries to learn Yaneshá (Peru); and using virtual realities and gaming to learn Dakota (U.S.). Furthermore teaching literacy skills via these digital media opportunities would be impossible without the development of keyboards for speakers of over a hundred indigenous languages worldwide, allowing them to email and chat in their ancestral language. This paper presents the state of the art technology being used to learn, teach and preserve endangered languages; and makes recommendations for moving forward.

### References

- [1] Eamer, A. (2013) "CALL" in the New Frontier: Exploring the i4 (Fourth Intersection) in J. Schwieter (ed.) Studies and global perspectives of second language teaching and learning. Charlotte: Information Age Publishing, 311-326.
- [2] Morrison, R. (2013) When languages die, whole worlds die too; If giant cultural forces are allowed to bulldoze obscure, little-spoken languages, they can kill what we value most. Times [London, England] 1 June 2013: 17. Academic OneFile. Web. 18 July.
- [3] Eamer, A. (2013) Indigenous Language Education and Technology. Scoop.it: A content curation site. <http://www.scoop.it/t/indigenous-language-education-and-technology>