

Minority languages and new technologies

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Abstract

We present research about minority languages and new technologies .

First we will focus on the balance of power between languages on the internet and how it can be a threat or an opportunity for minority languages.

We describe for different kinds of minority languages the different kinds of benefits and limits of the new technologies for developing minority language learning. We develop these topics about an endangered European language : occitan and refer as well to a migrant's language spoken by minorities living abroad, and a diaspora language spoken throughout the world.

We explain how new technologies can help these languages through dissemination, creating banks of resources, archives, using a specific environment for videogames, etc.

As well we assess the limits of the use of new technologies in language learning and so in language teacher training.

Mainly we highlight the real importance of the human factor, essential for motivation, differentiated pedagogy, and student development.

This paper shows the good practices of using new technologies in minority language learning.

1 Introduction

As we participate in a European project for linguistic policy for active social inclusion (INCLUDE), we have been carrying out a research about new technologies and minority languages. On the internet minority languages have to take their place.

INCLUDE works for groups at risk of social exclusion such as migrant communities, minority-language communities, elderly people, disabled people, the NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training) generation. The linguistic integration of migrants is an actual concern in a lot of countries, and according to the guiding principles of human rights, the implementation of language programs should provide a clear response to peoples language needs for their personal, social and working life., as migrants, or members of a minority language of any kind. Still, for the people who have to learn a new language it's important to keep and maintain linguistic skills in his/her mother tongue, sometimes called "language of origins". The council of Europe [1] highlights that "Language teaching in the language of the host society must take account of these languages, by making a symbolic place for them and by encouraging the learners to pass them on, because the relevant knowledge is an asset for their children's future". They say as well it's a boon for the society, which would be economically harmful to allow to go to waste.

On the other hand multilingualism is a strong asset in our societies and also digital multilingualism as well, and can be a real opportunity to build inclusive societies.

2 Minority languages and new technologies

So today we will focus specially on minority language communities and the cyberspace: three examples: a threatened language, a native language of migrants living abroad, a diaspora language throughout the world.

How the new technologies can help minority languages?

We consider that mainly the Internet can be a threat or an opportunity for minority languages.

As said centuries ago Antonio de Nabrija in his "gramática de la lengua castellana" [2] "The language always accompanies the empire." He analysed some language cases to demonstrate how a language can be spread and disseminated. UNESCO advertised some years ago that the Internet accelerates the disappearance of 50% of the languages, (2005)

An outstanding report « Netlang Réussir le cyberspace multilingue, [3] highlights that dominant languages reign on the cyberspace and note a digital divide between languages.

Nevertheless, when a threatened language tries to exist on the internet, it can be really useful for its vitality : Linguistic policy, open source/open content/ freesoftware, digital media, digital libraries, social network, on line courses on line archives (oral and written), on line tools.

They can restore an oral link between the separated members of a linguistic community.



They are re-creating a community (sometimes very far from their linguistic territory).

The benefits usually associated with the ICT dissemination, multiplicity of resources, exposure to the language, motivation, differentiated pedagogy, Creation of virtual community.

3 cases studies

1st: the case of occitan language, quite desocialised, and developing resources and tools on the internet.

2nd: the situation of Hungarian language used by migrants in the United States and how they use new technologies in children's literacy and maintenance.

3rd the greek over the world and how the greek government organises greek lessons on the internet for the children of the greek migrants, living abroad.

Occitan is a romanic language, spoken in a third part of the French metropolitan territory, in 12 Italian valleys and in Val d'Aran (in Catalonia, Spain).

Occitan is usually considered as an endangered language. Intergenerational transmission is almost disappearing,[4]

It's nearly in the case of language shift (Fishman, 2001)[5]

Developping Webmedia, newspapers: like la setmana or lo jornalet, web tv: octv TV in Aran, web aranés On line tools to download: CIRDOC, Congres permanent de la lenga Occitana, Montpellier's university and Toulouse's pages of websites,

Archives websites oral and written: Theleme techniques pour l'historien en ligne, Son d'aqui editions, web libraries, on line courses, interactive exercises: Pernoste etc.

Hungarian-American families- and their language practices were studied recently by T. SZECSEI and J. SZILAGJI (US) [6]

Hungarian is a Finno-Ugric language (as Finnish and Estonian) spoken mainly in Hungary and neighboring countries and by the diaspora.

In our case study we will focus on the Hungarian American of the United States.

T.Szecsai and J Szilagi conduct a study to delve deep into Hungarian – American families' perceptions regarding the role media technologies play in their children's literacy development and maintenance of HL skills. Research shows that within three generations the heritage language (HL) is completely lost, often causing devastating consequences on immigrant children's identities, family relationship, and academic accomplishments. (INTED 2014)

The families are aware of the importance of keeping the use of their language and culture and try with the new technologies: cartoons, films, skype meetings, videogames The families have now a new perception of the digital environment.

Minecraft in Magyar

KOURTIS-KAZOULLIS V and. SPANTIDAKIS G. and CHATZIDAKI A.[7] An electronic learning environment for greek-language intercultural education in the diaspora,INTED Valencia 2014.

Greek it's an indoeuropean language spoken mainly in Greece and Cyprus, but as well through out the world by the greek diaspora.The Centre of Migration and Intercultural Studies of the University of Crete and supervised by the Greek Ministry of Education made a project to enable the teaching and the learning of Greek language and history among pupils (-12) That project allows students and teachers to engage in interactive and multimodal learning tasks promoting language learning. It also gives teachers and students the opportunity to become part of a community of learning through global learning networks and to use what they have learned in creative ways and in ways that have meaning for the learners.

4 Conclusion

In order to develop social inclusion multilingualism is a necessity of the global world. In this context the ICT can play a very effective role in the languages practices. But a basic statement about the Internet shows that the cyberspace is occupied mainly by dominant languages, however there are still spaces available for the other languages and cultures. Multilingualism can take some territory and specially minority languages.

The benefits for minority languages are certainly worthwhile. In the three cases we've seen Occitan, Hungarian in the United States or Greek throughout the world, new technologies afford real opportunities for the development of language practice.

So social inclusion, multilingualism, minority languages, according to our research, can really be developed by ICT.



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