

Internet as a tool for language development and maintenance?

Processes that have a profound influence on societies today are urbanisation and globalisation in combination with an increasing use of IT. At the same time we witness a raising number of endangered languages. These processes and, in particular, the widespread use of English and other major languages on the Internet are often assumed to pose a serious threat to the survival of smaller languages (Crystal 2001). However, there is also another side of this spread and easy access to IT (2008), namely, the potential use of computer-mediated communication by and in smaller language communities for the promotion and development of their languages.

The general focus of this paper is on the Internet as a potentially important tool for development and maintenance of smaller languages, especially in geographically dispersed communities. As a case in point the paper discusses the increased availability and use of IT by the Megrelians in Western Georgia, its importance for the maintenance of Megrelian and how this changes the traditional diglossic situation (Vamling & Tchantouria 2005).

The Southern and Eastern Black Sea regions, including the Caucasus and neighbouring Near Eastern countries, show high linguistic diversity with several major languages and numerous smaller languages, often spoken in non-standardized varieties in dispersed communities. Considering this situation, it is suggested that the study of language maintenance based on various uses of computer-mediated communication among speakers of smaller languages in this particular geographic area is an interesting topic for research on language preservation.

References

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