Indigenous Language Overview

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CIES 2020
What are indigenous languages?

• Languages spoken by peoples who are non-dominant communities having historical continuity with pre-invasion/colonial times and who have their own ethnic identity

• Indigenous people self-identify

• There is no definitive list of indigenous languages
How many indigenous languages are there?

World's Languages (7,117) by Category

- Vigorous: 5,027 (≈70% of all languages)
- Threatened: ≈1,751
- Shifting: 6 languages
- Moribund
- Nearly...
- Dormant

≈400 million people/≈5% of the world’s population

Language loss and sustainability

• Loss of strong identity ➔ language shift
• 2,926 languages threatened, ≈40% of all languages
• Vigorous oral L1 + written L2 = Diglossia (stable)
• Written L1 loses out to written L2 (unstable) unless:
  • Standardized
  • Institutionalized
Language standardization

- Stable orthography
- Consistently spelled
- Language resources—dictionary, grammar
- Literature
Education in indigenous languages

• A right!—UN Convention on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
• Standardization important
• Need L1 teaching and learning materials across the curriculum
• But also other L1 reading materials
Literature in indigenous languages

• Documentation and preservation
• Builds pride in and status of the language
• Strengthen identity
• A must for L1 education
• Needed for standardization
• Needed for institutionalization
ICT and indigenous languages

• All languages, scripts, characters supported (Unicode)
• Increasing # of tools for creating L1 literature
• Tools with indigenous language interface!
• Ease of use fosters broad participation in writing
• They can leapfrog several generations of technology
• Indigenous people can create and are creating their own literature using ICT