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THE ROLE OF NEW MEDIA IN MINORITY- AND ENDANGERED- LANGUAGE COMMUNITIES

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10.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the role of new media in the endangered-language context. In contrast to traditional media, such as newspapers, television, and radio, new media denotes everyday digital formats such as social media (including Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube, among others), internet forums, podcasts, and video games.

UNESCO (2003) identifies the response to new domains and media as one of the factors that determine the linguistic vitality of a language: the more new domains a language has, the better are its chances of survival. Soria (2016) highlights the importance of Digital Language Diversity that can guarantee equality of linguistic rights and digital opportunities for all languages and all citizens; it ensures access to services and information for everyone, guarantees equal technological development and digital dignity, and provides opportunities for the survival and maintenance of an endangered or minority language (see also McDonough Dolmaya 2017; Wiggers 2017). Menjívar and Chacón (2019: 11) have noted that new media connects Indigenous people across different localities by helping them form networks, combat language loss, and raise political awareness. Online spaces can be digital counter-discursive and decolonising loci of resistance, activism, political unity, and self-determination (e.g. Carlson & Frazer 2018; Carlson et al. 2017; Carlson & Dreher 2018). New media is ideal for this as it allows democratic user-created content and user-led innovation, it is dynamic, ubiquitous, visual, and interactive, and it can reach global audiences (see Hjorth et al. 2016). Therefore, examination of the role of new media in endangered-languages contexts can contribute an important perspective to our understanding of these languages' linguistic vitality in the 21st century.

The chapter complements the FEL XVI conference proceedings on endangered languages and new media (Ka'ai et al. 2012), as well as Jones and Uribe-Jongbloed's (2013) edited volume on social media and minority languages. It adds

to the examples mentioned in Jany's (2018) paper on the role of social media in endangered-language contexts and the survey on European minority languages in new media by Ferre-Pavia and colleagues (2018), as well as Gómez Menjívar and Chacón's (2019) edited volume on technology and social networks in Indigenous communities in Mexico and Central America.

10.2 Theory, method, and data

Theoretically this chapter relies on Post-Colonial Studies (Ashcroft et al. 2013), specifically how colonial and imperial linguistic and other practices of the past and present as well as globalisation can be counteracted online and with the help of social media. The selection criteria for the types of new media examined in this chapter are based on Flew (2014), who defines it as media containing the three dimensions of 1) computing information technology, 2) a communication network, and 3) content. As such, the present analysis excludes digital materials not containing all of these three dimensions, such as online dictionaries, Wikipedia, digital corpora, Unicode, machine translation and similar technological solutions (see e.g. Buszard-Welcher 2018), and apps created specifically for language learning (see e.g. Rosell-Aguilar 2017).

The research questions are: How have different minority- and endangered-language communities used and engaged with new media? What is the significance and function of different types of new media in the endangered language for the speech community? What recent developments have taken place in the use of new media in selected endangered-language communities across the world?

The chapter provides a literature review and synthesis of recent studies on Indigenous and other endangered-language new media. It examines the uses and functions of different new media platforms by including case studies from different parts of the world. The data include extracts from new media, where relevant. The authors acknowledge the Eurasian and Anglo-American focus of our chapter, and their subject-position as scholars based in Europe.

10.3 Case studies

10.3.1 *The global reach of YouTube*

YouTube is a hugely popular video-sharing site that can serve as an important tool for endangered-language speakers as it is a way of creating and disseminating content to a large global audience without the need for largescale funding or the support of commercially driven mainstream TV channels and music labels. In majority-language contexts, YouTube content includes music videos, comedy, short and longer films, and other forms of media, and these different genres are also increasingly appearing in minority and endangered languages as well.

Recent years have seen the proliferation of endangered-language music videos on YouTube. These fall into two categories, both of which play a role in the revitalisation of endangered languages. The first category consists of original

musical compositions created by endangered-language speakers. For example, Estrada (2019) has analysed the way in which Maya musicians have harnessed the power of YouTube to reach global audiences and get young and diaspora Maya interested in Maya language and culture. A prominent case in point is the Maya rock group B'itzma Sobrevivencia, which has used YouTube as a way to gain visibility for their Maya-language songs and music videos. The band's videos include elements of Maya spirituality and focus on land rights, and their songs contain depictions of Maya people, culture, and language. According to Estrada (2019: 101), the fact that the songs and videos are created by community members facilitates more positive and complex representations of the Maya people and language on a global scale, while the visual element makes it possible to transmit and celebrate embodied spiritual practices and histories (106–107). B'itzma Sobrevivencia use three languages – Maya, Spanish, and English – in their output, which further contributes to their global reach (cf. Vincze 2012).

The second category consists of covers of majority-language hit songs translated into endangered languages. For example, Dlaske (2017) studied two endangered-language covers of popular songs: an Irish Gaelic version of the Swedish DJ Avicii's song *Wake me up* and a North Sámi version of a popular Finnish artist Jenni Vartiainen's ballad *Missä muruseni on?* 'Where is my sweetheart?'. The Avicii remake was created by students and teachers of the Irish-language summer school Coláiste Lurgan, and contains Irish instruments and a choir. Making Irish-language versions of hit songs and accompanying videos is a tried and tested language learning method at the summer school and as such serves a clear function as a pedagogical aid. The remake of the Jenni Vartiainen song was produced by a North Sámi comedy duo Märrät säpikkää/ Njuoska bittut 'Wet Gaiters' consisting of the young Sámi women Suvi West and Kirste Aikio to promote their TV sketch show. Dlaske (2017) analyses the response to these two videos with Ahmed's (2004) theory of affect, noting that the comments on each video are positive, expressing excitement and appreciation. The commentators also acknowledge the way in which these videos are an excellent way to introduce Irish and Sámi culture to the masses. Similarly, the late Canadian Inuit vocalist Kelly Fraser used YouTube as a way of disseminating her Inuktitut-language covers of popular English-language songs such as *Taimantitit* 'Diamonds', based on the Rihanna song of the same name. These examples highlight the important role that YouTube song covers can play in fostering a sense of empowerment, inclusion, and relevance among endangered-language speakers and heritage communities by creating high-profile, easily shareable, endangered-language equivalents of the most recent majority-language musical hits.

In addition to music, there are also YouTube channels featuring Indigenous and endangered-language comedy sketches and informational videos. For example, YouTube has been used as a platform for Indigenous activism by the Native American comedy troupe the 1491s. Berglund (2017) highlights the way in which the 1491s' YouTube channel is a direct and powerful way for Indigenous comedians to be a force for social change. In contrast to the music channels discussed

earlier, the 1491s' content is in English, perhaps highlighting the fact that in some cases, endangered-language content is secondary to considerations of accessibility and global reach for activism. Conversely, the Hasidic Yiddish YouTube channel *Yiddishe Vinkel* 'Yiddish/Jewish Corner' serves as a global platform for the dissemination of Yiddish-language videos including topics such as current events, short comedy sketches, informational videos (for example, how to perform CPR), and scenes from high-profile weddings and other important occasions within the Hasidic community. The channel has around 24,000 subscribers, which is a significant number considering the relatively small size of the Hasidic Yiddish-speaking community (with a maximum of approximately 750,000 speakers worldwide) and the fact that many Hasidic community members do not have internet access. These examples again highlight the important and unprecedented role that YouTube can play in reaching diaspora endangered-language audiences which are highly dispersed geographically.

10.3.2 *Opposition culture on internet forums*

Internet forums are online discussion boards for private or public interaction. Unlike many social media platforms such as Instagram and Twitter, internet forums do not usually involve downloading an app. This difference is significant because it means that communications on internet forums are less susceptible to being monitored or blocked by multinational corporations or the states in which the posters live. These kinds of forums can thus serve as effective loci of opposition culture in minority- and endangered-language settings, as the following case studies demonstrate.

One striking example of the ways in which online forums can power opposition culture can be seen in the case of the Uyghur minority in China. The Uyghur have used online forums for resistance and opposition, as well as cultural preservation by sharing music, film, and literature (Clothey & Koku 2017). For Uyghurs online forums have been a way to form a collective consciousness and to make silenced voices heard. The following extract from Clothey and Koku (2017: 358) illustrates the link between religion, language, and heritage in the diaspora.

This kind of information is very rare in our region because foreign websites are blocked and so we cannot get information and also most people do not use English so what I do I just read some good website, good articles, and write about it in Uyghur, and post it (with reference of course), so that other people use it. And also I written [sic] articles in Uyghur about religion. The reason is because the Chinese government does not allow any religious education. People getting [sic] their education on the street or at home, because the source of their information is so complicated. . . . My purpose is to let people know what is the right Islamic [sic]. Because people get the wrong information . . . so I post these kind of things.

*(Interview with munbar¹ user, 19 June 2014 from
Clothey & Koku 2017: 358)*

Another instructive case study of the use of internet forums as loci of resistance and opposition for endangered-language speakers concerns the Yiddish-speaking Hasidic Jewish community, particularly in the New York area. In recent years online forums such as *Yidische Velt Forums* ‘Yiddish/Jewish World Forums’ and *Kave Shtiebel* ‘Coffeehouse’ have become centres of anonymous communication for Yiddish-speaking Jews from the strictly Orthodox Hasidic community. In contrast to the Uighur situation, the Hasidic use of Yiddish internet forums is regarded as somewhat taboo and edgy by the community itself, which traditionally considers use of the internet to be outside the bounds of moral acceptability within Hasidic society (see Fader 2020). The anonymity of the forums allows Yiddish speakers to address and discuss topics of interest and concern without worrying about judgement from other members of the community: as Bleaman (2020: 3) notes, ‘KS [*Kave Shtiebel*] prides itself on giving writers the freedom to post socially critical content, alongside other topics including history, science, religion, politics, and poetry. This commitment is codified in its guidelines for new members’. As such, the forum may over time serve to broaden the parameters of socially acceptable discourse within Hasidic society. See Fader (2020) for further discussion of the societal implications of the use of *Kave Shtiebel* and other Yiddish internet forums within the Hasidic community. In addition, Bleaman (2020: 18) has found that *Kave Shtiebel* serves as a conduit for the spread of new linguistic forms, as well as conversely exerting a unifying influence on a language which has never had an orthographic standard.

10.3.3 *Hashtags and beyond on Twitter*

Social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook can offer another insight into the role that new media play in endangered-language revitalisation. Twitter operates with messages shorter than 140 characters that users can create or retweet (that is, repost to their own followers), and also includes the function of thematic hashtags that make it possible to search for and classify specific topics, thereby creating bottom-up networks centred around these topics. Twitter is used extensively for political purposes (see e.g. Gainous & Wagner 2014), and Indigenous and endangered-language communities are no exception to this practice.

There are numerous examples of Twitter hashtags being utilised to raise awareness of Indigenous and endangered-language issues. For example, since 2012 the #IdleNoMore hashtag has been used as a way of classifying and identifying tweets relating to Indigenous resistance, and has spread around the world (Alia 2009; Raynauld et al. 2018; Richez et al. 2020). The use of hashtags with a more specifically linguistic Indigenous focus is explored in Cocq’s (2015) case study of the Sámi hashtags #gollegiella (‘golden language’), #samegiella (‘[North] Sámi language’), and #aarjel (‘south’ for South Sámi). Cocq describes the function of Indigenous-language tweeting as follows: ‘More than a tool for communication, an indigenous language functions as a symbol of identity, and its visibility in a majority society is part of revitalization efforts and a way of questioning minority/

majority relations’ (Cocq 2015: 274). The following example from Cocq’s (2015) data illustrates this well:

‘Dekolonisering,’ guktie dam maahta jiehtedh? Jih mij lea ‘återta’ aarjelsacmien gilesne? #aarjel

‘Decolonization,’ how do you say that? What is ‘to take back’ in South Sami? #aarjel

(Twitter, December 31, 2012, Cocq 2015: 273)

The quote shows how terminology development, revitalisation, decolonisation, and global Indigenous networks of resistance are all connected. In terms of accessibility, the content associated with endangered-language hashtags is often multilingual, which widens its reach and allows heritage speakers as well as non-speakers to engage with it. For example, Cocq (2015: 278) cites the post ‘Gaerjagaetesne. På biblioteket “At the library”’ (Twitter, 13 January 2013), which appears in South Sámi and Swedish/Norwegian and can therefore be read by speakers of all three languages. On a related note, the use of endangered-language hashtags can serve as a potent pedagogical resource: Cocq (2015: 278–279) noted that many of the Sámi posts were by learners who had questions about vocabulary items or study resources, or who were documenting their language-learning journey and receiving positive and encouraging comments, such as ‘It will come! It takes 8 years to learn a language, so let the time be your assistance #samegiella’ (Twitter, 17 February 2013; in Swedish) (Cocq 2015: 278). The choice to use Sámi-language hashtags and to post associated content partially in Sámi enables ethnolinguistic identification (cf. Vincze & Moring 2018), even in the absence of fluency or confident skills during one’s language reclamation journey.

Despite their importance, hashtags only tell part of the story where endangered-language use and revitalisation are concerned. The need to look beyond hashtags is highlighted by McMonagle and colleagues (2019), who conducted an analysis of the Twitter hashtags #cymraeg, #frysk, and #gaeilge in order to gain an understanding of the use of Welsh, Frisian, and Irish on the platform. Their analysis (McMonagle et al. 2019: 41–44) revealed that in many cases, tweets in these languages were not accompanied by one of the aforementioned hashtags, while conversely, sometimes the hashtags were actually used by companies for commercial purposes rather than reflecting grassroots endangered-language activity; for example, the hashtag #frysk was found to have been used by a Frisian liquor company in a promotional context that was not related to the Frisian language.

The use of Twitter in endangered-language contexts beyond the hashtag has been explored by Jones et al. (2013), who conducted a survey about the use of Welsh on the platform as a whole. Given that in recent decades Welsh has enjoyed increasing state support and a more prominent public presence, with a concomitant growth in speakers of all ages, it is perhaps unsurprising that this extends to the online sphere in general and to Twitter in particular. Thus, Jones and colleagues (2013: 669) found that the use of Welsh on Twitter had been normalised, and that Welsh speakers are likely to use the language on the platform and to build

language-based networks. The choice by bilingual speakers to use Welsh on Twitter rather than English can have symbolic as well as practical motivations, with speakers selecting the language either in order to raise its profile and promote it, or because they want to communicate with other Welsh speakers and find Welsh the most natural medium for that.

10.3.4 Group cohesion on Facebook and QQ

Facebook, a hugely popular global networking and sharing site, plays a prominent role in the endangered-language context. As one of the older social media platforms, in Facebook's earlier years there were challenges translating its interface into smaller languages (Scannell 2012), but the situation has since improved and Facebook is currently available in a range of minority and endangered languages, including Basque, Breton, Corsican, Frisian, Galician, Iñupiaq, Irish, Sardinian, Silesian, Sorani Kurdish, Tamazight, Welsh, and Zaza. Despite the progress that has been made in this regard, the selection of languages remains relatively Eurocentric.

One of Facebook's characteristic features is that it allows users to create specific groups based around specific topics or interests. This includes groups dedicated to endangered languages, and these can often highlight the ways in which views on language policies and (identity) politics can intertwine in such contexts. For example, Wagner (2013) studied the ideologies governing different Luxembourgish language groups. The names of the groups included: *Et soll Letzeboiech an Letzebuerg geschwaat ginn* 'Luxembourgish should be spoken in Luxembourg', *Lëtzebuerg ass lëtzebuergesch, weist datt Ierch eis Identitéit net eegal as* 'Luxembourg is Luxembourgish, show that you are not careless about your identity', *Lëtzebuergesch soll een haaptfach an der Schoul gin !!!* 'Luxembourgish should become a main subject at school!!!!', *Fir dass d'Ausländer an Frontalieren sech un Letzebuerg unpassen sollen!!* 'Foreigners and cross-border workers should adapt themselves' (Wagner 2013: 93–94).

Another aspect of Facebook that is significant for endangered-language revitalisation is the fact that it can provide a forum for everyday writing in such languages without the constraints of standardisation or linguistic purism. This can free speakers to use the language unselfconsciously among a much wider audience pool than if they were restricted to more formal writing and/or to speech with friends and family, and can also serve (sometimes unintentionally) to raise awareness of the language among non-speakers. Cru (2015) studied this type of bottom-up networked revitalisation activity among young Yucatec Maya Facebook users, finding that they write non-normatively using spoken language and mixing in Spanish. In addition, Cru (2015) found that metalinguistic conversations about Maya can turn into Maya language lessons on Facebook. Similar organic bottom-up and non-normative uses of minority languages on Facebook have also been reported for Balinese (Stern 2017). Some of these points are highlighted in the following Facebook conversation from Cru (2015), which illustrates the use of non-standard Maya spellings, the use of both Maya and Spanish within the same exchange, and the positive response by non-speakers regarding the Maya

speakers' use of the language. The text in bold is in Maya and the non-bold is Spanish. The translations in italics are Cru's own.

Post on Blanca's Facebook Wall (9 November 2012)

Blanca:

jach ya'ab in ts'üib máax ku antiken????

I have lots of writing tasks to do. Who can help me????

Sergio:

mak in woojwli' jajaja

I don't know hahaha

Adrián:

es maya? K chido eh!

is it Maya? How nice eh!

Sergio:

jajajja asi es amigo jajajja

hahaha that's right my friend hahaha

Adrián:

Mi admiracion para las personas k ablan ese lenguaje tan chingon! Nta camarada.

My admiration for those people who speak such a cool language! Cool comrade.

Sergio:

jjajaja gracias se agradece krnal jejeje

Hahaha thanks it is appreciated buddy hehehe

Blanca:

y tambien

Me too

Blanca:

Sergio, a'alti' a amigo ka u t'aan maya xan

Sergio, tell your friend to speak Maya too

Adrián:

jejeje k digiste?!! Presumiiiiida jeje ntc

Hehehe what did you say?!! Viiiiin hehe jk

Sergio:

Dice mi amiga Blanca que tambien hables maya jajajaja

My friend Blanca says that you should speak Maya too

(Cru 2015: 288)

Like Facebook, the Chinese social media site QQ can serve as an informal way for minority-language speakers to interact with each other. For example, in China urban migrant speakers of Wa (an Austroasiatic minority language with around 900,000 speakers in China, Myanmar, and Thailand) are able to use texting and blogging on QQ to voice their views of the dominant Chinese language and challenge accepted language hierarchies (Liu 2015: 337). The existence of QQ can help combat Wa speakers' perceptions of themselves as second-class citizens due to their relative unfamiliarity with Chinese by giving them a space to exchange their experiences in their own language. Sub-groups on QQ called *laoxiang* (literally 'co-ethnics' or 'fellow villagers' who come from the same homeland regions or provinces) help to create a sense of community far away from the Wa region, and indeed can even mobilise fights for labour rights (Liu 2015: 344). In addition, Liu (2015: 346) points out that QQ gives migrant Wa speakers the opportunity to make use of their newly acquired literacy in Chinese characters by adapting them for writing in their own language, which does not have a standardised orthography.

The experience of being a fluent and competent speaker of one's own Wa language and then migrating to the city and being regarded as lacking *wenhua* 'culture', as well as the rural/urban, migrant/elite, and spoken/written dichotomies, are evident in the following translated quote from Liu's data:

I experienced it. Urban residents looked down on me since I did not know how to write my Chinese names properly even though I received education at an elementary school in the past. Without competence in writing standard Chinese, I am like someone who has not received any Chinese education. There are a lot of places in which I need to know how to write standard Chinese [referring primarily to online networking]. I feel bad about my lack of competence in written Chinese. Living in the city as a minority worker is different than my experience living in Wa communities where I can speak my native language and do not need to use Chinese writing in communication. I am not good at Chinese writing.

(Liu 2015: 341)

In contrast to the relatively extensive study of Facebook and similar sites like QQ, there has been less research conducted into the use of minority- and endangered-language groups, conversations, and memes conducted via encrypted private messaging apps such as WhatsApp, Signal, and Telegram. Research into such platforms is rendered difficult by the fact that they are by nature inaccessible to the public, but is a desideratum because it would be instructive to see how they contribute to endangered- and minority-language networking.

10.3.5 Popular culture through memes

A common feature of Facebook (as well as other social media platforms like Twitter and Instagram) involves the sharing of memes, namely images or videos accompanied by humorous text snippets (Shifman 2014). Among the wide variety of societal functions that memes serve, they can be used for political purposes,

and are known to be a means of expressing sometimes even extreme political views (e.g. DeCook 2018). As in the case of YouTube and internet forums, Indigenous peoples have used memes to express post-colonial resistance, for instance in Australia (Frazer & Carlson 2017; Welcome to the Country²).

Memes can also be harnessed more specifically in the service of endangered-language revitalisation efforts. A prominent example of this is the Mother Language Meme Challenge inspired by UNESCO's International Mother Tongue Day and coordinated by Rising Voices, the Living Tongues Institute, First Peoples' Cultural Council, Indigenous Tweets, Endangered Languages Project, First Languages Australia, and the Digital Language Diversity Project.³ The campaign page contains instructions on how to create a meme, how to upload it on social media, how to tag it, and how to challenge others to share it and create their own memes in turn. Many minority- and endangered-language communities accepted the challenge, and the memes they produced serve to raise awareness of and popularise the languages in question, particularly among younger speakers who often share memes on a regular basis. One of the ways in which they accomplish this is by associating the minority language in question with trendiness and global youth culture through utilisation of popular pre-existing meme imagery well known from majority-language contexts.

For example, one of the Basque memes created as part of the challenge utilises a widespread GIF and meme image of a brain,⁴ thereby explicitly forging associations between Basque and popular global meme culture and implicitly linking the language with 21st-century concepts of hip and trendy communication. Similarly, Guernésiais memes created as part of the challenge link the language to global popular culture by combining classic Star Wars images with the text 'May the Force be with you' in Guernésiais.⁵

A systematic study of the outcome of the UNESCO Meme Challenge remains to be conducted and would be enlightening as the project is likely to have increased the amount of Indigenous and endangered-languages content online.

10.3.6 *Collective identities in podcasts*

Podcasts enable creators to produce online audio content directly without needing to involve national or commercial radio stations in the process (similarly to YouTube in the case of video production). As Florini (2017) has argued, podcasts can serve as a way to combat the dominant neoliberal focus on the individual by enabling a networked collective identity, including in minority contexts. For example, the podcast TWiB! (This Week in Blackness!) included a discussion of George Zimmerman's acquittal for fatally shooting the unarmed Black 16-year-old Trayvon Martin in 2012, in which listeners could call in and contribute to shaping the discourse in a process that can be classified as 'collective meaning-making' (Florini 2017: 447). As in the case of other types of new media discussed earlier, podcasts have also been used in language learning, and student-produced podcasts are an excellent way to encourage collaborative learning, improve productive skills, and develop transferrable skills (e.g. Phillips 2017).

Aspects of these broader themes can be identified within the podcasts produced in minority- and endangered-language settings. For example, there are numerous podcasts produced partly or wholly in the Māori language and/or focusing specifically on issues of relevance to Māori listeners. Such podcasts are devoted to a wide range of topics including business, Christianity, history, science, folklore, and the arts, all from a Māori perspective. One such podcast, the (predominantly English-medium) programme *A Year in the Life of a Māori Medical Student*, whose angle is ‘What’s it like to work in a system that doesn’t do right by your own people?’, won a recent podcasting award. Further examples of the diversity of Māori podcasts can be seen in Table 10.1, which includes a selection covering topics such as language learning and language reclamation journeys (as in the case of Twitter, discussed earlier), aspects of Māori identity, values, and culture, and contemporary issues in Māori life. Many of these podcasts embrace bi-/multilingualism, which (as with YouTube and Twitter) makes them accessible to heritage speakers and other learners of Māori, thereby broadening their potential audience and making it easier for people to incorporate the Māori language into their everyday routine.

The Meänkieli language in Sweden can serve as another case study of podcast-mediated collective identity. Meänkieli podcasts are produced by the national Swedish radio and, like many of the Māori podcasts, are bilingual. An example is the show *Kielestä kiini/Det handlar om språket* ‘It’s about language’, which

TABLE 10.1 A selection of Maori podcasts

<i>Name</i>	<i>Blurb⁶</i>
Te Ahi Kaa	The philosophy of Te Ahi Kaa is to reflect the diversity of Māori in the past, present and future. While bilingual in delivery, the programme incorporates Māori practices and values in its content, format and presentation
Back to Kura	We are two Māori millennials who are taking a year off work to undergo a one year full immersion Te Reo Māori course at the renown Te Wānanga Takiura. Join us as we share our journey of reclaiming our identity
The Everday Māori	Helping you to learn and speak everyday Māori, every day. Hei āwhina i a koe ki te ako me te kōrero i te reo Māori o ia rā, i ia rā.
Kōrerorero	A bilingual podcast for learners and enthusiasts of Te Reo Māori.
Māori Initiatives	On Māori Initiatives guests share influencing factors that contributed to te ira tangata (improved quality of life) in their lives, whanau and mahi, including how they learned to handle life’s challenges

focuses on various features of the Meänkieli language.⁷ Listeners can call in and speak either Meänkieli or Swedish. The topics have varied from language reclamation and learning to sport, humour, animal names, weather, and food. Another minority-language podcast-related project currently in production in Northern Sweden is Storydox, which will invite people to tell stories in Meänkieli and the various varieties of Sámi spoken in the country. This project serves not only to affirm the identity of endangered-language speakers, but also encourages speakers and listeners to use it more widely, and heightens the visibility of Meänkieli and of Sámi varieties in mainstream Swedish media.

10.3.7 Modernity and language learning in video games

Interactive video games played on PCs, or with different consoles such as PlayStation and Xbox, are an excellent way to learn English, the international language of gaming. For example, Zheng and colleagues (2015) studied vocabulary learning in *World of Warcraft*, a massive quest-based role-playing game, and found that learners gained a solid acquisition of vocabulary items relating to the quests. Similarly, Ranalli (2008) studied the authentic life-simulation game *The Sims* as a language learning tool and found that it could be used successfully in this capacity, particularly if the game-playing was accompanied by supplementary materials and exercises. These findings are supported by Chen and colleagues' (2021) recent study on vocabulary learning with the help of adventure games.⁸

As this research indicates, the potential of video games in language learning for minority- and endangered-language communities is great, but this potential has yet to be comprehensively realised. For example, Fernández-Costales (2018) criticises the lack of video game localisation into minority and regional languages of Spain, such as Basque, Catalan, Valencian, and Galician, drawing attention to the mismatch between the market-driven localisation choices of gaming companies and the European Union's focus on linguistic diversity and minority languages. Similarly, Rami Ismail, co-founder of the gaming studio Vlambeer, lambasts the gaming industry's reliance on English (Ismail 2015), stating that 'as video games as a medium becomes more globalized, our shortcomings in the department of understanding and supporting non-Western languages becomes increasingly obvious and painful'.

However, there are recent signs that this status quo may be starting to change. 2018 saw the release of two minority-language video games, a Breton version of the futuristic shooter game *Steredenn*⁹ and a Corsican version of the fantasy adventure game *Winterfall*.¹⁰ The translator of *Steredenn*, computer engineer Gwenn Meynier sums up the significance of being able to use minority languages in all areas of life, including gaming and other hobbies, saying:

'I want my computer and my games to speak to me in Breton. . . . When the game was announced, I questioned its name, which means star in Breton, so I offered to run with the idea and translate it. The developers had thought about it but as they didn't know any Breton speakers, they didn't go any further.'

(Berhouet 2018)

Meynier's comments also highlight the fact that the translation of video games into minority languages can often run aground as a result of obstacles not experienced in minority language contexts, such as difficulty on the part of developers accessing contacts in the community. The case of *Steredenn* illustrates the point that in many cases, a game's translation into a given minority or endangered language is not the result of corporate localisation plans but rather is ascribable to lucky coincidence and the determination of a single person combined with the willingness of the developers to support the endeavour.

An important aspect of video game development in minority and endangered languages is the fact that it serves as an effective way of creating neologisms. As in the case of memes, the existence of video games and the concomitant terminology in minority and endangered languages shows the younger generation that these languages are compatible with 21st-century life rather than relics of a bygone age. Meynier gives some insight into the creation of new gaming terminology in Breton:

'We have to experiment and see what works, or doesn't. For me it's a breath of fresh air, it's much more interesting to translate than error messages!' In Breton a 'boss' becomes 'enebour-meur' (which could be translated as 'great enemy') or 'pennenebour' (main enemy).

(Berhouet 2018)

Professional designers and translators are not the only stakeholders engaged in promoting the use of minority and endangered languages in the gaming world. The interactive streaming platform Twitch has in recent years become a global locus of grassroots minority- and endangered-language use. An important example of this phenomenon is the ongoing struggle by minority-language Twitch users to lobby the platform to include tags that would allow them to accurately label the medium of their streams. While Twitch streams in English, Spanish, German, and other majority languages can be labelled as such, allowing users to find them easily, many minority languages lack specific tags and streamers are forced to classify them as 'Other', making them difficult to locate (Sinclair 2021). In May 2021 Twitch added a number of minority languages, such as Catalan, to its list of tagging options, but other languages including Basque, Gaelic, and Galician, still lack tags, and users continue to fight for their recognition (Sinclair 2021).

Many minority- and endangered-language gamers all over the world actively choose to stream in their language despite the possibility that they would have larger audiences if they used a more dominant language instead. For example, Outakoski and colleagues (2018: 24–25) have written about Sámi gamers posting their play-throughs with Sámi-language commentary of popular games like Minecraft on YouTube, rather than in a majority language. Many minority- and endangered-language speakers view the act of streaming in their language as a form of activism and a powerful expression of their cultural identity. These individuals are not driven by financial gain but by their love of the language, and their efforts can play an important role in ensuring that minority and endangered

languages are extended over a greater range of domains than in the past, thereby enhancing the perception of their viability as a vehicle for communication in 21st-century life. As a Basque user of Twitch notes:

‘I believe that at the end of the day, all of us who create content in Basque are [activists]. . . . For many of us, the relationship we have with our mother tongue is fundamental for us when it comes to enjoying what we do.’

(Sinclair 2021)

Similarly, the Māori streamer Rangiora explains the importance of using Māori on Twitch within the context of decolonising and language reclamation:

‘I don’t stream entirely in Māori, but I try to share some knowledge such as having Māori word of the week or Māori phrase or saying as something viewers can redeem with their channel points. Hopefully we can inspire more people to speak [the language] because I’m aware that a lot of Māori [people] aren’t confident due to colonization and the suppression in the past. I feel as if people are learning something every time I stream as we try to normalize Māori in this space.’

(Sinclair 2021)

This sentiment is shared by the Welsh-language streamer Morgan, who echoes Rangiora’s desire to be able to use the minority language in all contexts, including online:

‘I feel it’s important to be able to express yourself in the language you feel most comfortable. For Welsh as a language to grow quicker, there has to be a space for people to do everything in Welsh and this includes the digital realm.’

(Sinclair 2021)

While most minority- and endangered-language video game production is designed specifically for the communities in question, in some recent cases endangered languages have actually been incorporated into games intended for more general audiences. For example, the serial stealth action-adventure role-playing game *Assassin’s Creed* (more specifically the 2012 instalment *Assassin’s Creed III* and the 2020 instalment *Assassin’s Creed: Valhalla*) contains Mohawk characters, as well as (untranslated) dialogue and a story in Mohawk, which were produced by the gaming company Ubisoft with consultation from the Montreal Kanien’kehá:ka Onkwawén:na Raotitióhkwa Language and Cultural Center (Newman 2012; Venables 2012). As is typical of new media, the launch of *Assassin’s Creed* with its untranslated Mohawk-language portions led to interactive engagement by users: fans of the game were inspired to translate the Mohawk dialogue (with the help of the Kanien’kehá:ka Onkwawén:na Raotitióhkwa Language and Cultural Center that had participated in its creation) and to post it on YouTube (Stanton 2021). *Assassin’s Creed* demonstrates the

potential power of video games vis-à-vis minority- and endangered-language revitalisation in that it introduces millions of players to the Mohawk language and may indeed inspire some of them to explore it further and decide to learn it, as well as teaching the general gaming public about Native American history and traditions.

10.4 Summary and conclusions

This chapter has demonstrated that new media have a wide variety of applications in minority- and endangered-language contexts extending far beyond the basic function of language teaching. The case studies have highlighted a number of salient points regarding the uses of minority and endangered languages in new media and their significance both to the language communities themselves and to outsiders. First, certain types of new media such as video games can enrich the languages themselves by acting as a conduit facilitating the creation of neologisms. Second, social media and gaming platforms can be used effectively to create global grassroots language-based communities. Third, online forums can serve as safe and accessible loci of opposition, both to hostile states and to more conservative elements of the language community itself. Fourth, social media, memes, podcasts, and video games can have a potent symbolic value, helping users to express their linguistic and cultural identity while helping to raise the languages' status and prestige. Fifth, the existence of popular digital media such as memes and video games in minority and endangered languages can help younger users connect to their heritage and appreciate their relevance in the contemporary world; concurrently, they contribute to the languages' vitality by introducing them to new domains. Sixth, new media such as YouTube and Twitter, with their widespread global popularity, can provide an excellent platform for language-based activism and for raising awareness of minority and endangered languages. Likewise, they can serve to challenge stereotypes and provide a more nuanced picture of the communities in question. Thus, the case studies discussed in this chapter highlight the fact that, while new media are often regarded as hastening the destruction of minority and endangered languages, they can actually act as a powerful, user-generated tool which supports speaker agency and can guarantee a bottom-up process of revitalisation.

Notes

- 1 *Munbar* is the Uyghur word for an online discussion forum.
- 2 www.welcometocountry.org/top-50-aboriginal-resistance-memes/.
- 3 <https://mememotherlanguage.wordpress.com/>, also <https://rising.globalvoices.org/blog/2018/03/06/the-mother-language-meme-challenge-2018-highlighted-the-internets-amazing-linguistic-diversity/>.
- 4 www.ekogunea.eus/es/ekogunea/noticias/nos-unimos-al-reto-de-memes-en-lengua-materna-en-kutxa-ekogunea/5-13-0-737/.
- 5 <https://rising.globalvoices.org/blog/2018/03/02/creating-memes-in-the-guernesiais-language-to-join-the-big-friendly-family-of-tiny-languages/>.
- 6 <https://player.fm/podcasts/Maori>.
- 7 <https://sverigesradio.se/grupp/26095>.

- 8 Video games have even been developed specifically as language-learning tools (e.g. Bado 2014; Alavesa & Arhippainen 2020), but the present study will not focus on this type of product.
- 9 <https://pixelnest.io/presskit/steredenn-binary-stars/>.
- 10 www.winterfallgame.com/.

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