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Digital Collaboration: 21st Century Tools for Revitalization

Abstract

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A common problem faced by language teams is distance - the difficulty of getting all the members of a project together in one place for extended periods of time (or even short ones). Indigenous team members are frequently located in remote, difficult-to-access places, while academic team members often live at great distances from the language communities they study and work with. Even within a speech community, it can often be difficult, costly, time consuming, or even dangerous to travel in the region.

The advent of digital collaboration technologies, however, is making teamwork for language revitalization projects cheaper and easier than ever before. Today numerous technologies exist to facilitate long-distance collaboration on any aspect of a team project, requiring nothing more than a computer and an internet connection. In the past, these technologies could be prohibitively expensive for many communities, or require steep learning curves, especially for community elders who are less comfortable with technology. Today, many of the best tools are not only easy to use, but entirely free. Such tools facilitate group tasks like collaborative writing and editing, file sharing and version tracking, voice calling, audio recording, photo capture and sharing, and conferencing – all long-distance via the internet.

This poster details and compares a number of collaborative tools for language teams, focusing on tools which are both inexpensive and easy to use. Drawing on experiences from Rosetta Stone's Endangered Language Program, which works remotely with a number of Native communities in distant and remote places across the continent, I outline the merits and demerits of each tool, and offer practical advice for ways that revitalization teams can benefit from integrating these technologies into their projects. I will also be demonstrating these tools firsthand on a laptop for anyone who is interested.

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