Chapter 15
Digital Technologies:
Way Forward for Nigerian Languages Literacy

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ABSTRACT

This chapter aims to discuss the relevance of digital technologies in the acquisition of indigenous language literacy in Nigeria. Using the technological determinism and social presence theories to anchor the discourse, the chapter content analyzed a purposive sample of YouTube and Second Life. Preliminary findings on Nigerian languages on YouTube reveal a dominance of Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba content, uploaded by individuals rather than institutions. In contrast, there was an absence of Nigerian languages content on Second Life. The chapter advocates for the integration of these digital technologies into formal indigenous language pedagogy. The recommendation is that there should be a synergy between Nigerian language teachers, software developers, and the government to develop creative digital instructional materials in Nigerian languages.

INTRODUCTION

As a twilight innovation of the 20th century, digital technologies of the Web 2.0 era have evolved and now offer several opportunities to promote educational content to the increasing number of global web audience. Due to their high level user engagement and multimodal capabilities, many academic institutions and governments across the world are integrating digital technologies to complement classroom pedagogy. One reason for this development is that digital technologies offer enormous possibilities to learn, practice and make use of any language literacy skills of the learners choice (Terantino, 2011). In contrast, there appears to be little evidence in the integration digital technologies in indigenous language pedagogy in Nigeria. This is worrisome and deserves research attention particularly with the observed decline in the use of some indigenous languages. While the number of languages spoken in Nigeria is not conclusive, Gordon (2005) report that of the 521 languages that have been spoken, 510 are living

languages, two are second languages without native speakers, and nine are extinct. Eleazu (2016) quoting a UNESCO study, state that 25 per cent of children under 11 years are unable to speak their mother tongue.

Kirimi (as cited in Taiwo, 2013) blames the decline on the digital divide occasioned by technology. Observation shows that the language decline figures may have worsened over the past decade among those Prensky (2001b) calls the 'digital natives'. In other words, to promote indigenous language literacy in the 21st century, one cannot ignore digital technologies. Prensky defines digital natives as persons raised with digital technology and who have habits and interests that are different from those of earlier generations (Prensky, 2001). Thus, in the digital age, there seems to be a cultural disconnect between the old and new generations of persons. To underscore this point, Ba (as cited in Taiwo 2013) states that, "When an old man dies in Africa, it is like a library burning down." Clearly, language decline raises legitimate concerns, particularly as the indigenous language confers cultural identity to the speakers, with messages about tradition and customs in form of proverbs, idioms, songs and music, dances, rhymes, myths, poetry etc., which cannot easily be transferred through another language (Anulunkor, 2013).

As at 2016, Nigeria had an estimated population of 186, 879,760, and usage data reveals that about 52 percent of the population make use of the Internet (Nigeria Internet Statistics, as cited in Olowole, 2016). Therefore, Nigeria has the potential to drive innovations in indigenous language literacy using digital technologies. Nevertheless, there appears to be a dearth in research on the integration of digital technologies such as YouTube and Second Life to indigenous language pedagogy in Nigeria. Majority of investigations in this area have focused on western and Asian countries (e.g. Burke, Snyder & Rager, 2009; Jiang, 2007; Lo, 2012; Nikopoulou-smyrni & Nikopoulous, 2010; Terantino, 2011). Moreover, many Nigerian language studies have concentrated on the pedagogical and implementation challenges of the language provisions of the National Policy on Education (e.g. Bamgbose, 2016; Danladi, 2013; Emenanjo, 1985). The desire to help close some knowledge gaps relating to indigenous language learning in the digital age is the motivation for this chapter. Although there are several digital platforms relevant to language learning, the author chose to provide insight into YouTube and Second Life language learning because of their audio-visual and immersive simulation capabilities. The aim is to attempt to lay the groundwork for future empirical investigations into digital technologies and language literacy research in Nigeria.

BACKROUND

Language in its basic form is a set of words and symbols that are mutually understandable by a group of people and accepted as a means of communication. Nwachukwu (2016) posits, "An indigenous language is a language that is native to a particular region and spoken by the people of the region." In this regard, language empowers a people for development. Thus, the decline in indigenous language literacy affects the socio-cultural, political, scientific and technological development of the country in the process of globalisation (Ekanem &Ogundipe, 2008). On the other hand, literacy in its simplest form, is the ability to demonstrate fluency in the reading and writing in a language. Omolewa (1994) defines literacy as "the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate and compute using printed and written materials associated with varying context. Thus, this chapter refers to language literacy as the ability to read, write, compute, create, teach and learn as well as communicate effectively in the mother tongue (L1) or an indigenous second language (L2). Ditsheko (as cited in Taiwo, 2013) reasons that indigenous language literacy is important, as such, before people claim proficiency in another language through

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