Journal of Teaching and Learning

Teaching and Learning Resources for Endangered Languages

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Book Review:

Teaching and Learning Resources for Endangered Languages

by Riitta-Liisa Valijärvi, Lily Kahn
Leiden, The Netherlands, Brill, 2023, 398 pages.
ISBN 978-90-04-53969-3 (hardcover)

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Previous research on endangered languages (EL) has focused on two areas: documentation and revitalization (REHG & Campbell 2018). For revitalization, it is essential to create teaching and learning materials (TLM), yet there is limited research on this topic. This volume, a follow-up from the Foundation for EL 24th annual conference, addresses this imbalance.

The book contains eighteen chapters grouped into five thematic parts and prefaced by the editors.

Part 1 "Innovative TLM": Chapter 1 chronicles and analyzes both printed and digital innovative resources, including curriculum materials for Kaurna, an awakening language. It demonstrates how innovative materials (e.g., a book of funeral protocols) for awakening languages make the teaching and learning process relevant and accessible to heritage speakers. Chapter 2 reports how existing resources are activated, and new ones created for online courses of Bininj Kunwok for non-indigenous university students. It shows how cultural content can be activated and integrated into new technologies, such as videos and mobile apps to produce innovative TLM for the university's pedagogical purpose. Chapter 3 is about the contributions of two organizations to educational materials for Itelmen. Chapter 4 outlines the use of online classroom materials during the COVID-19 pandemic to teach Livonian to pupils with the involvement of the dispersed Livonian community.

Part 2 "Educational Contexts for TLM": Chapter 5 discusses the pedagogical challenges encountered by a complete Gaelic-medium college in delivering a university curriculum to promote Gaelic revitalization. Chapter 6 presents the author's experiences of adopting his native language, Torwali, as the medium of instruction for his teaching in a government high school. It

offers insight into using an EL as the language of instruction in a multilingual educational context, which serves as a successful bottom-up approach to language revitalization and an example of empowering teachers. Chapter 7 demonstrates how community language content enriches the classroom setting through a report on a teacher-training program in Brazil. The program emphasizes linguistic and cultural diversity, and encourages and empowers the trainee teachers in activities, yielding substantial curriculum resources. Comparing the use of two bilingual dictionaries in different contexts, Chapter 8 finds that they serve to connect younger generations to their heritage language and resist linguistic and cultural hegemony.

Part 3 "Ideological Issues regarding TLM": This part probes into language communities' ideological issues, including community's initial awareness of ownership and empowerment (Chapter 9), the challenges of creating pedagogical materials through community empowerment (Chapter 10), and the ideological desire of the online course creators for increased understanding and communication between Russian and Ukrainian speakers (Chapter 11). This part points out that speech communities tend to embrace language variation, rather than purist attitudes toward language, benefiting both the communities and language learners.

Part 4 "Teaching and Learning Methods for EL": Chapter 12 explores the applicability of teaching methods used for large languages to ELs. The authors point out that methods such as task-based learning, direct method, and performance approach are appropriate for EL. They propose four criteria for evaluating teaching methods for their effectiveness. Chapter 13 introduces Tobati's school-based revitalization model and focuses on the successful application of the performance stage, specifically the students' dramatic performance in Tobati, illustrating the approach in the previous chapter. Chapter 14, the only theoretical chapter, turns to a media-based syllabus for adult-minority language learning, and develops theoretical and practical uses of EL media for language instruction.

Part 5 "Orthography Development for EL Pedagogy": Four chapters in this Part respectively focus on establishing a practical orthography for Ayapaneco (Chapter 15), the challenges in standardizing Blanga orthography (Chapter 16), the positive effects of creating Torwali orthography (Chapter 17), and the preservation of Philippine indigenous scripts (Chapter 18).

The state-of-the-art papers in this volume illustrate innovative ways for EL communities to harness traditional knowledge, diverse pedagogical approaches, and technological advances to create teaching and learning materials that benefit heritage speakers and interested learners. Specifically, it contributes to the following aspects.

First, the book achieves great breadth and depth. Breadth is achieved through a mutli-regional and mutli-contextual perspective. Regarding multi-regions, the volume contains 17 case studies involving 16 different ELs from 15 regions and nations, including Australia, Indonesia, the Philippines, Scotland, Pakistan, Ghana, Southern Argentina, Mexico, the Solomon Islands, Taiwan, Estonia and so on. Concerning multi-contexts, it covers diverse educational contexts: mother-tongue learners and second language learners; children, university students and adults; teacher training; as well as family-based, school-based, and community-based learning. As for depth, it analyzes TLM from their innovativeness, ideologies, and appropriate methods. It also discusses various problems during the creation, development, and implementation of these resources, such as language community attitude and cooperation, learners' motivation, teachers' empowerment, parents' cooperation, school and local language policies, and different presentation media, including printed and digital/online forms. The book's breadth and depth facilitate a comprehensive exploration of the field.

Second, this collection is informative and enlightening, offering a variety of creative EL TLM. They vary from printed resources, such as a funeral protocol book, cultural guidelines, and even a deck of playing cards with cultural icons, to digital and online resources, such as video clips, app-form dictionaries, video lessons and songs, videos of puppet shows for children, multimedia cartoons featuring linguistic and cultural content, CDs accompanying the funeral protocol book, plus videos of speakers discussing social customs. They serve as inspirations for other endangered or threatened language communities to produce their own creative materials. These entertaining and appealing culturally relevant innovative resources can motivate learners and foster a sense of pride in their language and culture, thereby facilitating language revitalization.

Third, this volume blazes a trail in EL pedagogy. For example, besides expounding the significance of top-down efforts, such as governments' language policies and contributions from international or regional organizations (Chapter 3) in the process of developing ELTLM, this volume also highlights the success of bottom-up efforts (Chapters 5 & 6), showcasing the resistance of the communities to linguistic and cultural hegemony. Another example is the introduction of alternatives to the common belief (Chapter 18) regarding the orthography of EL.

However, this book could be improved in the following two ways. 1) A structural improvement would be to add a short conclusion at the end of the book, summarizing the main points and suggesting avenues for further research. 2) A content improvement could be to add a chapter focusing on language community empowerment, a thread running through all of these 18 chapters, placing speech communities at the very centre of the work, and underscoring the importance of open dialogue, trust building, flexibility, and accessibility. However, it is not adequately addressed, as it only appears in the conclusion or problem section of each chapter. It thus seems necessary to have a dedicated chapter on empowering speech community, which will in turn, enhance the efficiency of the entire language revitalization.

Overall, this first volume in the EL Yearbook series presents a panorama of EL TLM, offering readers a comprehensive understanding of the field, while simultaneously instilling a sense of the vast potential for further illumination of the production and implementation of these materials. As there is no one-size-fits-all TLM for EL, each language community should determine what are realistically optimal materials for themselves. Therefore, this volume is highly recommended for researchers, educators, policymakers, students, curriculum designers and activists interested in EL.

References

Rehg, K. L., & Campbell, L. (Eds.). (2018). *The Oxford handbook of endangered languages*. Oxford University Press.

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