

Language Endangerment and Language Maintenance: Can Endangered Indigenous Languages of Kenya Be Electronically Preserved?

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Abstract

United Nations Cultural and Scientific Organization (UNESCO) contend that languages are the centre piece of the cultural diversity of the world yet they are also a vulnerable part of the world's cultural heritage. According to UNESCO there are about 6,000 languages spoken in the world. Unfortunately, currently there are only eight languages of wider communication in the whole world. In spite of the importance of language as a component of cultural diversity, over 417 languages all over the world are endangered. In Kenya, over eight languages are endangered among them: Terik, El Molo, Ogiek, Omotik, Bong'om, Sogoo, Suba and Yaaku. Some of these languages have already been classified as being extinct by UNESCO. This paper addresses the need to preserve and maintain endangered indigenous languages. The paper has highlighted the current state of language endangerment in Kenya. The following observations are made: most African languages have not been phonemically coded. Given the length of time that is taken for a language to be phonemically coded, many languages whose vitality is critically endangered need an urgent means for their preservation. The paper recommends for an electronic method to be considered for preservation of the endangered languages.

Key words: Cultural Diversity, Language Endangerment, Language Preservation, Electronic preservation, Indigenous Languages IntroductionCultural