Investigating the Role of Technology in Language Policy & New Media

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This research is concerned with language policy and new media, investigating the impact of this technologically globalised context on existing language policy theory, in particular with regard to minority languages. New media is often espoused as an opportunity for individuals and communities to become active media producers and consumers (cf. Cunliffe and Herring, 2005). However, this research offers a new perspective, considering the role of technology in this empowerment of minority language speakers and communities in language policy developments and also the impact of technology on language policy matters in the new media context.

The case study of the current research is an online crowdsourced translation effort, the FacebookTranslations application (app). This app enables Facebook to localise their website by soliciting translations from its existing users. 'Translators' as Facebook title them, translate the words and phrases of the Facebook website from the original US English into over 100 languages, including minority languages such as Irish and Welsh.

This paper will examine the impact of technology in new media on language policy from two perspectives, that of Facebook and the Irish 'translators' involved in the app. Facebook are involved in the language policy of this context via the development and design of the app, its technology. In relation to the Irish 'translators', this paper will argue that technology is changing the power dynamics of language policy, giving minority language speakers a primary role in the development of their language’s presence online. Finally, this paper will consider if the future of languages and language policy is in the hands of techno-capitalism and individual practices given the success of crowdsourcing and internationalisation driven by commercial concerns and technology.


Keywords: new media, language policy, minority languages.