Under-resourced languages

Improving capabilities with innovative tools for analysis and instruction

CHALLENGE

Professionals working with African and Southeast Asian languages face an array of challenges due to the linguistic diversity of these regions, the lack of available language resources, and the difficulty of predicting ever-changing language requirements and priorities due to geopolitical fluidity and volatility.

Access to new and updated materials on under-resourced languages can help mitigate some of these challenges. CASL researchers are working to increase language professionals’ efficiency by providing them with easy access to a variety of standardized, organized materials and tools to help identify unfamiliar languages quickly and accurately.

FINDINGS

CASL has developed innovative resources to facilitate language identification and familiarization, enabling users to:

- **Recognize and identify languages.** Fieldwork with native speakers of African and Southeast Asian languages has yielded a collection of audio recordings, including common words and expressions, narratives, and conversations. These materials populate the map-based language portal PASAGLOSSA. With this tool, users can familiarize themselves with specific languages or with the broader language environment. Speech samples, incorporated into a search-by-sound interface, also assist in language identification.

- **Acquire the fundamental structures of a language more quickly and accurately.** Grammatical sketches and course curricula empower language learners to grasp core structural and grammatical components.

- **Search dictionaries more efficiently than before.** CASL’s *Did You Mean...?* tool for Somali or Swahili helps users find words quickly in an online dictionary, even when users are uncertain about which sound they are hearing or when there are inconsistent or competing spelling practices.

More at www.casl.umd.edu/africa

PRIORITIZING LANGUAGES

With input from government stakeholders, CASL has developed a dynamic prioritization methodology for African languages. This methodology groups African languages into three tiers (enduring priority, high interest, and potential surge) based on four criteria: speaker population, geographic dominance, geopolitical importance, and sociocultural impact.

CASL Priority Languages

- **A: Enduring Priority**
- **B: High Interest**
- **C: Potential Surge**

CASL’s methodology for language prioritization is designed to be updated at regular intervals. This map reflects the most recent list.

Map showing the distribution of African languages with different priority levels.