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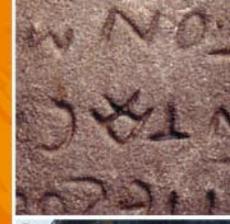
Федеральное агентство  
по делам национальностей



**INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE  
“PRESERVATION OF LANGUAGES  
AND DEVELOPMENT OF LINGUISTIC  
DIVERSITY IN CYBERSPACE:  
CONTEXT, POLICIES, PRACTICES”**

**Final document  
“Yakutsk Resolution”**

**Yakutsk, Russian Federation, 1–5 July 2019**



СЕВЕРО-ВОСТОЧНЫЙ ФЕДЕРАЛЬНЫЙ УНИВЕРСИТЕТ

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**Final document  
of the International Conference  
“Preservation of Languages and Development  
of Linguistic Diversity in Cyberspace:  
Context, Policies, Practices”  
(1–5 July, 2019, Yakutsk, Russian Federation)**

The International Conference “Preservation of Languages and Development of Linguistic Diversity in Cyberspace: Context, Policies, Practices” took place in Yakutsk, Russian Federation, on 1–5 July, 2019, as a significant contribution by Russia and UNESCO to the implementation of the 2019 International Year of Indigenous Languages declared by the UN, as well as to UNESCO’s efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, and to the implementation of the UNESCO Information for All Programme (IFAP).

It is the fourth (4<sup>th</sup>) major international forum jointly organized in Yakutsk by the Russian Committee of the UNESCO Information for All Programme, the Interregional Library Cooperation Centre, the Government of the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia) and Ammosov North-Eastern Federal University with the support of the Government of the Russian Federation, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, the Commission of the Russian Federation for UNESCO, the Russian Federal Agency for Ethnic Affairs, the Russian Federal Agency for Print and Mass Communications under the auspices of UNESCO.

The event brought together experts from 63 countries from all regions of the world: public figures, politicians, diplomats, researchers working in the fields of ethnolinguistics, sociolinguistics, ethnopolitology, ethnosociology, cultural anthropology, philosophy, as well as specialists in the elaboration and analysis of national and international language policies, educationalists, academics, representatives of cultural institutions and the information communication sphere.

## **Preamble**

Languages are unique tools for understanding, describing and analyzing reality. They form the worldview and reflect the historical and social experience of nations. Largely due to UNESCO’s efforts, more people today are aware of the role of languages and the importance of preserving languages. It is vitally important to preserve languages, since globalization and urbanization are rapidly reducing linguistic and cultural diversity, which is a source of intellectual and cultural development and a cornerstone of pluralistic, equitable and inclusive knowledge societies, and sustainable development.

Given that languages are often used as tools for cultural, political and economic domination, ideological manipulation, separation and identity alteration in relation to both individuals and whole nations, linguistic diversity issues have become more relevant than ever before.

It is indisputable that particular attention should be paid to indigenous languages threatened with extinction, primarily due to the small number of speakers, often living in difficult socio-cultural and economic conditions. The loss of such languages may result in a serious reduction in cultural diversity which has been the hallmark of human life on our planet.

The position of indigenous languages cannot be considered separately from the context of multilingualism and linguistic diversity in the real world and in cyberspace. Modern reality, sociocultural transformations in specific countries and throughout the world, political, economic and social processes and trends should not be overlooked.

Language problems in the whole world, especially in really multilingual countries, should not be narrowed down to discussing small indigenous languages. Today, many major and well-equipped languages are also declining in use in various fields – in education, science, business, politics, the media, etc. Even if these languages are spoken by tens of millions of people, the fact that official communications are in a dominant language (such as English) which the majority do not master means that they are marginalized.

Attempts are being made all over the world to make languages visible in all possible ways including in cyberspace. Behind the *digital divide*, understood as a connection problem, lies a deeper and more meaningful *content divide*, directly linked to languages. Little or no content produced in many languages compels their speakers to seek content in other languages and eventually abandon their own languages permanently. Care must be taken to establish a multilingual knowledge system, with a view to producing more and more content in all languages and strengthening language communities so that they can produce original content and increasingly translate to and from other languages.

The fewer opportunities to use different languages (minor, unofficial, official, state and foreign) the less the amount of information its speakers can acquire. And the more languages individuals (and the entire language communities) use, including their first or mother tongues, the wider their *language repertoire*, the more access to information and knowledge and opportunities for self-expression, description, understanding and analysis of reality they get, the stronger and the more extensive is communication. It is important to recognize the *multilingual repertoires* that people and communities generally use and not just think in terms of individual languages. In this sense, it is necessary to have more multilingualism and not less, and not only in the direction of adding the more spoken languages.

The use of digital technologies can pose threats to many language communities, but we need to consider also that the modern technological environment empowers new uses of less-resourced languages, including oral ones, supporting their preservation and development. Digital technologies, at the same time, facilitate a greater contact of languages and of people inside and between language communities.

Solving the problems of preservation, revival, development and promotion of indigenous languages requires a differentiated approach depending on the function and load of each language and the sociocultural environment in which it exists.

Equipping languages should be focused not on models produced over the past centuries, often in the context of more hierarchical, authoritarian and excluding societies, but on

language repertoires, language communities and their demands of different types, demands that organise their linguistic uses. These linguistic uses should point the direction for any development of resources by and for the users of the languages.

### **Taking into account all the above and recalling the**

- Outcomes of the First, the Second and the Third International Conferences on Linguistic and Cultural Diversity in Cyberspace (Yakutsk, Russian Federation, 2008, 2011, 2014), as well as the Bamako International Forum on Multilingualism (Bamako, Mali, 2009), the 1<sup>st</sup> International Symposium on Multilingualism in Cyberspace (SIMC I – Barcelona, Spain, 2009), the 2<sup>nd</sup> International Symposium on Multilingualism in Cyberspace (SIMC II – Brasilia, Brasil, 2011) and the 3<sup>rd</sup> International Symposium on Multilingualism in Cyberspace (SIMC III – Paris, France, 2012), the International Expert Meeting on Improving Access to Multilingual Cyberspace (UNESCO's Headquarters in Paris, 2014), the Ugra Global Expert Meeting on Multilingualism in Cyberspace and the Ugra World Expert Meeting on Multilingualism in Cyberspace for Inclusive Sustainable Development (Khanty-Mansyisk, Russian Federation, 2015, 2017);
- Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity;
- UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Promotion and Use of Multilingualism and Universal Access to Cyberspace;
- Key documents of the World Summit on the Information Society (Geneva, 2003, and Tunis, 2005) and the Vision for WSIS Beyond 2015 (WSIS+10, Geneva, 2014);
- Holding by the United Nations System, under the coordination of UNESCO, of the International Year of Indigenous Languages in 2019,

### **Conference participants agree on the following:**

- ✓ Achieving Sustainable Development Goals depends on effective communication which is inclusive of indigenous languages and multilingualism in order to ensure that NO ONE is left behind.
- ✓ It is necessary to build on the needs of language communities, to recognise and promote their language repertoires and the joint equipping of language sets, to better address the needs of language communities in the context of sustainable development as indicated by the SDGs (2015–30). This vision will ensure that languages are recognised as rights; it will further ensure that languages, including the less spoken ones, are recognised as resources for life and for the future. It means we need more and not less multilingualism.
- ✓ Language policy design needs a shift, moving from quantitative motivations to qualitative ones (especially those describing the functionality of a given language). An integral and thorough language policy would place the real language use and its context on the forefront.

- ✓ One of the most evident problems today is not the lack of good legislations regarding multilingual rights, but the lack or insufficiency of implementation strategies. Overcoming these limitations would require more participative consultation policies with the linguistic communities.
- ✓ The issues faced by truly small languages (with a handful of users) can differ greatly from those of “small” languages (with tens or even hundreds of thousands of users). At the same time, many of the phenomena that affect less spoken languages, linked to their obsolescence in terms of equipment, loss of scope, loss of ability to produce contemporary content, which force their users to choose other languages, are now getting more and more relevant for medium-sized and major languages used by millions of people. For that reason it is important to go deeper into research on linguistic loss and to undertake realistic analyses on the subject.
- ✓ Further technological tools such as automatic summarisation and translation should be largely distributed to facilitate access to scientific information to users of all languages over the world.
- ✓ Teenagers and other young people are the most frequent users of language technologies on the Internet. They are the future of language, transmitting it in a short time to the next generations in a very different context than their parents did. It is therefore essential to develop specific ideas and programmes focused on the younger citizens of Member States, bearing in mind that the preservation and development of a language is possible only when a generation of children inherits this language in direct communication with previous generations, parents, grandparents, and their peers.
- ✓ Concerning resources for languages, we need to increasingly consider that languages themselves are resources for language communities, societies in general, and states: languages are *sine qua non* for the good achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, for example. In this sense, it is important not only to maintain the perspective that languages and their use are a right for the communities involved, a perspective that has been developed in the documentation in the area, but also a social, economic and political resource to be used, even when it comes to the languages used by small communities.

**Regarding all the above the Conference has elaborated the following recommendations.**

**At the political level:**

1. All stakeholders should seek to facilitate the emergence of knowledge societies respecting human rights and values and based on the four pillars, including cultural and linguistic diversity, freedom of expression, universal access to information and knowledge, and quality education for all.

2. UNESCO, especially through its Information for All Programme (IFAP), should pursue in cooperation with relevant UN agencies, IGOs and NGOs the efforts for further development and promotion of ethical, legal and societal principles and norms for preserving linguistic and cultural diversity worldwide, in particular in cyberspace. In the same token, participants would recommend UNESCO to develop guidelines on language policies similar to the documents issued about information and knowledge societies, aiming at fostering language vitality and its preservation.
3. All stakeholders should encourage governments to enact and implement more effective national policies in support of preservation of linguistic and cultural diversity.
4. All stakeholders should continue to promote and support the creation and free dissemination of language resources (alphabets, diacritic marks, phonetic language resources, Wikipedia, Wiktionaries, and related technical means, with specific reference to the use of virtual keyboards), necessary for the use of indigenous and minoritised languages in cyberspace ensuring more digital opportunities for all languages. Social technologies are important as well, like language officialization, bilingual or multilingual curricula, teaching methods, common framework of reference for languages, among others.
5. States should ensure that technology education in schools be integrated with the learning and teaching of national and local languages and the enhancement of cultures that are essential to peoples and countries.
6. States should also encourage the construction of language content in cyberspace that would safeguard integrity, interculturality and reinforce the shared values of dialogue amongst cultures.
7. It is important to invite the UNESCO Institute of Statistics, in cooperation with other technical national institutes, to improve mechanisms for better measuring of the situation of languages in cyberspace.

**At the practical level:**

1. Strategies need to be developed to help individuals to use language technologies and develop confidence in their own abilities so that more people in different language communities can become more involved in communicating and delivering content in their languages. This should include digital and media literacy, because a digitally-literate citizen is the first line of defence, and is a key stakeholder in the digital economy and society.
2. Universities as powerful institutions to investigate the linguistic situation, to help equip languages, to organise language courses and to train professionals capable of using languages in different contexts, should be encouraged and oriented to devote more energy to the overall effort to support language use, multilingualism and linguistic diversity. This also includes transforming universities' linguistic practices, turning themselves into multilingual institutions by including more languages in teaching and research.

3. In language education, beyond the dimension of languages as mother tongues, more attention should be given to teaching second and third languages, which represent the flow of linguistic communities in the social space, in search of a better life. Smaller languages will also benefit from this strategy, if they can be prepared to be taught to non-speakers.
4. Given the huge role of ICT corporations in the contemporary equipping of languages, it is essential to engage them in the discussions and in the permanent and rapid expansion of the tools and equipment necessary for all languages to be used digitally. It is important today to equip not individual languages, but language sets on the same technology bases. This is basically due to three reasons:
  - i) equipping a set of languages within a common space optimizes the investment made with the development of the tools, as the same tool serves multiple languages;
  - ii) this strategy mirrors the previously discussed fact that communities in general increasingly use language repertoires and not just individual languages;
  - iii) finally, most of the language tools, such as electronic translators, serve precisely to connect languages and allow information to be passed from one to the other, that is, there are obvious advantages to the efficient connection between them in having language sets sharing the same tools.
5. At the same time, new types of alliance between civil society, academy, and governments have to be established to try to counterbalance the excessive concentration of power over languages and their circulation by those bodies.
6. The state must support the sustainable work of civic organizations that successfully develop indigenous and other less-spoken languages (e.g., via community based language development, literacy, or language nests), including by providing long-term earmarked subsidies and grants, as well as through administrative support.
7. The introduction of artificial intelligence (AI) technologies can greatly accelerate the equipping of languages and benefiting users. However, it urges us to be aware of the gender and racial biases that might be imported from spoken and written languages into the virtual sphere, and refer to AI as an opportunity to reduce such biases.

**The Conference also especially recommends UNESCO, and other relevant international, regional and national stakeholders to:**

- Facilitate assistance for the promotion and development of social technologies for languages and language resources; promoting and encouraging international cooperation in the area with the objective to strengthen the use of languages in cyberspace. This works in the sense that all people are equal, and all languages should be given equal chances.
- Welcome the start of the data collection phase for the UNESCO Atlas of the Languages of the World, which extends the scope of the UNESCO Atlas of Languages in Danger

and includes in its questionnaire questions on the usability and use of languages in cyberspace, as well as on their technological equipment, which will allow a broad global analysis on the matter.

- Initiate a preparatory process for a World Summit on Multilingualism as it is highly desirable for the preservation and development of the world's languages and cultures in the context of the superdiversity produced by communications in cyberspace, economic globalisation and international migrations.

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This document was produced through a collaborative process involving participants from the following countries: Albania, Argentina, Armenia, Australia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Belgium, Benin, Brazil, Bulgaria, Cameroon, Central African Republic, China (including SAR Hong Kong and SAR Macau), Colombia, Croatia, Cuba, Czech Republic, Dominican Republic, Egypt, Finland, France, Germany, Ghana, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Israel, Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Kazakhstan, Korea, Kuwait, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Mexico, Moldova, Mongolia, Morocco, Mozambique, Nigeria, Palestine, Philippines, Russian Federation, Saudi Arabia, Slovakia, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Switzerland, Syria, Tajikistan, Turkey, Ukraine, United Kingdom, United States of America, Uzbekistan, Venezuela, Vietnam, Zambia, as well as UNESCO.



