Endangered languages get a Google protection plan

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Photo illustration shows a Native American member of the Navajo Code Talkers at the White House Tribal Nations Conference in Washington, DC in 2010. Google unveiled an online information exchange platform to try to give some extra lasting power to more than 3,000 endangered languages, including Navajo.

Google unveiled an online information exchange platform to try to give some extra lasting power to more than 3,000 endangered languages.

Called endangeredlanguages.com, it is out to help improve the exchange of digital source materials in languages spoken by small numbers of people, from Navajo in the United States, to Aragonese in Spain, to Koro in India and Burunge in Tanzania.

"It is an open, on-line platform where anybody can get on and start sharing materials in those languages which are in danger of being lost,"

said Miguel Alba, Google's Mexico marketing chief.

"Today there are around 7,000 languages spoken around the world, but half of them are expected not to survive to the end of this century," Alba said.

It is hoped that the languages will get an extra dose of energy as users share texts, videos, photos and audio files.

"Generally languages that are threatened are being abandoned by their own speakers as they are not seen as positive and speakers instead opt for another language seen as more economically or socially advantageous, said anthropologist Francisco Barriga.

But if users see their languages reflected positively in world media they may start taking stock more seriously, of all that can be lost, Barriga said.

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