

Saving minority languages from digital extinction

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How minority languages in Europe can survive and adapt in a digital age will be the focus of an international forum hosted this week by the University and organised by the European Network to Promote Linguistic Diversity (NPLD).

Language and technology experts from across Europe will be in Cardiff to consider how communities of minority languages can develop new technologies to boost the use and status of their languages.

The forum is sponsored by the Welsh Government and supported by S4C, in partnership with the NPLD, Cardiff and Bangor Universities, Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol (CCC) Wales, and META-NET

The findings of a series of white papers recently released by Europe's leading language technology experts warn that most European languages

face digital extinction. Undertaken by META-NET - a European Commission funded network of excellence, committed to developing language technology – the white papers will form the basis for discussions at the forum.

META-NET's research concluded that digital support for 21 of the 30 European languages investigated is "non-existent" or "weak" at best.

Dr Georg Rehm, META-NET's Network Manager and keynote speaker at the forum, identified a growing gap between big and small languages and that all small and under-resourced languages need to be equipped with much needed base technologies, otherwise they are doomed to digital extinction.

Lecturer Dr Jeremy Evas from Cardiff's School of Welsh, also a keynote speaker, recently published the latest white paper in the series entitled 'The Welsh Language in the Digital Age', which promotes knowledge about language technology and its potential. He said:

"Barriers to the use of Welsh language still exist but Language Technology could hold the key to its proliferation, both digitally and in day-to-day life. Understanding and awareness of this technology is vital if people are to embrace it; of equal importance to its uptake is the technology's availability and quality. Indeed, there is enormous potential for language technology to not only bolster the Welsh language's use, but also its status."

Garffild Lloyd Lewis, Director, Communications, Marketing and Partnerships, S4C said:

"As the only Welsh-language television channel in the world, S4C has an important role to play in the provision of [digital media](#) By working with partners from across Europe, we can continue to ensure our audiences

benefit from cutting-edge digital content in Welsh.

A spokesperson for the NPLD said:

"Technology can make minority languages easily accessible to anyone in Europe, it's an opportunity which is an open door to us as long as we plan together and support each other."

First Minister, Carwyn Jones, said:

"In order to ensure that the Welsh language thrives in the twenty-first century, Welsh language technology and digital media must be of high quality and readily available. We cannot allow the language to be left behind by the latest technologies and must instead use digital resources as a way of demonstrating that the language is a relevant, modern, and creative medium.

"Our Welsh Language Technology and Digital Media Action Plan aim to encourage the creation and use of Welsh language technology. I'm pleased that we have been able to support this international forum, which will further the discussion around this important issue with our European counterparts."

The field of language technology produces software that can process spoken or written human language. Well-known examples of [language](#) technology software include spell and grammar checkers, interactive personal assistants on smartphones (such as Siri on the iPhone), dialogue systems that work over the phone, automatic translation systems, web search engines, and synthetic voices used in car navigation systems.

Provided by Cardiff University

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