SOCIAL NETWORKS AS A TOOL FOR THE PRESERVATION AND DISSEMINATION OF LANGUAGES

REȚELE SOCIALE CA INSTRUMENT PENTRU PĂSTRAREA ȘI DISEMENAREA A LIMBELOR

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Abstract: Acest studiu analizează modul în care platformele online, precum Facebook, Instagram și TikTok, contribuie la păstrarea limbilor minoritare și la popularizarea acestora în rândul noilor generații. Printr-o abordare calitativă și cantitativă, cercetarea evidențiază impactul conținutului digital, al comunităților virtuale și al strategiilor de promovare asupra utilizării și transmiterii limbilor. Rezultatele arată că rețelele sociale facilitează nu doar accesul la resurse educaționale în diverse limbi, ci și interacțiunea dintre vorbitori nativi și non-nativi, stimulând astfel învățarea și revitalizarea limbilor aflate în pericol de dispariție. Concluziile studiului subliniază importanța integrării tehnologiilor digitale în inițiativele de conservare lingvistică și necesitatea unor politici care să sprijine utilizarea limbilor în mediul online.
Cuvinte cheie: rețele sociale, păstrarea limbilor, diversitate lingvistică, globalizare digitală, promovarea limbilor, educație online, comunități virtuale, transmiterea culturală, politici lingvistice, influența social media

JEL CLASSIFICATION: L82, D83, Z13

INTRODUCTION

The Internet forms a special communicative environment, a special place of language realization, which has no analogues in the past. As it develops, the virtual reality of the Internet acquires the features of a new world and lifestyle, which stimulates the emergence of new means of communication The Internet space itself is a living human mind expressed in the form of text, synthesizing graphics, sound, and animation. Web as a new communication space helps native speakers to think more often about the language tools they use. The network stimulates the speech creativity of communicants; language becomes not only a means of communication, but also a tool for the creative self-realization of communicants.

Objects of this work:

- To examine how different linguistic communities use social networks for language dissemination.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of digital platforms (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, TikTok) in promoting language learning and engagement.
- To explore the impact of social media on linguistic diversity and cultural heritage

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Modern social networks have significantly influenced various aspects of our lives, and language is certainly no exception. The impact of social media on language can be considered in light of numerous factors, such as changes in communication structure, the emergence of new words and expressions, and the transformation of linguistic norms and rules.

One of the most noticeable effects of social networks is the way they have changed the methods and style of communication between people. In the past, face-to-face meetings, phone conversations, and letters were the primary channels of communication. Nowadays, a large part of communication takes place online through social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and others. These platforms not only change the format of communication but also encourage the use of specific linguistic forms adapted to the conditions of short messages and constant status updates.

Researchers have discovered that groups stop speaking their traditional languages on a daily basis because speaking a more widespread, international language provides them with greater access to economic opportunities. According to scientists, for a language to survive and successfully develop, at least 1 million people must speak it. However, there are no more than 250 such languages today. Therefore, scientists confidently state that up to 90% of all the world's languages will disappear in the coming decades.

The global community is concerned about the rate at which languages are vanishing. Ethnolinguistic diversity, currently represented by more than 6,500 languages, is under threat. Among the factors contributing to this process are the decline in the number of speakers of smaller languages, their geographically dispersed settlements, and the generally low level of economic, political, and social development of these communities.

The disappearance of languages is not a phenomenon unique to modern times. Throughout history, languages have been born, developed, disappeared, or transformed into other linguistic forms.

In developed countries, internet penetration is significantly higher, which contributes to the active use of online learning. In 2024, 33% of internet users in the EU took online courses or used educational materials online. The leading countries in this regard are Ireland (61%), the Netherlands (59%), and Finland (53%), whereas in less developed countries, this figure is lower (e.g., Romania – 10%).

Regarding language learning, technology expands access to education, especially in countries with high digital literacy, such as Sweden and Denmark, where foreign language studies are actively integrated into educational programs. However, in developing countries, limited access to technology and the internet remains a barrier to language learning, particularly for less widely spoken languages
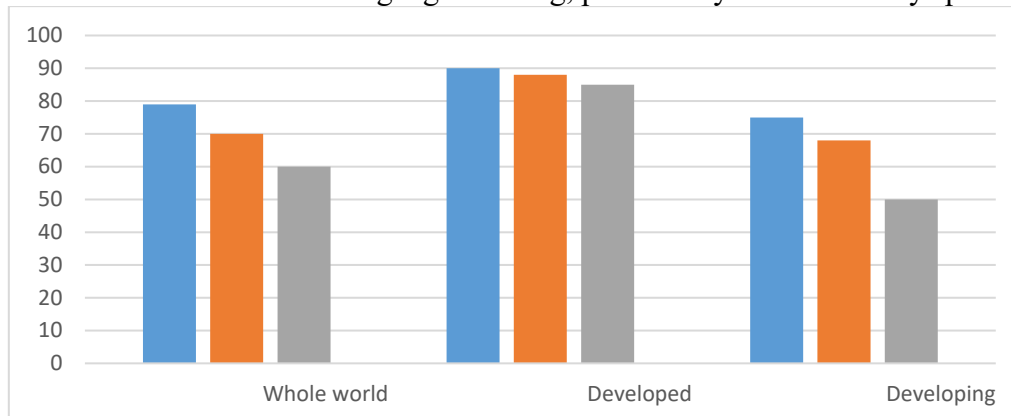

Figure 1: Internet usage rate in developed and developing countries
Source: Elaborated by the authors

We are entering a new era of language change driven by social media, and it's not just about creating new words to bypass algorithmic censorship. The entire structure of social media is reshaping how words emerge, gain popularity, and spread. For instance, a meme created by a 13-year-old that went viral last year, full of current middle school slang like "rizz," "gyat," and "skibidi," played a significant role in popularizing these terms. This happens because social media algorithms reward repetition—if something, like a song, is funny or catchy and people engage with it, the algorithm pushes it to a broader audience. The same goes for memes or words since trending metadata like hashtags get shown to users who have interacted with similar content before. Creators are very aware of this and actively use trending audios or hashtags to boost the performance of their videos.

Take, for example, the rizzler song, which led to a surge of videos using the words rizz, gyat, and skibidi because people knew those words would help their content perform better. This caused the words to spread rapidly. Language has always been contagious, with words passing from person to person and adapting as they move through social networks, but now, the viral nature of social media accelerates this process. A word like "rizz" can go from complete obscurity to becoming the Oxford English Dictionary's Word of the Year in just a year, thanks to social media algorithms, with influencers playing a key role in spreading it. Creators use these tactics to entertain and engage users, which in turn boosts their video performance and helps them earn a living. As a result, creators often end up promoting and spreading words that fuel the system. One example is the rise of the suffix "core" in Gen Z slang, used to describe various aesthetics like "cottagecore" or "goblincore." On the surface, these trends seem harmless and fun, but they exist primarily because TikTok's algorithm recognizes them as trending topics. Creators respond by making more content around these aesthetics, which causes more people to interact with it, making the words trend even more.The reason this happens is that social media algorithms aim to push hyper-specific, compartmentalized identities, which allow them to serve highly targeted, commercialized content. If you identify with a label like "cottagecore," the algorithm will send you more content that fits that label. You might even start buying cottagecore-related items to align with this newfound identity. This is exactly what the platform wants: to have you buy into an identity that benefits their commercial interests. TikTok's business platform openly claims that niche subcultures are the new target demographics, providing businesses with ideas for profiting off trends like cottagecore. While this phenomenon offers opportunities for linguistic growth—since subcultures create and spread new words—it also has a darker side. The creation of identity labels by the algorithm can sometimes be harmful, as it traps users in echo chambers that reinforce these narrow identities.

In a recent Tedtalks podcast, Adam Alexis shared his opinion on how social media is changing the way we talk: " Personally, I find this rapid evolution of language both fascinating and concerning. Each viral word reflects the cultural moment we're living in, but it's important to stay aware of how our speech is shaped by digital platforms. We should recognize when language is being manipulated to sell us something, when extremist rhetoric seeps into everyday slang, and when words are being used in ways that erase or distort their original meaning. Social media isn't just documenting language change—it's actively shaping it."(Aleksic, 2020).

CONCLUSION

Social networks can indeed serve as an effective supplementary tool for foreign language learning, extending the boundaries of traditional education. In addition to facilitating classroom and independent study, they play a significant role in preserving and studying languages, especially in the context of globalization and digitalization. First, social media help maintain linguistic diversity by providing a platform for speakers of rare or endangered languages. Groups, communities, and personal blogs allow users to exchange knowledge, create educational content, and even develop interactive courses for learning less common languages.

Second, social networks provide easy access to authentic language materials, such as videos, podcasts, articles, and live discussions with native speakers. This helps students immerse themselves in a natural linguistic environment, improving listening comprehension and modern vocabulary acquisition.

Third, crowdsourcing projects and wiki-based resources on social media enable collaborative creation and editing of learning materials, making language study more interactive and community-driven.

However, like any tool, social networks come with risks, including unreliable information and distracting content. Therefore, their use in education requires a thoughtful approach that balances the benefits of digital technology with academic rigor. In the long run, integrating social media into language learning could not only boost student motivation but also contribute to the preservation of linguistic heritage, making foreign language acquisition more accessible and engaging.

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