

**Giving wings to our race against time:
Auto-Documentation and the Amazigh languages**

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Throughout the world, linguistic diversity is dwindling at an accelerated pace. While most of Africa seems to fare better than other parts of the world, with its two thousand or so languages and its many still vibrant local cultures, it is obvious that even on this continent, there is no chance whatsoever of achieving the academic documentation of more than ten percent of the remaining non- or under-described languages, given the ratio of researchers and funding to languages.

It is therefore urgent to create an alternative, sustainable strategy that could scale up linguistic and cultural documentation, as well as empower speakers and communities. I call this strategy "auto-documentation", and consider it distinct not only from standard academic documentation, but also from "remote fieldwork" or speaker-assisted documentation ("community-training", "crowdsourcing", etc.). In this approach, auto-documentation is defined as the constitution, by and for speakers/communities, of a body of recordings of their own language and culture, using methods and tools that do not involve academic institutions or funding, NGOs or other external support, but are accessible to any speaker or community in their local environment.

For this kind of autonomous strategy to be successful, it is crucial that the internal and external factors of endangerment should be identified, and the technical, social and political obstacles (and facilitators) to auto-documentation clearly established. I will present a survey of those factors for Amazigh languages and cultures, and the subsequent elaboration of a two-year campaign involving social media (Twitter, Facebook, YouTube), as well as resource- and capacity-building. In doing so, I will specify the underlying assumptions involved and make the architecture of the strategy explicit, so as to facilitate the transfer and adaptation of auto-documentation methods to other communities throughout Africa and beyond.

Ultimately, at the onset of the International Decade of Indigenous Languages (2022-2032) engaging in auto-documentation is an act of empowerment for local activists and a way for them to stand in their rightful place, at the core and in control of the documentation of their own languages and cultures, in their own terms.