Making Dictionaries: 21st Century Tools for Indigenous Communities

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Documenting and preserving as much as possible of the LEXICON of its language should be the goal of every indigenous community.

In the 21st Century, a language community can create a database containing the LEXICON, from which many DICTIONARIES can quickly be produced.

Technologies exist to make this possible today.
To know a language you must know:

• **The Lexicon** [ = Lexical inventory + Semantics + Pragmatics ]
  • Concepts
  • Words
  • Phrases
  • Expressions

• **The rules for constructing utterances** [ = Grammar ]
  • Words
  • Phrases
  • Clauses
  • Sentences
  • Paragraph
  • Speeches
  • Conversations

• **The sounds of the language** [ = Phonetics and Phonology ]
  • How to listen and hear
  • How to say
Lexicon

• The catalogue of concepts about the world, the culture, and language known collectively by the speakers of a language.
• No individual speaker knows all of them.
Lexical Database

• An organized digital collection of information about the Lexicon of a language.
• It can include text, audio recordings, photographs, illustrations, and videos.
• It is dynamic:
  • Easy to add information
  • Multiple people can contribute, at the same time
• It preserves a permanent record of the Lexicon, to pass on to future generations
Dictionary

• A distributable collection of some of the information in a Lexical Database:
  • For a particular audience
  • For a particular purpose
  • In a form that is accessible and useful to the audience
• A single Lexical Database can be the source for many Dictionaries.

- Bilingual Dictionary
- School Dictionary
- Dictionary of Plants
- Printed book
- Internet
- Smart phone
Dictionary Project

Creating the elements of a Lexical Database and then repurposing them for use in a Dictionary requires:

- a Product Idea
- a Plan
- a Team
- the right Processes
- the right Tools
... a Plan
The Right Tools
SIL Americas Language Development Services can help you to design and do Dictionary Development projects.

All our software and tools are free, and can be downloaded here;

software.sil.org/products

Email for questions, consulting, training, or more information:

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