



# LEARN LANGUAGES ONLINE

A GUIDE TO STUDYING  
ENDANGERED, UNDER-RESOURCED  
AND MINORITY LANGUAGES



LIVING TONGUES INSTITUTE  
FOR ENDANGERED LANGUAGES

# **Learn Languages Online:**

## **A Guide To Studying Indigenous, Under-Resourced and Minority Languages**

By Anna Luisa Daigneault

### **Table of Contents**

Overview	2
Popular Language Platforms	2
Chat Apps, Gaming, Real-time Tutors and Flashcards	3
Platforms that Serve Indigenous and Less-Commonly Taught Languages	4
Memrise	4
Duolingo	6
uTalk	7
Master Any Language	8
Drops	9
The Language Conservancy (TLC)	10
El Centro Cultural de España en México (CCEMx)	11
Binasii Inc.	12
Mother Tongues	13
IIAP	14
SPIKIT	15
Lingua Libre App (by Wikimedia)	15
North American and Australian Indigenous Language Platforms	16
Dictionary-Building Platforms	17
Talking Dictionaries (by Living Tongues Institute for Endangered Languages)	17
The SIL's Dictionary App Builder	18
APPENDIX 1	19

## Overview

The availability of online educational platforms and apps has revolutionized the way people approach language learning today. They can now learn languages online on any device, at their own pace and on their own schedule. People can now study in short, digestible sprints, track their progress easily, and even chat with or hire language tutors in safe, online community spaces. While many of these platforms and apps are free, some are subscription-based and can involve fees. Overall, language learning is now very accessible to the average learner. This report begins by looking at the world's top language learning platforms and then focuses on the ones that serve indigenous and other under-resourced minority languages. It also looks at a number of smaller platforms that are specifically tailored to learning indigenous languages.

## Popular Language Platforms

Most of the popular language platforms that exist today are geared towards gaining fluency in global languages such as English, French, Spanish, Mandarin, Arabic, as well as regionally dominant languages such as Hindi, Turkish, Japanese, etc. When it comes to language-learning approaches, there is an overwhelming variety of services available, and most work seamlessly on mobile or desktop.

Some of the top platforms in the world that focus on college-style classroom-based language curriculums are [Babbel](#) (see screenshot to the right), [Busuu](#) and [Duolingo](#). In this category, there are also other well-known language platforms such as Rosetta Stone, Pimsleur, Mondly, and LinguaLift. With the notable exception of Duolingo (see analysis below), very few of those platforms serve indigenous, endangered or minority languages, presumably because those languages are not seen as economically viable, and/or because the platforms do not have access to systematic language data with which to create the courses.

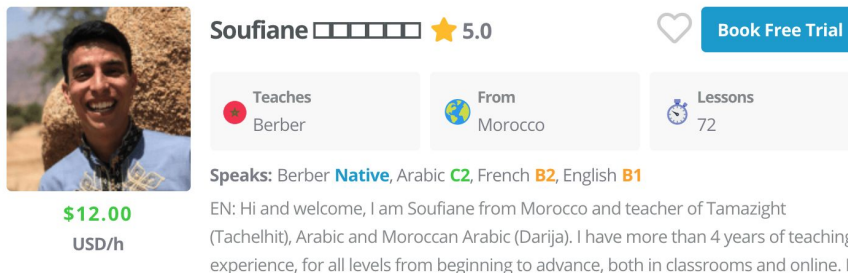




## Chat Apps, Gaming, Real-time Tutors and Flashcards




As texting on smartphones becomes one of the most important forms of communication today, a number of live interactive chat, Q&A and social apps such as [HiNative](#) and [HelloTalk](#) have exploded in popularity. They allow learners to practice stress-free texting in other languages, pose questions in community forums with real-time responses, and even pay to chat with fluent speakers. They appear to be very popular with students throughout Asia who are learning dominant European languages such as English, French, Spanish and German.

The gamification of language-learning is also a real thing now. Because online gaming has also become so popular in recent years, [Mindsnacks](#) and other language apps have crossed over into the realm of gamification and resemble brain games more than traditional language courses.

In terms of online services where people can hire language tutors on an hourly basis, one of the best-known platforms is [iTalki](#), which is a paid language-learning platform that boasts having over 10,000 real-time language tutors to choose from. While primarily for dominant languages, there are some minority and indigenous languages being taught on the site, and users can easily apply to become a teacher for any language. iTalki may work well for sharing minority and endangered languages across distances, if the language tutor has the right educational background to teach students effectively. [Verbling](#) is also a paid platform where language teachers can teach students a language online, and learners can search by their target language and/or their mother tongue. These platforms can potentially be useful for users learning indigenous and less-commonly taught languages. They might very well constitute an economic opportunity for the tutors teaching them to learners who are part of language diaspora communities around the globe. See screenshot below of a Verbling tutor who teaches Tamazight (Berber) online.



**Soufiane**  5.0  [Book Free Trial](#)

 Teaches Berber	 From Morocco	 Lessons 72
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**Speaks:** Berber **Native**, Arabic **C2**, French **B2**, English **B1**

**\$12.00**  
USD/h

EN: Hi and welcome, I am Soufiane from Morocco and teacher of Tamazight (Tachelhit), Arabic and Moroccan Arabic (Darija). I have more than 4 years of teaching experience, for all levels from beginning to advance, both in classrooms and online. I

In the realm of language-learning platforms focused on memorization through flashcards and SRS (spaced repetition software), the most popular platforms are [Memrise](#) (see our analysis below), Duolingo's [TinyCards](#), [AnkiApp](#) and many other applications such as Drops, TripLingo and MosaLingua. The beauty of SRS is that computer-based algorithms feed the learner "question and answer" pairs and can evaluate how well the person memorizes the pairing over time. This method is popular online for visual as well as auditory learners of languages, and also for many other areas of study such as math and science.

Many of the world's indigenous, small, under-resourced and/or endangered languages do not yet have a significant presence online or sufficient language content available to create online courses, flashcards or games. There are, however, a number of medium-sized indigenous languages such as Maori, Scots Gaelic, Hawaiian, Quechua, Navajo and Lakota that are making their way into well-known educational platforms, presumably because there is a ready and willing audience that inspired the platform to invest energy into developing content in those languages. There are many existing opportunities that could be harnessed for teaching and learning indigenous languages.

## Platforms that Serve Indigenous and Less-Commonly Taught Languages

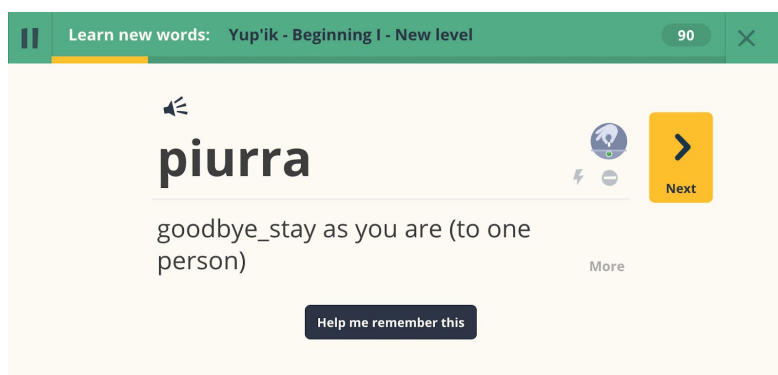
### Memrise

<https://www.memrise.com/>

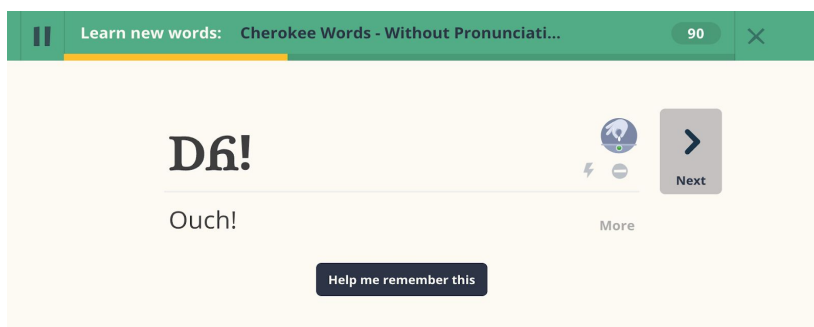
Out of all the platforms surveyed in this report, Memrise may be the most compelling for indigenous and other under-resourced minority languages. It is an online educational platform that uses [memory techniques](#) such as flashcards, SRS (spaced repetition software) and visual aids to optimise language learning. Memrise founder Ed Cooke is the acclaimed author of *Remember, Remember: Learn the Stuff You Thought You Never Could*. Cooke is also a [Grand Master of Memory](#) and has applied his deep knowledge of memory retention and improvement techniques to the creation of Memrise to benefit online language learners.

Founded in 2010, Memrise has grown exponentially over the past ten years. According to the "About" section on the site, Memrise now has over 40 million people in 189 countries learning languages and other media content on the platform. Currently based in London, Memrise has 75 employees.

Based on the list of languages in the sidebar, it seems that Memrise has content available for over 170 languages, a much greater number than most other language-learning platforms. Notably, the site has an impressive, community-created selection of content for indigenous languages and dialects from around the globe such as [Yup'ik](#) (see first screenshot below), [Cherokee](#) (see second screenshot below), Algonquian, Alutiiq, Choctaw, Greenlandic, Inuktitut, Lakota, Nahuatl, Yucatec Maya, K'iche', Quechua, Guarani, Ainu, Jeju and many other medium-sized tongues spoken in Europe, Africa, the Middle East, Asia and the Pacific. See [Appendix 1](#) at the end of this report for a full list of all the languages taught on Memrise.



Unlike some other sites that must be navigated through a modular curriculum, the Memrise user can jump around to any lesson they want. As a casual user, one can see the range of lessons and games that are available without having to pay any fees, but there are also subscription options for pro users who use the site more intensively.



The Memrise platform has a DIY, democratic and grassroots feeling to it. The platform is innovative because: 1) users can follow existing courses and flashcard sets and seamlessly upload their own mnemonic aids to help recall words and phrases as they progress through a course; 2) the site provides a engaging way for users to connect with language content through repetition, little quizzes, short videos, funny images and



recordings made by fluent speakers, and 3) the platform allows community users to easily create their own language courses that others can use as well.

Some of the community-generated courses are very rich, powerful, detailed and presented in a systematic manner. However, other courses feel very rudimentary and are missing features such as audio recordings for pronunciation, and explanations about the use of different orthographic scripts. But overall, the platform is ground-breaking in the way it allows learners to quickly learn and retain content in other languages, as well as create and share new content for minority languages that have minimal presence online.

## Duolingo

<https://www.duolingo.com/>

One of the most popular websites for learning languages, Duolingo boasts that it is *the most downloaded educational app in the world*. It has a beautifully designed desktop interface as well as a seamless mobile experience. People are welcome to use the free version of Duolingo to get started, but serious learners must pay to access intermediate and advanced content. According to their site, “Duolingo allows learners to discover patterns on their own without needing to focus on language rules — the same way you learned your first language as a child. This approach, called *implicit learning*, is ideal for developing a strong foundational knowledge of a language and its rules.”

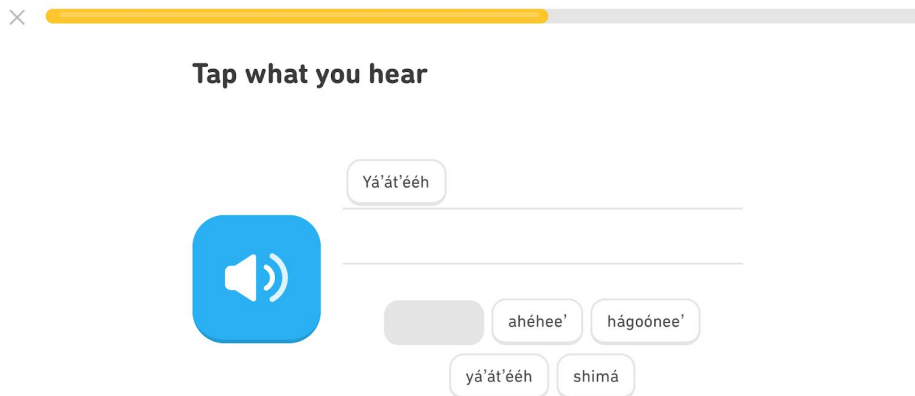
Primarily used for learning dominant languages, the platform also offers robust and well-conceived curriculums for medium-sized indigenous languages such as [Navajo](#), [Hawaiian](#) as well as minority European languages such as Welsh and Catalan. Here is a snapshot from an introductory Navajo lesson:

**duolingo**



**Learn Navajo for Free**

START LEARNING

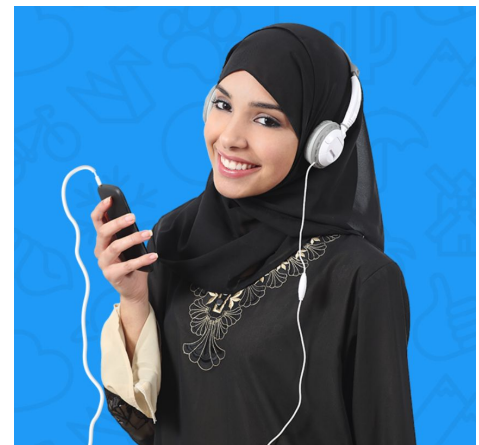


Using Duolingo feels more or less like taking a class in a school or a college, where users follow a modular curriculum planned by educators. It allows learners to track their progress, receive notifications, and earn points. Users reap rewards such as “lingots” that motivate them by stimulating their serotonin and keep them coming back to the app for more. Duolingo also includes an active community discussion board organized by useful topics, as well as a powerful multilingual dictionary feature that works well for dominant languages. It may not work as smoothly for the smaller languages such as Navajo, so there is work that remains to be done in that regard.

## uTalk

<https://utalk.com/en/store>

uTalk is a paid educational platform where users can learn dozens of dominant languages, as well as minority and threatened languages such as Maori, Samoan, Fijian, Welsh, Sicilian, Scottish Gaelic, Scots, Sardinian, Southern Saami, Manx, Irish, Galician, Catalan, and Basque. The platform boasts that over 30 million people have used their tool, and that they are interested in adding content for as many languages as possible, including minority and endangered ones. According to their website, “More than 1,000 native speakers have visited our studio in the last 15 years to record 140+ languages with more languages being added all the time. Mainstream, minority or endangered languages – we love them all. We’ve also recorded in a desert and in Siberia in winter. If we have to go the extra mile, we will.”





## Master Any Language

<https://www.masteranylanguage.com/>

While the design of the interface is not as slick and compelling as the other platforms such as Duolingo, uTalk or Drops, the great content and sheer number of available languages on “Master Any Language” might make up for it. Users can learn less commonly taught languages such as Greenlandic, Inuktitut, Inupiaq, Navajo, Ojibwe, Guarani, Quechua, Aymara, Maori, Samoan, Fijian, Tongan, Tahitian, Nauruan, Marshallese, Komi, Cornish, Breton, Corsican and many others. They can opt for learning through games, flashcards, more traditional-style courses, with sound on or off.



There are also [bonus sections](#) that discuss language immersion techniques and other community best practices to keep people motivated to speak their languages in their personal lives and collective environments.

## Drops

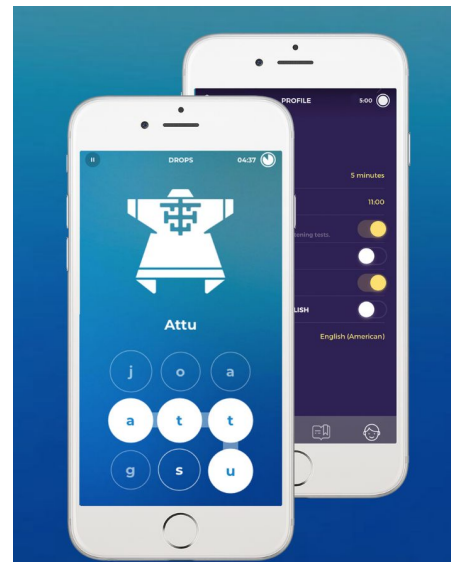
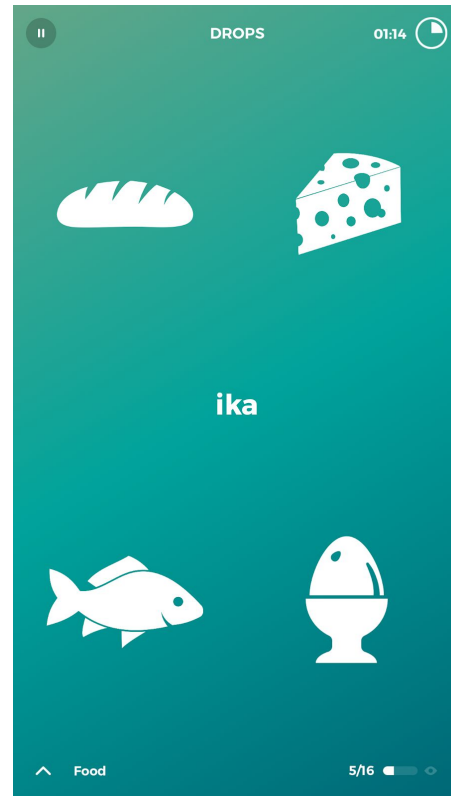
<https://languagedrops.com/languages>

Drops is a paid educational platform that is 100% built for the mobile user experience. While it may take the new user a few minutes to get acquainted with how the platform works, it soon becomes easy to use and feels like playing a pictographic word game on your phone. With over 30 languages on the platform, Drops is primarily for dominant languages, but also has excellent courses for Hungarian and minority indigenous languages such as Hawaiian, Maori, Samoan and Ainu (which the app's founders refer to as "niche" languages, and they say their mother tongue Hungarian also falls into the niche category).

It is great for visual learners, and employs many touch-only functions such as *swipe* and *slide* to correlate vocabulary words with images. For example, in the mobile screenshot to the right, the user must slide the Maori word "ika" (fish) with the correct image of a fish to earn points and proceed to the next item.

The platform is also very proud of its course on [Ainu](#), and includes this description: "Ainu is one of the world's most endangered languages with multiple dialects. For hundreds of years, the Ainu has been linguistically isolated to a relatively small Ainu population in Japan's northernmost prefecture – the island of Hokkaido. " Drops clearly believes Ainu has an audience online and has invested significant resources to create materials for it, which is encouraging for other endangered languages.

"We've watched the rise and decline of many niche languages — including our own," Co-founder and CEO Daniel Farkas told [TechCrunch](#). "We know how important language is in representing culture and connecting people, and understand the significance of bringing under-served languages in particular, to light." For further reading, see this article about Drops on [InVentures.Eu](#).



## The Language Conservancy (TLC)

<https://languageconservancy.org/>

This organization supports indigenous language revitalization projects in North America and Australia by creating multimedia tools such as language-learning apps and vocabulary builders that are accessible on iOS as well as Android devices. According to their website, “The Language Conservancy leverages technology in the revitalization of languages. We couple this with best approaches in method, working with educators and linguistic experts. TLC is a leader in the use of groundbreaking technology to build language resources and to distribute them to community members. We develop apps that expand and build the language revitalization process.”

Their vocabulary builder app works by pairing written content with an audio recording and an image, but also integrates quizzes to help learners retain the information they are presented with. It clearly shows learners how much progress they are making through various categories of vocabulary (such as wild animals, domesticated animals, fruits and vegetables, etc). Some of the languages they serve are: [Arikara \(see screenshots below\)](#), Cheyenne, Yanktonai, Keres, Nakoda, Crow, Omaha, Maskoke, Mandan, Hidatsa, and many more. See their [full list of languages on their website](#).



neétAhkas

neétAhkas 



eagle

## El Centro Cultural de España en México (CCEMx)

<http://ccemx.org/laboratorio-de-ciudadania-digital/>

<http://ccemx.org/evento/laboratorioapps/>

The Laboratorio de Ciudadanía Digital (LCD, or Digital Citizenship Laboratory) operated under the CCEMx in collaboration with a tech company named Manuvo in 2015-2016 to create the Apple and Android language-learning platforms for three indigenous languages: Náhuatl, Mixteco, and Purépecha. Geared towards a local Spanish-speaking audience, these apps were each downloaded tens of thousands of times, were launched publicly in Mexico with a media campaign, and received excellent reviews by online community users. They include culturally-sensitive illustrations by local artists and make use of virtual immersive environments where users learn vocabulary related to different domains of daily life.

Here is the description of the Purépecha language app, translated from Spanish: “The application, developed in the Digital Citizenship Laboratory, proposes a journey through the life of the Purépecha people in a journey in which words acquire meaning alongside the daily activities and the space in which they are carried out: the family, the community, the kitchen, the countryside, the festival and other elements that form part of the daily work of people who represent the identity of a people and enrich our cultural diversity.”



## Binasii Inc.

<https://apps.apple.com/us/developer/binasii-inc/id1215028485>

This platform includes digital dictionaries, language-learning tools and word game apps for North American indigenous languages such as Sioux Valley Dakota, Opaskwayak Cree, Saysi Dene, Long Plain Ojibway and others. The resources are created as partnerships between Binasii and local language authorities and tribal councils. With culturally-specific art and content, these resources are well-made and kept up-to-date. They display all content in English as well as the indigenous language in Roman script and in syllabics (where syllabics are used for writing) as well as easy-to-use syllabics charts where necessary for comprehension.

### iPad & iPhone

[See All](#)



Dakota Dictionary  
Reference



Long Plain Dictionary  
Education



Opaskwayak Cree Dict...  
Education



The Dakota Trail  
Games

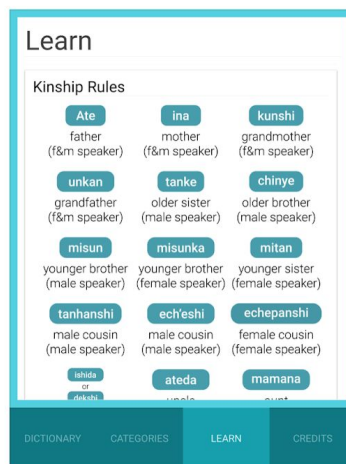
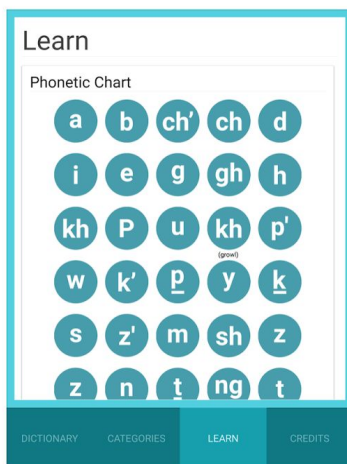
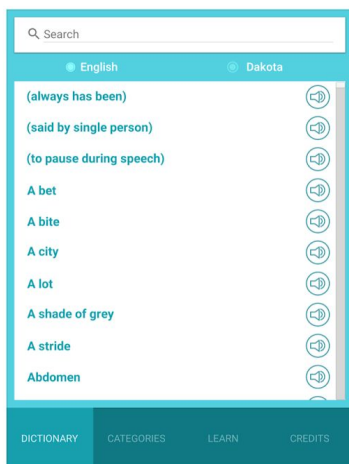


MCCN Cree Dictionary  
Reference



Long Plain Word Quest  
Education

Binasii's [Dakota Dictionary](#) (which serves the Sioux Valley Dakota people) includes over 2,000 words and phrases, information on phonetics, a searchable index in English and Dakota, and searchable categories such as body, places, people, seasons, verbs, clothing, etc.





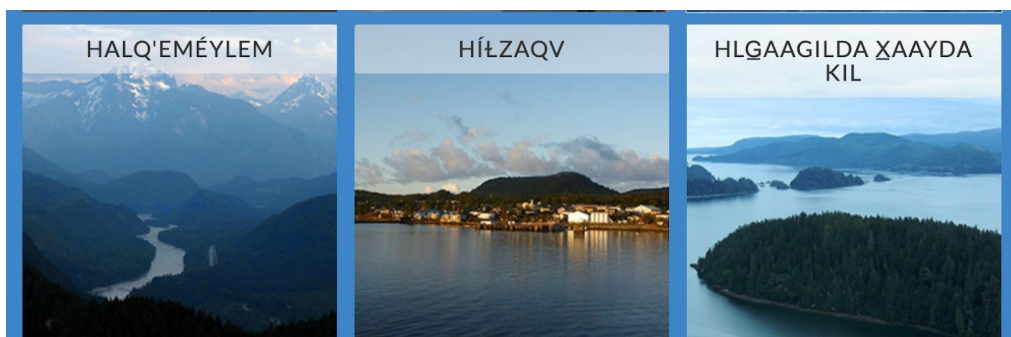
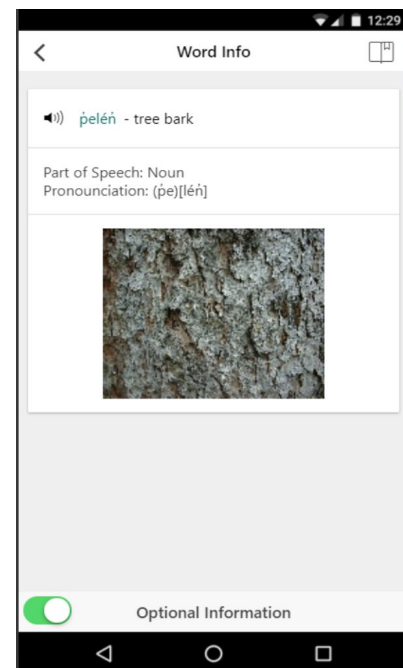
## Mother Tongues

<https://mothertongues.org/>

According to their website, Mother Tongues is an organization “whose focus is to provide powerful tools for language revitalization.” It was founded by full-stack web developer and linguist Aidan Pine in Coast Salish territories in British Columbia, Canada. Mother Tongues presently has two publicly available tools:

- **Mother Tongues Dictionaries**, formerly known as Waldayu, are sophisticated dictionary applications for web and mobile platforms that are currently used by almost twenty different languages from 8 different language families including Tsimshianic, Wakashan, Salishan, Sino-Tibetan and Iroquoian languages. Some of them were produced in collaboration with First Peoples’ Cultural Council, by accessing language data collected and stored by the FirstVoices organization in Canada. For example, the Secwepemc Dictionary tool (see screenshot to the right) was produced out of their collaboration.

- **Convertextextract** is a Python programming library that performs orthographic (writing system) conversions on Word, Excel, PowerPoint and Text files while preserving the file's original formatting. Presumably this tool was developed as a result of juggling many special characters from various Coast Salish languages. The screenshot below shows some of the special characters in several of the languages the tool serves. This open-source tool is available on [GitHub](https://github.com).



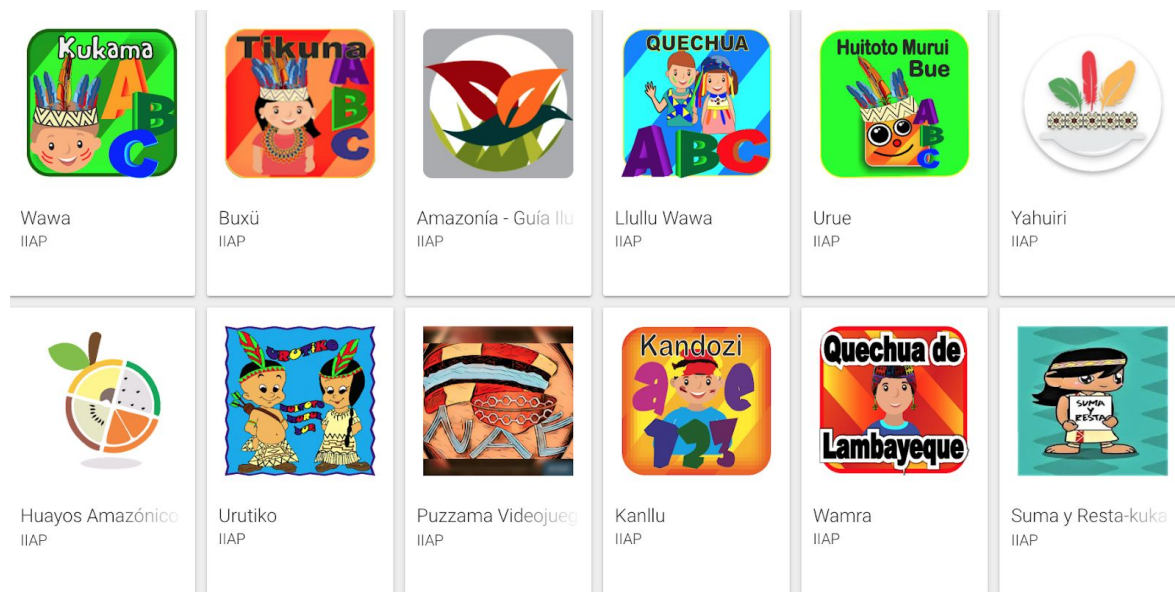


## IIAP

<https://play.google.com/store/apps/developer?id=IIAP&hl=en>

The IIAP has produced a wide variety of Google Play educational apps for learning many Amazonian indigenous languages in Peru such as Ashaninka, Tikuna, Taushiro, Bora, Quechua de Lambayeque and others. Their content is geared towards a young target audience and includes activities such as learning the alphabet, playing simple word games, and accessing basic vocabulary paired with fun images. Translated from the Spanish description of their app, “This platform is part of the Adaptation and Research in Information Systems project on Biodiversity, Environment, Biotrade and Biotechnology (SITEC II, BIOINFO programs), made with the support of the Ministry of Culture that aims to safeguard the native languages of the Peruvian Amazon.”

While the number of downloads is in the low hundreds for each language app, their reviews are overwhelmingly positive. It is possible that the government has not undertaken a publicity campaign for these apps, and also that the local population does not have regular access to the Internet to be able to readily download these apps.

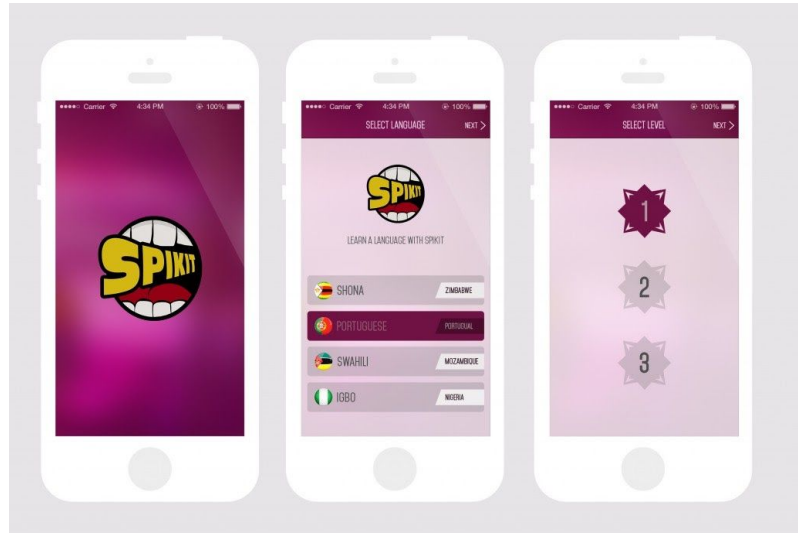


## SPIKIT

[Google Play Store](#)

[Project Website](#)

The SPIKIT platform features audio learning, drag and drop activities, spelling games and foundational skills in African languages as well as one Northern Territory language in Australia. It is available for iOS and Android. According to their website, SPIKIT is an “Australian patented tool that will help to restore the importance of indigenous languages from Africa and Australia. It currently has content for Shona (Zimbabwe); Zulu (South Africa/Swaziland); Xhosa (South Africa/Swaziland); Yolŋu Matha (one of the Northern Territories Indigenous Languages in Yirrkala, Nhulunbuy, East Arnhem, Australia) and Ndebele (one of the languages spoken in Zimbabwe).”



## Lingua Libre App (by Wikimedia)

[https://lingualibre.fr/wiki/LinguaLibre:Main\\_Page](https://lingualibre.fr/wiki/LinguaLibre:Main_Page)

According to their website, Lingua Libre is “a library of audio records that everyone can complete by giving a few words, some proverbs, a few sentences, and so on. Lingua Libre has been designed so that everyone can pass onto future generations the fragile treasure of orality. The words, phrases, expressions thus collected thanks to you will improve some Wikimedia projects (like Wikipedia, Wikimedia Commons and the Wiktionary) and help specialists in their work. [...] This ambitious project aims to bring together a unique audio corpus that will help to bring visibility to minority and regional languages by improving the different linguistic versions of Wikipedia and providing audio material to illustrate Wiktionary entries.”

## North American and Australian Indigenous Language Platforms

The following platforms all have good online reviews and each serve several languages. Future iterations of this report will examine these tools in detail, as well as other websites and platforms:

### North America

- [Ogoki Learning Systems Inc](#) (for North Americans languages such as Ojibway, Saulteaux, Blackfeet, Cree, Meskwaki, Northern Tutchone and others)
- [Thornton Media Inc](#) (for North American languages such as Cree, Mohawk, Tsuut'ina, Chickasaw, Yugtun, Omaha and more)
- [Yamózha Kúé Society](#) (for languages such as Inuinnaqtun, Gwich'in, Shutaot'ine, South Slavey, Tlicho, Northwest Territory Cree, Denededline)
- [Christopher Horsethief](#) (for North American languages such as Cree, Navajo, Muckleshoot, Osage, Ktunaxa, Salish)

### Australia

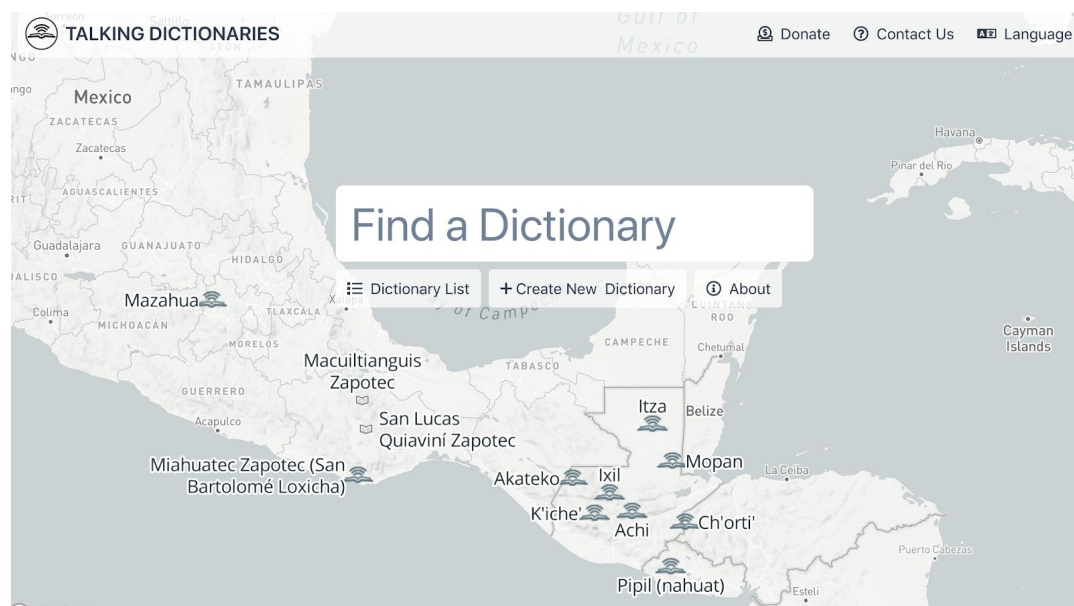
- [Wiradjuri Condobolin](#) Corporation Limited (for languages such as Wonnarua, Yitha Yitha, Yorta Yorta, Mutti Mutti, Wiradjuri, Barngarla, and Nari Nari.)
- [Benedict Foley's](#) Apps (for Aboriginal languages such as Pertame, Kune, Kayardilt, Gamilaraay, Yuwaalaraay, and others)
- [Victorian Aboriginal Corporation for Languages](#) (for Australian languages such as Tyalingi, Wadawurrung, Wemba Wemba, Taungurung and more)
- [Miromaa](#) Aboriginal Language and Technology Centre

## Dictionary-Building Platforms

### Talking Dictionaries (by Living Tongues Institute)

<https://talkingdictionaries.app/>

A Talking Dictionary is an interactive online tool that digitally preserves words and phrases, and it allows the user to hear high-quality audio recordings of their language, as well as record and upload new content and images. Living Tongues Institute for Endangered Languages first launched a desktop-friendly version of the Talking Dictionary software in 2007 and collaborated with speakers to create over 120 Talking Dictionaries between 2007 and 2018.



Talking Dictionaries promote connectivity over vast distances, and support an online community of language learners who wish to hear and learn a language without close proximity to proficient speakers. They allow thousands of recorded words and phrases to be available at one's fingertips. High-quality audio recordings can be created and saved in the dictionary entries so that community members, new speakers and research scholars can listen to the correct pronunciation by a speaker. They serve multiple functions for different communities of stakeholders and provide real opportunities for indigenous citizen science.

## The SIL's Dictionary App Builder

<https://software.sil.org/dictionaryappbuilder/>

According to their website, the SIL's Dictionary App Builder “helps you to build customized dictionary apps for Android and iOS smartphones and tablets. You specify the lexicon data file to use, the app name, fonts, colors, the ‘about box’ information, the audio, illustrations and the icons. Dictionary App Builder will package everything together and build the customized app for you. You can then install it on your phone, send it to others by Bluetooth, share it on microSD memory cards and publish it to app stores on the Internet.”



## APPENDIX 1

Below is a complete list of the 170+ languages offered on the [Memrise](#) language-learning website.

Languages of Europe	Languages of Asia & the Pacific	Arabic & Middle Eastern Languages
English (UK) English (US) Spanish (Spain) Spanish (Mexico) French German Swiss German Portuguese (Portugal) Portuguese (Brazil) Italian Dutch Finnish Danish Greek Norwegian Swedish Albanian Eastern Armenian Western Armenian Basque Breton Catalan Cornish Estonian Faroese Flemish Georgian Gothic Hungarian Icelandic Irish Ladin Ladino	Russian Chinese (Simplified) Chinese (Traditional) Mandarin (Spoken Lessons) Cantonese Cantonese Jyutping Ningbo Dialect Taishanese Hakka Japanese Kanji (orthography lessons) Bengali Gujarati Hindi Telugu Urdu Marathi Kannada Malayalam Pali Punjabi Sanskrit Tamang Nepali Tamil Indonesian Korean Thai Vietnamese Mongolian Azerbaijani Hawaiian Kazakh	Classical Quranic Arabic Egyptian Arabic Gulf Khaliji Arabic Iraqi Arabic Levantine Arabic Modern Standard Arabic North African Maghrebi Arabic Hebrew Turkish Aramaic Kurdish Persian Yiddish Circassian Laz



Latvian Lithuanian Luxembourgish Maltese Manx Occitan Romanian Lule Sami Northern Sami Ume Sami Scots Scottish Gaelic Welsh Russian Bosnian Croatian Czech Polish Serbian Bulgarian Slovak Slovenian Ukrainian Belarusian Macedonian Ossetic Galician  <b>Classical Languages</b> Latin Ancient Greek	Ainu Burmese Cebuano Dzongkha Javanese Khmer Kyrgyz Malay Maori Marshallese Tagalog Tibetan	
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Languages of Africa	Indigenous Languages of the Americas	Creoles
Coptic Swahili Afrikaans Akan-Twi Amharic Hausa Kaonde Kinyarwanda Luganda Malagasy Mandinka Nyanja Somali Soninke Wolof Zulu	Cherokee Algonquian languages Alutiiq Choctaw Citizen Potawatomi Greenlandic Guarani Inuktitut Lakota Nahuatl languages Quechua	Haitian

Sign Languages taught on Memrise	Constructed (or Invented) Languages taught on Memrise
American Sign Language (ASL) Argentinian Sign Language Australian Sign Language (Auslan) British Sign Language (BSL) French Sign Language (LSF) Korean Sign Language Swedish Sign Language	Esperanto Interlingua (International Auxiliar) Klingon Lojban Morse Code Na'vi Quenya