First steps towards a tool to analyze keyboarding activities in minority languages

Currently no framework exists to evaluate or rank the complexity of the text input task on a per orthography bases. We present on the challenges which must be addressed by a cross-language text input assessment framework. We discuss relevant user experience (UX) considerations for keyboard layouts and unique actions undertaken in the communicative act of 'entextualizing' language (typing). We follow previous work which focuses on majority language text input methods (Bellman & MacKenzie 1998, Castellucci & MacKenzie 2013, MacKenzie 1992, 2002, 2007, MacKenzie & Soukoreff 2002, Soukoreff & MacKenzie 2001, 2003a, b) and apply considerations for minority language orthographies - especially those orthographies which overtly mark tone and other distinctions via diacritics.

The ability to communicate with electronic text based devices is important in this era of globalization. Many minority language users often find it difficult to type in their languages because of the way that orthography/language specific characters are accessed through existing keyboard layouts ([Author] 2012). The keyboard layout is an essential component in text input both on mobile touch screen and traditional devices. Barriers to efficiently using text in digital mediums has a wide impact on language vitality, by affecting the way that language users perceive their language's viability in the 21st century context. The text input challenge has been often acknowledged by minority language users (Esizmetor 2009: 13, Zheltov 2005). Perceptions about the need to be able to use text based digital communication devices has sufficiently challenged language communities leading some to change their orthographies (Boerger 2007: 133: South Pacific, Cooper 2005: 149, 160: Central Asia, Jany 2010: Americas). Simons and Lewis (2010) describe the social practice of literacy (EGIDS levels four and five) as a sign of a healthy language. A text input device which does not intuitively work for language users can be seen as discriminating and be a reason for speakers to choose to not use their language in digital mediums (Trosterud 2012). We propose a language agnostic framework for text input analysis for the benefit of language development efforts and software developers alike.

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