

A Heritage Language Hub in Adult Migrants' Home Languages



Katharine Miles k.miles@newcastle.ac.uk 160045574, Q100 Linguistics
Professor Martha Young-Scholten (Supervisor) martha.young-scholten@newcastle.ac.uk
 School of English Literature, Language and Linguistics, Newcastle University
Collaborated with: **Dr Joy Peyton** jpeyton@cal.org Centre for Applied Linguistics
Dr Ian Cheffy ian_cheffy@sil.org SIL International
Dr Fernanda Minuz fminuz@ihu.edu Independent Researcher

Introduction

With 3.5 million refugees having never been to school (UNHCR 2017), there is a need to provide adult migrants with basic language and literacy skills to help them integrate into the society of their host country. Learning to read in their home language first or alongside their new language provides a better foundation for literacy learning. The Heritage Language Hub identifies literacy materials in non-literate migrants' languages with the fewest resources. Links to these resources have been placed in a resource hub for LESLLA (Literacy Education and Second Language Learning for Adults) teachers to find materials to help their learners find appropriate reading material.

Aims

- Collaborate with LESLLA teachers to discover which languages are most in need of resources
- Discover which resources are available in these languages
- Collate and sort links to the resources into a hub

Literature Review

Collier and Thomas (2007) argue it is important for learners to continue speaking and using their home language while developing their second language. This is why the Hub will find home or 'heritage' language resources for migrants, rather than just resources to help learn the host country's majority language.

'Heritage language' has multiple definitions (Aalberse & Muysken in press). A heritage language speaker can refer to a person who grew up speaking a community language rather than a majority language. By contrast, it can also refer to people with ancestral ties to a language, although they may not be able to speak it.

As far as possible, the resources to which the Hub will provide links should have audio accompanying the written stories, as audio is shown to be beneficial for those with limited reading proficiency (Hartman 1961).

Method

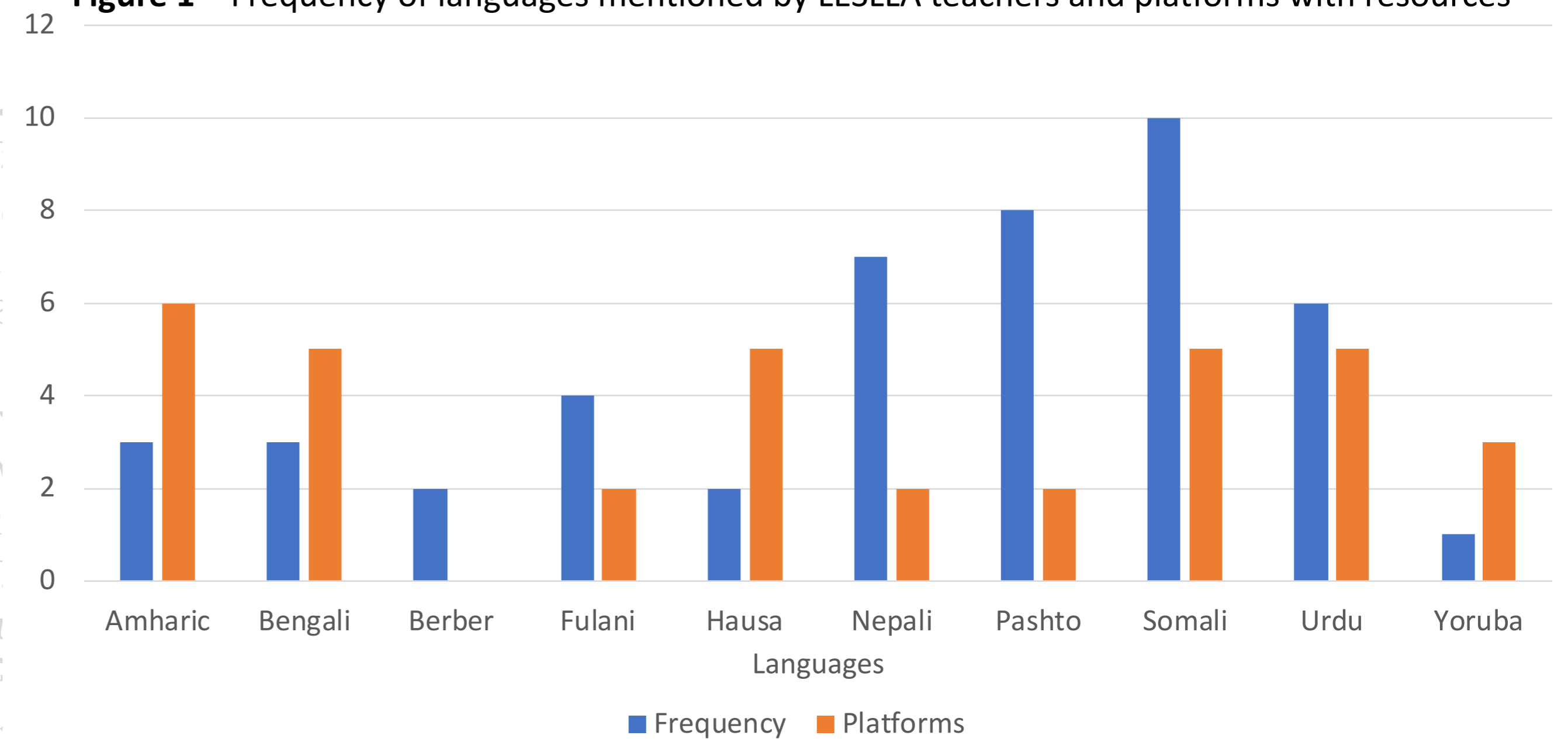
1. Survey LESLLA teachers to identify the languages spoken by their students
2. Research migration statistics for a select group of countries receiving higher numbers of non-/low-literate migrants: Belgium, Canada, Finland, Italy, Spain, the UK and the USA
3. Combine results to look for the most prevalent languages
4. Find and collate resources and links to these
5. Collaborate with LiASIG researchers for links to more resources if necessary

Results

After compiling an initial list of 153 languages most commonly encountered by LESLLA teachers, further research winnowed the list to 32 languages with the fewest resources and the greatest need. Over 5220 resources on 107 platforms were identified, of which some were categorised into dialects. Some had no accessible literary materials, for example Berber, Romani and dialects such as Kurmanji, Northern Kurdish and Palewani. It is important to note that some Fulani dialects are more mutually intelligible than others, with some bordering on unintelligibility (Diop 1993: 90). However, some resources simply state 'Fulani' and are not classified into one of the dialects, whilst others were categorised as Fulfulde, the eastern Fulani dialect, which is not intelligible to speakers of a different dialect.

Figure 1 shows a sample of ten languages and compares frequency mentioned by LESLLA teachers against the number of platforms with identified resources. Whilst there were more resources for Amharic, Bengali, Hausa and Yoruba, the six other languages show that demand for resources is greater than availability. In particular, Berber is spoken by students in the USA and Spain, however, from the websites used, no written resources were found.

Figure 1 – Frequency of languages mentioned by LESLLA teachers and platforms with resources



Discussion

From Figure 1, it is clear there are some platforms providing literacy materials. However, there is still a dearth of resources for most languages targeted. While the Hub is focused on links to materials for migrants who grew up speaking the language, given the broader definition of heritage language speaker, the Hub also includes links to resources for speakers learning Lingala and Sorani as a second language.

Illustrations and Background

Echesa, C. 2015. *7 Colours of a Rainbow*.
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Conclusion

There are encouraging statistics about the number of resources available worldwide for non-literate migrants and their children in their heritage languages. Of the 32 languages selected, only two had no resources. Following the creation of the Hub, the next step in this project is to develop guidance to help teachers use the Hub to its full potential.

Abbreviations

LESLLA – Literacy Education and Second Language Learning for Adults
LiASIG – British Association for Applied Linguistics Language in Africa Special Interest Group

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