

A Runyakitara Culture Wiki

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ABSTRACT

Peterson Asingwire developed a Runyakitara culture framework in 2013, with the aim of using the wiki as a tool for Runyakitara culture documentation, collaboration, sharing, preservation, and revitalization. This paper discusses the implementation of his framework using the wikispaces web hosting service. The Runyakitara culture wiki is entirely presented in Runyakitara, from page titles to introductory information. The wiki currently has three pages: one for proverbs (enfumu), idioms (emiguutuuro), and riddles (ebishaakuzo). Our wiki is available to be read by everyone, though only members are allowed to edit and update the pages. We hope that our wiki will grow as a repository of Runyakitara culture and realize the purposes for which it was created.

Keywords: *wiki, Runyakitara, indigenous language, culture, collaborative learning, collaborative writing*

INTRODUCTION

All languages, whether spoken or written, embody the culture from which they originated in the world [7]. Runyakitara, a combination of four indigenous Ugandan dialects [1], embodies the cultures of all four peoples. The combination of the individual dialects into a single language was supposed to enable the growth of the language by creating more users and allowing for the application of the language in books, schools, and technologies. Though this has happened to some extent, the preservation and documentation of more language and other cultural aspects is still lacking. The Runyakitara culture wiki was built as a means by which Runyakitara culture experts can collaborate and contribute cultural artifacts in order to create a knowledge archive which can be shared with the world.

To Jimoyiannis [10], a wiki is a “*dynamic, open content, constantly changing web page that can be viewed and modified by any participant.*” The word “wiki” (the Hawaiian word for “quick”) was first used by Ward Cunningham to name the collaborative tool he developed on the internet in 1994 [3] cited in [2, 10, 11, 12, 16]. Since then, a wiki has come to mean a fully editable website that allows a user to read, reorganize, edit, and update the structure and content of the wiki according to one’s desire [2, 15, 16]. Parker and Chao [12] simply defined a wiki as a collaborative website; while Slotter [16] defined a wiki as an informational website which can be edited by any user. A wiki therefore provides its users with both author and editor privileges, thereby enabling collaborative contributions of content by authoring, revising, reviewing, modifying, and sharing content [10]. The most popular wiki is Wikipedia [19].

Wikis can be used to: support Computer Supported Collaborative Learning (CSCL) [2, 15], where collaboration in education and research are augmented by technology [2, 10, 11]; facilitate the dissemination of information [2]; enable the exchange of ideas [2, 10, 15]; and facilitate social, peer, and group interaction [2, 7, 10, 11, 15]. Wikis can also be used for knowledge creation and management [11, 15] and are able to incorporate content in multimedia formats (images, sounds, and videos) [10]. Wikis are particularly suited to the above tasks because they are generally easy to access, edit, and update [11].

The main aim of this project was to create a knowledge base wiki, a knowledge repository [10, 12] of Runyakitara culture, as contributed by Runyakitara experts throughout the world. Runyakitara is a generic form of four indigenous dialects in Uganda: Rukiga, Runyankore, Runyoro, and Rutooro [1]. Culture in the context of this paper refers to the cumulative deposit of knowledge, experience, beliefs, values, meanings, roles, notions of time, hierarchies, special relations, and concepts of the universe of Runyakitara speakers, who are the Bakiga, Banyankore, Banyoro, and Batooro [1]. Runyakitara

cultural aspects can therefore include folk songs, proverbs, marriage customs, riddles, dress, idioms, and legends and tales. For now, our wiki only contains proverbs, idioms, and riddles.

The Runyakitara culture wiki is presented in the document writing mode, where the contributors create collaborative unsigned documents which, after several modifications and updates by several authors, become the shared knowledge of the contributors [2]. Due to the need to ensure the correct spelling, grammar, and structure of the information contained on the wiki, edit and update permissions are restricted to a selected group of members. However, everybody is able to view what is on the wiki. It is hoped that the resulting content will create or increase the personal and community identity and interaction among the Bakiga, Banyankore, Banyoro, and Batooro. This paper is arranged as follows: section 2 discusses the key aspects of the framework proposed by [1]; section 3 explains how the framework was implemented in a wiki; section 4 presents several ways in which our wiki is useful to Runyakitara culture; and section 5 concludes and discusses future work.

1. THE WIKI-CULTURE FRAMEWORK

The framework on which our wiki is based was developed by Peterson Asingwire in his undergraduate thesis [1]. The conceptual structure documented in [1] served as a guide for the implementation of the Runyakitara culture wiki. This section discusses the key parts of the framework, the extent to which our wiki is based on it, and deviations from the framework.

1.1. Framework Aspects

Asingwire [1] used a cross-sectional analytical and descriptive survey design to assess the knowledge of the younger generation on wiki-culture and their native culture, to study the interest of the younger generation in preserving their native culture, to research what aspects of Runyakitara culture could be shared on a wiki, and then develop a framework for a wiki-culture for Runyakitara. He found out that most of the fifty respondents (students from the School of Languages, Literature, and Communication at Makerere University) knew at least one Runyakitara proverb and riddle but lacked knowledge on Runyakitara idioms (only 32% knew at least one idiom); 88% had no knowledge of a wiki; and a majority (96%) were interested in preserving their native culture. He also found out that 93% of fifteen staff from the School of Languages, Literature, and Communication at Makerere University were strongly willing to share their knowledge of Runyakitara culture on a wiki.

Asingwire [1] proposed a framework that would ensure that every user is registered and known to the wiki administrator for security purposes. After logging-on, the wiki user would be able to navigate to the desired content (whether proverbs, riddles, or idioms), add to or edit the content on the wiki, ask or interact with other users, and log-out [1]. A user of the Runyakitara culture wiki would perform the following steps: start in order to register or log-in, read the available information, write new

information, leave a comment, ask a question, and then log-out [1]. The next section discusses how these steps have been implemented.

1.2. Structure of Implemented Framework

The created wiki allows everyone to view the information on all pages, but only members are allowed to update the wiki content. This was done as a quality assurance measure, to ensure that only Runyakitara experts can alter the content on the wiki. As proposed in the framework by Asingwire [1], our implemented wiki allows the user to: use the URL to access the wiki; read the information on the different wiki pages by using the links; log on (only if one is a member); edit and update the information on the wiki using the “Edit” button (for members only); ask a question, leave a comment, or even request for membership; and log-out (for members only).

1.3. Deviations from Proposed Framework

Our wiki deviated from the framework proposed by [1] in three main ways:

- Instead of using a “Start” button to launch the wiki, the user of our wiki goes to the wiki’s web address to access it;
- Protected instead of public access was implemented, to limit the edit and update rights of the wiki content to wiki members only; and
- There is no explicit registration in order to become a member of the wiki; instead one can only become a member by requesting the wiki organizer for membership, or by being invited by the wiki organizer.

2. RUNYAKITARA-CULTURE WIKI

The Runyakitara culture wiki was created on the 16th of May 2014 and is available from <http://runyakitara-culture.wikispaces.com/>. It currently has four pages: the home page (“Runyakitara-culture-home”), the idioms’ page (“runyakitara-culture-emiguutuuro”), the proverbs’ page (“runyakitara-culture-enfumu”), and the riddles’ page (“Runyakitara-culture-Ebishaakuzo”). The choice of wikispaces [20] as the domain of our wiki was made based on the fact that wikispaces is a free web hosting service and is primarily for educational wikis [21]. The wiki content (except the website specific content like “My Wikis,” “Help,” “Sign Out,” etc.) is entirely in Runyakitara. Translations of the text on the wiki was deliberately avoided in order to: 1) create a purely Runyakitara culture knowledge base; and (2) prevent the watering-down of complex language structures (such as idioms, proverbs, and riddles) whose meaning would be lost in translation.

The home page of the wiki, <http://runyakitara-culture.wikispaces.com/home>, contains introductory information about the creators of the wiki, its purpose, and explanations about and links to the pages with proverbs, riddles, and idioms. The Oxford English dictionary [13] defines a proverb as a “short, well-known pithy saying, stating a general truth or piece of advice.” Asingwire [1] more simply defined it as a simple and concrete saying, popularly

known and repeated, which expresses a truth based on common sense or the practical experience of humanity. Proverbs in Runyakitara are “enfumu” and a list of them is available from <http://runyakitara-culture.wikispaces.com/enfumu>. Riddles in Runyakitara are “ebishaakuzo”, and can generally be defined as statements, questions, or phrases which have a veiled meaning, and therefore require ingenuity in ascertaining their answers or meanings [1, 14]. A list of the questions or statements and their correct answers or meanings is available from <http://runyakitara-culture.wikispaces.com/ebishaakuzo>. An idiom can be defined as a “group of words established by usage as having a meaning not deducible from those of the individual words” [9]; or as a word, phrase, or expression which cannot be taken literally [1]; for example, “over the moon” or “see the light” [9]. Idioms in Runyakitara are “emiguutuuro” and a list of them is available from <http://runyakitara-culture.wikispaces.com/Emiguutuuro>.

The Runyakitara culture wiki is currently set to the protected permissions, which allow everybody to view the wiki’s content but restricts edit and update operations to invited wiki members. By the end of May 2014, several Runyakitara individual experts, as well as groups of persons from Runyakitara Facebook groups, and the Runyakitara department at Makerere University Institute of Languages were invited to join the wiki as members.

3. EXPECTED USE

The Runyakitara culture wiki was created with the main aim of providing a knowledge base which would be used to reignite the relevance and significance of Runyakitara culture. One of the expected outcomes of creating this wiki is that it will slow down or even reverse the decline of Runyakitara. According to Woodbury [18] cited in [7], a language becomes endangered based on: (1) its number of first speakers (those who speak it as their first language); (2) the age demographic of those speakers; and (3) the domain in which the language is spoken. Asingwire [1] described the reasons for the loss of cultural heritage, values, and history in Uganda as being due to the death of elders (first speakers) and the lack of communication about culture between the elders and the younger generation. He further stated examples of cultural loss as the inability of the younger generation (in their indigenous language) to: differentiate between an idiom and saying; greet, thank, and/or ask a question; and tell stories [1]. He concluded by warning of the extinction of indigenous culture (including language) in Uganda if the current trend goes on unchecked. Proverbs, riddles, and idioms were selected as the starting point of our wiki because they go beyond mere communication; they portray natural phenomena like landscape, plants, and animals, and recount events from history [1]; they are used to convey ideas, theologies, cultural practices, and artistic skills [7]. The purposes to which our wiki can be put are explained in the sections below.

3.1. Runyakitara Language Preservation and Revitalization

It is estimated that more than 90% of the 6,900 languages spoken in the world today will be extinct at the end of this century [7]. The most significant factor causing language decline is the lack of indigenous people who speak their language as a first language, which leads to less and less of such languages being passed down to younger generations [1, 7]. This phenomenon was brought about by, and is still occurring because widely popular (and usually colonial)

languages (like English and Spanish) are pushing native languages out of homes; thereby reducing language learning opportunities of the younger generations from their elders [7], and thus reducing the relevance and significance of native languages among indigenous peoples. Language preservation and revitalization are therefore important and urgent endeavors for many indigenous peoples in the world today, and technology is proving to be an invaluable tool in this cause.

The role of technology in language preservation and revitalization goes beyond collecting and storing language resources; it involves the ability to share, collaborate, and utilize those resources to teach new learners and/or to promote the significance and relevance of the language in today's contexts. In Uganda specifically, the death of elders is compounded by the fact that those who are still alive and able to pass on the culture have no means to address the younger generation, who are more interested in modern technologies (which the elders do not know how to use) [1]. Galla [5] mentioned several technologies that can be used to promote indigenous languages by allowing for connections among other speakers and learners all over the world, and they include: chat, email, forums, text messages, blogs, and wikis.

Hermes and King [8] stated the crucial question concerning the appropriate role of technology in indigenous language revitalization as “*How can community members effectively use technology in their efforts to revitalize a language?*” They proposed three possible answers: (1) communicative use, where technologies like the internet can provide a modern context, purpose, significance, and relevance [5] to indigenous languages traditionally regarded as outdated; (2) materials production, where technology is used to rapidly create and distribute language materials and resources, thereby placing the design and distribution of indigenous language materials in the hands of the indigenous community; and (3) documentation and archival efforts, where technology is used to store large amounts of information on indigenous languages. The Runyakitara culture wiki hopes to encompass all three roles, first as a means of collecting and storing various artifacts of the Runyakitara culture contributed by the community, second as an archive of the collected cultural artifacts, and lastly to provide the relevance and the means of distribution of Runyakitara culture to the world.

3.2.As an Educational Tool in Schools

One of the most significant challenges faced by language instructors in indigenous communities is the lack of textbooks as well as culturally relevant and authentic materials with which to depict the language [5]. Galla [5] presented several examples of how the internet has helped to teach the Hawaiian language both in educational institutions and personally. A wiki, as one such internet technology, can be considered as a learning object if it contains an educational purpose, and can therefore be used to engage students in learning with others within a collaborative environment [12]. As an educational tool, our wiki will facilitate the collaborative finding, shaping, and sharing of knowledge on Runyakitara culture. In terms of aiding the learning and/or teaching of Runyakitara, this wiki can provide an avenue by which

authentic and culturally relevant community-contributed aspects of the Runyakitara language can be accessed. This will hopefully prevent the situation where Runyakitara language students, like other native language students around the world who achieve high scores in a language class, are unable to actually use the language [5].

“Technology is by no means the most important means to produce speakers, but rather it gives students more authentic ways to communicate and interact using the language” [5]. Following the new education policy in Uganda that requires pupils to be taught in their native language for the first four years of primary education [17] and the teaching of the Runyakitara language at Makerere University [1], our wiki can provide a reference point in learning in schools by illustrating language aspects such as spelling and vowel assimilation. Hermes and King [8] however, having noted the much needed support and status given to indigenous languages taught in schools, discussed the key problem of the school approach as the transformation of the form and function of the language into an academic, frozen, and culturally disconnected register. This is because students are taught the vocabulary and grammatical structures of the language, but use and transmission of the knowledge gained is not usually encouraged outside of school [8]. The Runyakitara culture wiki aims to combine technology with language learning by supplementing the lessons instead of being the lesson (as recommended by [5]). By providing a source of language structures (proverbs, idioms, and riddles) which students can apply to enhance their understanding and practical use of the language outside of the classroom, the wiki can be used by learners to provide a richer experience when speaking the learned language in everyday situations. Also, the content on the wiki can be regarded as original material which reflects the Runyakitara culture, perspective, and reality; as compared to textbook content structured for academic skills.

Several authors have documented the benefits of applying wiki technology to group classroom projects, especially in tertiary institutions, as: students’ enthusiasm and self-motivation towards the work, the convenience of collaborating with group members irrespective of time and place, the development and enhancement of multiple skills (computer, research, writing, and presentation skills), and the ease of instructor feedback and monitoring of individual student contributions and overall project progress [2, 10, 11, 12, 16]. Wikis help in the processing of group projects by enabling students to comment on each other’s work, allow for the work posted by one student to be edited by others, and enable the tracking of the contributions (revision history [11, 15]) of each student to the wiki [11]. As Makerere University is the only institute of higher learning which currently teaches courses in Runyakitara [1], the use of 21st century teaching skills such as critical thinking, problem solving skills, computer and technology skills, and communication and self-direction skills [12] can be incorporated in the learning process. Adding collaborative skills to the above, our wiki can be used to develop research projects based on researching Runyakitara cultural aspects which can be added to what already exists on the wiki.

3.3.As a Family Learning Tool

Scholars and supporters of language revitalization have long pointed to the home as a critical domain for language transmission [8]. This is because indigenous languages are often taught

out of context, not supported outside of the classroom, and have severely restricted use in the wider community [5]. Hermes and King [8] discussed the role of new technology in the teaching and renewal of less-commonly taught languages among children and families in informal contexts, as opposed to the common literature focused on the teaching of adults in higher education or at work. It is hoped that this wiki will be used as a tool which will provide the content with which to jumpstart communication in Runyakitara in the home, as the *"conversations, which provide rich incentives and opportunities for language learning and use, take place at home with family"* [8]. Runyakitara riddles, for example, can be used to play games among family members. This can provide intergenerational, family-based activities which cannot easily be replicated in the classroom setting which, for the most part, is teacher-centric and age-segregated and usually focused on reading, writing, and academic skills [8].

3.4.Others

The Runyakitara culture wiki can serve several other purposes including: increasing the content and presence of Runyakitara on the web, which, by being paired with a modern technology such as the internet, could result in a renewed interest and pride from younger generations; providing opportunities of cultural lessons expressed in proverbs among family members, which can result in the teaching of various language aspects such as pronunciation and intonation; create a basis for conversation between the younger generation and their elders (who are the repositories of the oral culture) and update their cultural findings to the wiki for others to learn; and providing a medium preferred by the younger generation in which to access aspects of their culture.

4. FUTURE WORK

The creation of the Runyakitara culture wiki is only the beginning of a large body of work concerning the use of wikis in indigenous language preservation and revitalization. Future work includes: to monitor the number of hits to the wiki as well as user feedback in order to assess the popularity and relevance of the wiki to the target population; to research the functions to which the wiki is being put (especially the school and family education modes) by the users; to analyze the growth of the wiki content both in the existing pages (ebishaakuzo, emiguutuuro, and enfumu) and the creation of new pages for new Runyakitara culture aspects; and to investigate whether the wiki has made any changes to the attitudes of the younger generation towards Runyakitara.

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