

Media Research That Helps Keep Rare Languages Alive

Every two weeks, one of the world's approximately 6,000 languages "disappears," according to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). In fact, UNESCO considers more than 50 percent of the world's languages "endangered." The vast majority of the world's languages are spoken by minuscule populations: about 5,760 languages are spoken by 4 percent of the world's inhabitants.

Though InterMedia publishes the results of its research in English, the research would never be accomplished if not for its connections with people who speak the often-rare languages of local inhabitants in developing and transitional countries. InterMedia's work with less common languages helps its clients better serve these small populations and keeps languages such as Belarusian and Avar thriving.

Belarusian

Even a few years ago, Belarusian was a vanishing language. In its research over the past decade, InterMedia has had great difficulty finding respondents who are truly fluent. While Belarus was part of the Soviet Union, Russian was the de-facto state language so there was little need or opportunity to use Belarusian. Nearly everything--media, education, politics, culture and social life--was in Russian.

Since the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Belarusian has made somewhat of a comeback. Politically, it became important to provide opportunities to learn and use Belarusian in daily life. But, in spite of the government's efforts, InterMedia's annual surveys over the past few years have not indicated a significant change in the use of Belarusian. In 2003, a national survey showed 8 percent of respondents spoke Belarusian at home, 29 percent spoke a mix of Belarusian and Russian (known as Trosianka), and 63 percent spoke Russian.

InterMedia is a leader in providing global media research, evaluation and consulting. The Washington, D.C.-based organization serves international media, government and non-governmental organizations requiring high standard, cost-effective and culturally appropriate research in transitional and developing countries worldwide.

InterMedia in the Field. . .



Conducting an in-depth interview in Asia.

Because of these patterns, only a handful of media outlets in Belarus currently cater to Belarusian speakers. However, given the government's continuing promotion of the Belarusian language in schools and public life, and its recent ban on Russian-language content on state-owned broadcasters, this situation is changing.

InterMedia research will continue to track use of Belarusian and help shape broadcasting strategy.

Avar

Between the Black and Caspian seas is an area known as the Caucasus, the crossroads of dozens of cultures and languages. The former republics of Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan gained

independence after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Other parts of the Caucasus such as Chechnya and Dagestan were, and remain, part of Russia.

The Republic of Dagestan, on the western shore of the Caspian Sea, is home to more than 30 ethnic groups. The largest of these groups is the Avars, which make up about one-fourth of the estimated 2 million people in Dagestan. An InterMedia survey found 26 percent of the nearly 3,000 people surveyed spoke Avar at home. Other sources put the number of Avar speakers worldwide at about 600,000.

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