

Vitality of Damana, the language of the Wiwa indigenous community **Tatiana Fernandez, Western University**

This project examines the vitality of Damana [ISO 693-3: mbp], in the two only communities that offer bilingual high school education in Damana and Spanish to the Wiwa indigenous community located in the slopes of the mountains of Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta in Colombia. Despite having a speech community of 7,400 individuals, previous research on Damana, remains poor, and very few grammar or lexicon surveys have been produced (Anderson, 2014). Moreover, we do not know of any study that had considered Damana within these two educational contexts. This study measures the level of endangerment of the language according to the factors used to compile the UNESCO Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger (Moseley, 2012).

According to this objective, it was decided to use three different tools in the collection of quantitative and qualitative data. This approach permits the triangulation of the results to obtain a more accurate interpretation in order to categorize the vitality of the language appropriately (Litosseliti, 2018).

The first instrument is a questionnaire to elicit quantitative information. The questions gather demographic and background language information, self-reported proficiency and use of Spanish and Damana from 56 individuals. Secondly, the researcher conducted interviews to teachers and parents [n=27] and students [n=29] in the two communities to elicit attitudes and perspectives about the two languages to complete a thorough description of the condition of the Damana and the beliefs of the communities regarding it. Finally, the researcher completed detailed field notes containing descriptions of the schools, classes, material and methodology used and languages spoken in different situations.

Based on the information gathered, we measured and analyzed the vitality of the language in the light of the nine UNESCO factors. Results show Damana is the mother tongue of 62% of the school's students. However, all respondents self identified as fluent in Spanish and 72% chose Spanish as they preferred language of communication meanwhile 21% of them manifested not to understand Damana. As per the attitude towards the language, 72% recognize the importance of learning Spanish to communicate with others and only 17% consider that the lack of knowledge of Damana affects the identity of the Wiwas.

Results indicate a difference in language use and competence between older and younger generations suggesting a pattern of language shift that allows us to rate the language as vulnerable or definitely endangered. Moreover, each factor was carefully examined to determine the real situation and the type of support and actions needed for language revitalization, maintenance, perpetuation and documentation (Drude, 2003).

The project concludes with general considerations of the reach of the different initiatives applied in the two schools including the efforts of the community and the Wiwa secretary of education. Further steps in the revitalization of the language can be better designed if the current situation of language loss is clearly determined. Information on language vitality is essential in the description of a language, especially when language endangerment is identified, to provide an effective support effort at different levels.

References

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