

The revival of Añunnükü or Paraujano language

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ABSTRACT. Añunnükü is an Arawak language that may be described as sleeping. There is only one speaker left. Despite this fragile situation, many efforts are taking place in attempt to awaken the language. This paper seeks to describe factors that have caused the Añu people to be in this current situation, as well as to document how language loss is being prevented. The description and ensuing discussion on the vitality of the language is based within an ecological framework (Mühlhäusler 1996, Mufwene 2002). The information was gathered from the literature, six interviews, and from class observations in 2012.*

Keywords: Añu, Paraujano, Arawak, Linguistic Ecology, Language Revival

1. INTRODUCTION. The idea of reviving a sleeping language is a rather new phenomenon that has come about due to the increasing awareness regarding the speed of language loss within the last century. Zuckerman and Walsh (2011) propose that Australian Aboriginal language revival movements should practically model their efforts on the documented successes that Modern Hebrew went through. Although their proposal provides great insight about the linguistic issues in reviving a language, they also underestimate the complex non-linguistic factors that allowed the emergence of Modern Hebrew, such as nationalism. It is evident that the immense ecological differences between Israelis and Australian Aborigines in their respective experiences do not allow a simple modeling of efforts. Any model for reviving a language has to comprise parameters regarding the interdependency between linguistic and ecological factors.

Mühlhäusler (1996) explains that the metaphor of ecology in linguistics emphasizes the fact that a language is not detached from its context, or its environment. Just as biologists restore the niche of an endangered species in order to improve its vitality, linguists must address how to restore the system in which a specific language thrives. Mufwene (2002) believes that the most influential factors that cause language loss are changes in the socioeconomic ecology of a population. A new socioeconomic system may no longer support an ancestral language. Both of these authors' views agree that language external phenomena determine the fate of a language.

The Añu, or Paraujano, comprise approximately 21,000 people who identify themselves as the people of the water. They live on the coasts and islands of Maracaibo Lake and along the Limón River in Venezuela. They are one of the few surviving Arawak cultures of the Caribbean and today they firmly struggle to awaken their sleeping language. A young man, Yofri Márquez, who is in his thirties, is the only speaker alive today (Álvarez 2009:93). Despite their lack of speakers, poverty, and water pollution, the Añu people today face a very favorable sociopolitical environment that may allow the re-awakening of their language.

This paper will describe current efforts of reviving Añunnükü, as well as some factors in its ecology that have influenced and continue to influence its vitality. This description presents an additional reflection on linguistic revival efforts within a decolonization context. It seeks to be more comparable to the situation of Australian Aborigines and other populations in the

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Americas. This ecological description is based on various linguistic, social, and political issues. The information in this paper has been collected from the literature, from six interviews held with academics and leaders involved in these efforts, as well as from Añu language class observations that took place in June 2012.¹

2. LINGUISTIC ECOLOGY AND LANGUAGE REVIVAL. The ecology of a language refers to all factors external to language that may affect a language's vitality, either positively or negatively. Ignoring ecological factors becomes especially problematic for language revival or revitalization efforts. Fields such as sociolinguistics or historical linguistics have been exceptional by taking ecological factors into account when analyzing linguistic phenomena. However, linguistic ecology attempts to encompass broader factors by considering, for instance, how the physical environment also influences a specific speech community's vitality.

Linguistic ecology metaphorically parallels many concepts from biology that aid our understanding and description of linguistic issues. Biological metaphors in linguistics are already plenty. We speak of 'genetic' relationships between languages, syntactic 'trees' and lexical 'roots'. More recently even 'survival' or 'endangerment' are commonly used for language as if these were species. Proponents of linguistic ecology highlight some of these analogies by blurring the distinction between the metaphoric and the literal. For instance, biologists believe that stability within diverse ecosystems comes about via the adaptability and creativity of the species within it (Skutnabb-Kangas & Phillipson 2008). For humans, this adaptability and creativity have manifested in cultural and linguistic diversity. Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson believe that these two abilities are essential for the long-term planetary survival of all life. Therefore, 'language' may replace 'species' and result in working hypotheses that also add a moral touch to the reasons for maintaining linguistic diversity.

Within Latin America, literature regarding the ecological approach to language is almost non-existent. However, the inclusion of systemic factors regarding a culture's vitality is inherent in the views that indigenous peoples hold when conceptualizing language. The indigenous approach to language does not divide language use and transmission from its own specific socioeconomic setting or political contexts in which they exist. For instance, the history of linguistic domination and oppression is often invoked in Latin American indigenous schools in order to allow the maturing of the students' attitudes towards their heritage language (López 2008:141). In the last few decades, educational programs such as Ethnoeducation in Colombia, and Intercultural Bilingual Education² in most of Latin America, have emerged out of the need to autonomously determine how the transmission of indigenous language and culture are to be related to each group's specific environmental, political, social and economic concerns.

Furthermore, an extremely important concept that ties a language's vitality to its ecologies is the indivisibility between language, identity, and territory. Indigenous peoples must remain interconnected with their ancestral territory in order to ensure the continuity of their languages. Forceful displacement of a population amounts to a drastic change in their ecology. The likelihood that a new ecology may sustain their language is insignificant. Even in cases where displacement is not forceful, colonizers like the Norman French in England encountered unsupportive ecologies and had to shift to English (Mufwene 2002:5). The relocation of Native Americans in the US was tragically one of the most efficient language removal strategies in this country's history. In contrast, I believe that one of the most advantageous factors in the success of the revival of Modern Hebrew was the return to their land. The lexeme *eco*, from Greek *oikos*, means 'house'. It is this dedicated physical space that allows an identity, a culture, and a

language to flourish. In today's Latin America, if what we seek is the maintenance and strengthening of native languages, it is crucial that governments guarantee titles to ancestral land to every indigenous group that has not yet received it.

Blaming colonization for language loss seems to hold true only for one style of colonization. Mufwene (2002) categorizes three colonization styles: trade, exploitation and settlement. These three styles have typically resulted in the creation of pidgins, creoles and language shift respectively. Notice that the settlement colonization, as exemplified by the Spanish in Latin America, is the only style that leads to massive language shift. In the continental Americas, this type of colonization consisted of repopulating a territory and psychosocially engaging Europeans with native populations. As a result indigenous peoples were minoritized, integrated into the new socioeconomic order, and assimilated. Since the independence of most American countries, the new powers continued the oppression of indigenous cultures with the 'benign' intention of becoming homogenous nation-states.

Nowadays, there is a vigorous new interest within the field of linguistics to direct our efforts towards turning the tide of cultural extinction towards revitalization. This idea is like swimming upriver, and for revitalizing an American indigenous language, that river is a mighty one. On top of documentation, strengthening an endangered culture takes a considerable amount of ecological restoration, such as the assumption and redressing of historical burdens, as well resisting and changing various kinds of systems. For reviving a language the task is even larger.

Although one may find several decades-old literatures regarding the revival of Hebrew (Rabin 1963) and that of Cornish (Ellis 1974), language revival is still a very new concept. The Hebrew and Cornish experiences may be the only ones to have spent over a century working to bring their respective languages back to functional life. Although there are some 100 fluent speakers of Cornish today, and some are learning it as a mother tongue (Dorian 1994:488), this story is often significantly downplayed and overshadowed by proponents of the exceptionality of Hebrew revival. One finds repeated mentions of the Hebrew case as unique and the 'only' known successful linguistic revival to date (Nahir 1998:336).

But within the last twenty years, other revival movements set in contexts where settlement colonization caused language loss have emerged. For close to two decades, in the state of Massachusetts, the Wampanoag Language Reclamation Project led by Jessie Bair has been able to preliminarily awaken this Iroquoian language that had been sleeping for more than a century (Makepeace 2010). Similarly, in Southern Australia, Karna is being actively reclaimed after not being spoken for almost a century, and is so far considered the most successful revival movement in Australia, out of several that have been emerging (Amery 2004).

3. AÑUNNÜKÜ OR PARAUJANO LANGUAGE

3.1. THE PEOPLE TODAY. The people of the water, as they identify, have historically inhabited northern Zulia, Venezuela. They are one of the few surviving Arawak cultures of the Caribbean and today they struggle to awaken their sleeping language. The Añu are the ancestral residents of the Maracaibo Lake coasts, the islands that separate the lake from the Gulf of Venezuela and the Limón River lagoons and riversides. They live in palafittes, or stilt houses above the water, they are avid fishermen, boatmen, and consider themselves to have emerged from *ainmatuaree*, the place where the horizon meets the ocean (Quintero 2009).

The Añu, like many other indigenous groups in Latin America, have been experiencing a consciousness shift that has resulted in their reevaluation of their identities. Centuries of discrimination had caused a denial of their ancestral identity. But today there is a newly born pride of being Añu. Several of my interviewees conveyed that this has been the biggest accomplishment of at least two decades of Añu cultural revitalization efforts. This dignity is most visible in the increasing results of self-determined responses to the last four censuses in Venezuela. Añu membership has increased significantly over the last couple of decades. In the 1982 census, 2,612 people declared themselves to be Añu. By 1992, the census gave a figure of 17,440 members. The 2001 census inconsistently reported 11,205 members. While the 2011 census documented over 21,000 Añu (all census results are from Mendoza et al. 2009). On the surface, we see an exaggerated population growth, but the growth is not as much in population as it is in dignity.

This psychosocial change partly results from major constitutional changes in Bolivarian Venezuela, where native peoples have achieved special privileges, as well as from a changing mainstream perspective, which is today more attentive to indigeneity as a major contributor to the re-definition of national identity. The latter factor could be exemplified by the fact that a highly modern bridge that is currently being built across Maracaibo Lake has been named after the previously forgotten 17th century Añu chief Nigale.

3.2. GENETIC CLASSIFICATION. Añunnükü is a North Arawak language. Aikhenvald (2002) uses the labels ‘Extreme North’ or ‘Caribbean’ to refer to this branch of North Arawak, which includes Añunnükü, Wayuunaiki, Lokono,³ Garífuna,⁴ and the formerly spoken Taíno, Kaketío, and Shebayo. The Añu’s closest linguistic relatives are their northwestern neighbors, the Wayuu or Guajiros. More than 300,000 people speak Wayuunaiki, and the linguistic similarities with Añunnükü are highly significant. Another possibly very closely related language could have been the one spoken by their former eastern neighbors: the Kaketío. But their language ceased to be spoken early in the colonial era and its documentation never occurred. After Wayuunaiki, the next most similar language is Lokono, although this language is spoken further east on coasts of the Guayanas. Lastly, the limited documentation of Taíno also reveals a very close relationship to Añunnükü: at least more alike than Garífuna.

Although it is linguistically obvious that Añu people should make use of the vitality of Wayuunaiki for their efforts to reawaken their own language, it is important to state that historical and political Wayuu Añu relations have today manifested an emphasis on non-Wayuunaiki cultural features within Añu identity (Patte 1990). Consequently, there is generally no desire to model Wayuunaiki features, let alone borrow lexicon. This suggests that the needed expansion of Añunnükü lexicon, possibly brought about via comparative work, must include Lokono; a population with whom there are less historical disagreements.

3.3. LANGUAGE USE. The very densely populated Maracaibo metropolitan area surrounds Añu communities. Petroleum extraction from the lake from the beginnings of the 20th century has caused the rapid urbanization of Zulia and an overwhelming shift to the cash economy. The ethnologist, Jahn (1927:70) gathered from his observations in the first decades of the century that ‘many Añu had mixed with outsiders, but even the non-Añu were speakers of their language’. The French linguist Patte (1989) found only 13 speakers in the 1970’s. Patte’s recognition of the rapid disappearance of Añunnükü caused her to copiously document the language during the

1970's and 1980's. She was personally acquainted with seven elder speakers in Sinamaica lagoon.

Today there is only one speaker of Añunnükü. Yofri Márquez is in his thirties, and he learned his ancestral language from his recently deceased grandmother, Ana Dolores Márquez (Álvarez 2009:93). There is possibly one more elder woman who is said to know the language. She is still alive but does not speak anymore due to very advanced old age. There are other semi-speakers, like Francisco Montiel, who despite his old age still retains partial knowledge of the language.

Besides Yofri Márquez's extremely rare case of intergenerational transmission, there are many Añu and non-Añu learners of the language. These learners do not use the language functionally (yet), but they represent the primary great hope for the survival of the language. Lastly, it is not superfluous to state that linguists Patte, Álvarez, Mosonyi and Bravo possess very valuable knowledge that is crucially important for the fate of the language.

The only interactional use of the language seems to be the ethnically symbolic use of words or short phrases embedded in dominant *Maracucho* Spanish. This symbolic use evidences the advanced stages of identity reclamation, as well as the incipient stages of reviving the language. Non-interactional uses of the language however seem to be more advanced. There is for instance an Añunnükü version of the Venezuelan national anthem, as well as the *Pater Noster* and the *Ave Maria* prayers. But as expected, the language emerges mostly in schools in Añu communities. Children are receiving Añunnükü instruction in three elementary schools in Santa Rosa de Agua,⁵ two others on the Sinamaica lagoon,⁶ and one in Maraca Island.⁷ It is in these spaces indeed, where children are partially acquiring the language, and thus they constitute the hope for concrete results in this language revival effort.

In El Moján, the Kanüye Añu⁸ School is unique and significant in that it trains Añu teenagers or adults to revitalize and develop their native fishing economy, traditional arts and crafts, as well as the language. Additionally the Misión Sucre in Santa Rosa de Agua gives Añu language and culture instruction for adults. Nevertheless, a great obstacle towards revival is that none of the instructors of the language are fluent, and therefore, apprentices acquire basic knowledge of the language at best. The only exception is when Yofri Márquez teaches for special occasions.⁹ Overall, it is clear that the language is not alive, but it is also evident that the efforts to reverse its disappearance are momentous and praiseworthy.

3.4. AÑUNNÜKÜ DOCUMENTATION. In the colonial documents there is mention of the people, but there seems to be almost no descriptions of the language. In the 20th century the first vocabulary lists and minor grammatical items were produced. Jahn (1914, 1927), Oramas (1918) and Rivet and Wavrin (1952) published mainly short vocabulary lists. This was practically all the documentation that the language had by the time that Marie-France Patte began her Añunnükü work. Patte (1978, 1981, 1986, 1987, 1990, 1992) published various linguistic and anthropological articles as well as her invaluable grammar titled *Estudio Descriptivo de la lengua Añun* (1989).

Around the turn of the century, Venezuelan linguists began collaborating with the communities and with UNICEF to compile all existing documentation and to create pedagogical materials that would allow the language to be taught in Añu schools to all children. They have been able to compile the dialogue book *Anii Wanükü* (Álvarez 2007) and a basic dictionary containing 3,000 words, *Liuruchaa Añunnüküimoyatü* (Álvarez & Bravo 2008). Álvarez (2009) then continued with the publication of an article on syntax and wrote a grammatical sketch,

Esbozo gramatical de la Lengua Añu, which is yet to be published. Additionally, Yofri Márquez collaborated with Álvarez, Bravo, and Fernández (among others), in turning a traditional legend told by his grandmother Ana Dolores Márquez into a children's book with an accompanying CD titled *Pütümaata keichi Pütümaata 'sleep moon, sleep'* (Márquez 2007).

These latest and most important writings supporting language revival (Álvarez 2007, Álvarez & Bravo 2008, Álvarez 2009, Márquez 2007) are written following the Venezuelan Indigenous Languages Alphabet conventions. This has defined the orthography in a very practical manner. A significant change between Patte's (1989) and Álvarez's (2007) proposed orthographies is a simplification of the vowel system. Patte described the existence of two high central vowels: unrounded [i] and rounded [u], and suggested the graphemes <ī, ü> respectively. But Álvarez believes that [u] is an allophone of [i] and thus this phoneme should be written as <ü>, as in Wayuunaiki. Furthermore, Patte described the existence of a mid central rounded vowel [ə], written as <ö>. But she also writes that both [ə] and [u] are infrequent phonemes that only occur in vowel geminates (Patte 1989:21), and that [ə] is the only vowel that does not participate in diphthongs (Patte 1989:27). Álvarez interprets the available data and Patte's descriptions of the limited distribution of these rounded central vowels as indicative that these were likely allophones. This interpretation coupled with the complexity of transmitting three distinct central vowels to native Spanish speakers without any intergenerational transmission, led to the decision to replace the rare occurrences of <ö> with either /e/ or /o/, as in Wayuunaiki (Álvarez 2007:21). In sum, the works of Patte and Álvarez definitely constitute the most important linguistic written documentation of the language to date.

But a more powerful form of documentation for the purpose of transmission has also taken place. In 2005, the Venezuelan ministry of culture presented a one-hour video documentary, *Somos Añu*. This video is an introduction of the people and their culture to Venezuelans, but it also presents their language revival efforts. In another video production with much greater revitalizing potential, Matheus and Matheus (2011) created a documentary series to be broadcast on national television, called *Los Añu: Una Lengua Patrimonial en Recuperación (The Añu: A recovering heritage language)*. This series consists of eleven 30-minute episodes describing their culture and language and their monumental efforts to reestablish themselves as Añu. These five-and-a-half hours of high quality audiovisual documentation features Yofri Márquez as a narrator and translator. Roughly half of the material is spoken in Añunnükü with subtitles in Spanish, while the other half is in Spanish with Añunnükü subtitles. Also in 2011, Añu filmmaker from Santa Rosa, Gretzy Atencio produced another TV series titled *Los Niños del Mangle (The Mangrove children)*, which is a more creative production that specifically celebrates Añu culture, although it is mostly in Spanish.

3.5. INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT. When it comes to language, the efficiency of policies may be questionable. But if Añu language revival requires its ecologies to provide the necessary space and support, the law on their side definitely fuels their process. In 1999, Venezuela reformed its Constitution. This new constitution, following the trend of constitutional reforms in the region, conceded many rights and benefits to indigenous Venezuelans. Among these, indigenous languages have become official in their own communities (Art. 9).

Although Article 119 guarantees their right to their ancestral territory, both Añu and Wayuu are still waiting for land titles. The environment of the Añu area has also been negatively affected for many decades by oil extraction generated pollution of their waters. Now Article 120 maintains that the socioeconomic or cultural integrity of the peoples is not to be harmed by

resource extraction. Sadly, the water pollution in the lake is severe, and given that the Añu economy is based around seafood, their integrity has clearly been harmed.

In the field of education, native Venezuelans have the freedom to implement their own curriculum within Intercultural Bilingual Education (Art. 121). This means that the classes must be taught in indigenous languages, as well as in Spanish, so that bilingualism and the ability to communicate both within and outside of one's culture becomes the norm for indigenous graduates. This promises to be a very long project. In most of Latin America this educational philosophy only exists in elementary schools. As for the Añu, their students must legally learn their language, but they lack speakers to teach it.

Furthermore, in 2009, the National Assembly of Venezuela passed the Indigenous Peoples Cultural Patrimony Law. This very recent law, among other mandates, prohibits copyrighting indigenous cultural heritage. Additionally, this law guarantees the 'transmission, diffusion and revaluation' of the cultural manifestations of communities that face 'the threat of extinction' (Art. 17). This is to be realized by compiling and safeguarding such manifestations in literary or audiovisual form, or by using new technologies. This same article also suggests that indigenous people be the protagonists and beneficiaries of the necessary documentation and research.

Outside of Venezuela, UNICEF has also been engaged, primarily with the Sinamaica communities, by contributing financial support within the last decade or so for the purpose saving their language and culture. They have already built a school, in the traditional palafitte style, and contributed financial aid for the publication of a dictionary (Álvarez & Bravo 2008) and a dialog book (Álvarez 2007).

4. DISCUSSION. This paper has attempted to present a picture of Añu language vitality by briefly exploring some linguistic and non-linguistic factors. On the linguistic side, much has been done with very limited resources. The dictionary (Álvarez & Bravo 2008) only has 3,000 words. It is estimated that there were around 7,000 words documented in Hebrew before they began their revival process of word creation (Rabin 1963). This is an area of concern and students of the language should know that the only two ways to increase the vocabulary is by either inventing words or borrowing them. Given the rather tense Wayuu-Añu dynamics, it is important to also consider Lokono and Garífuna lexicons when proposing neologisms.

Eira and Couzens (2010) who have been very active in the revival of Australian Aboriginal languages suggest that the lexical and grammatical processes described in language contact and language change theories are highly relevant to reviving languages. For instance, they propose the idea of language mixing in reverse. Here, the dominant language to which a culture has shifted should be gradually 'infiltrated'. The specific suggested order would first focus on the use of ancestral lexicon, with some attention to its phonological features. Then native syntactic features are to be used in the dominant language, and lastly the native morphology.

These authors believe that revival must occur through mixed language phases. Zuckerman and Walsh (2011) for instance, posit that Modern Hebrew is a Semito-European hybrid. They claim that the language is primarily a Hebrew Yiddish mix with elements from many other languages (Zuckerman and Walsh 2011:114). Thus language revival also involves its evolution. As we know languages change with time, and those which stop being spoken for a period of time may undergo greater change. For that reason it is imperative that linguistic purism does not hinder revival work. It makes sense that speaking a language with limited resources will

generate major linguistic gaps that must be filled on the spot. Communication then takes precedence as the major practice that will revive the language, in which there will be plenty of need for dominant language lexicon and structure in order to ensure success. As for the Añu, the currently limited knowledge that apprentices have acquired should be used in communication with help from the Spanish language. This is phase one of revival.

On the ecological side there is considerable legislative and institutional progress. The Añu are building schools designated to implement mandatory bilingual education. The constitution and the cultural patrimony law guarantee significant cultural rights, benefits and protections. As for the environment, there is one huge problem: water. Alí Fernández, a Wayuu social anthropologist who is one of the most important figures in the decades-long reclamation of Añu identity stated in an interview that I conducted, ‘the identity of the millenarian people of the water, has been heavily impacted by their acknowledgment that for the first time in history they are the people of the polluted water.’ The new constitution guarantees that oil extraction in the Maracaibo basin must not affect Añu socioeconomic or cultural integrity (Art. 120). Contaminated waters not only affect Añu culture and economy, but also jeopardize their actual future existence.

5. CONCLUSION. Impressive and significant linguistic and ecological progress has provided a very important stepping stone towards the revival Añunnükü. Apprentices must be aware that even if they attempt to learn the ‘pure’ language, a successful revival will result in a new variety, which could be thought of as Neo-Añunnükü. The vocabulary needs to be expanded based on comparative work. It is highly important that Lokono and Garífuna are included in these comparisons. Lastly, I agree with Patte (2011) that the concurrent processes of purifying the waters and receiving land titles constitute the two most important ecological factors for success in linguistic revival.

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NOTES

¹ IRB Protocol #12–137. The Awakening of the Añu Language and its Continental Implications

² Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador, Colombia, Venezuela, Paraguay, Nicaragua, Mexico and Guatemala are among the countries that have passed legislation establishing mandatory Intercultural Bilingual Education (EIB) for regions where indigenous peoples reside. Although the full implementation of this evolving educational philosophy has proven to be a major challenge to most countries, the evolution of the model has aroused major intercontinental debates in which the tenets of linguistic ecology are always on the table.

³ Lokono, also called Arawak, is spoken in French Guiana, Surinam, Guyana and the Venezuelan Guayana. There are just over 2,000 speakers in these four countries.

⁴ Garífuna has been previously called Black Carib, and it is effectively Modern Island Carib, also called Kalíphuna or Eyeri. Island Carib was formerly spoken in the lesser Antilles, primarily in the islands of Yurumain (Saint Vincent), Galugaira (Guadeloupe) and Wai Tugubuli (Dominica). The speakers from Yurumain maintained the language in their new lands of Central America. After the British deportation from the island, they established themselves in the coastal lands of Belize, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua. Today there are more than 150,000 speakers.

⁵ Batalla de Carabobo, Batalla de Boyacá and Jesús María Portillo

⁶ Bartolomé Duarte and Laguna Sinamaica

⁷ Maraca

⁸ Escuela Técnica Agropecuaria Kanüye Añu

⁹ The state of Zulia has not granted teaching credentials to Yofri.

