

PROTECTING, PROPAGATING AND REVIVING CARIBBEAN INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES

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Aims

This report, within the framework of the contract and UNESCO's programme to promote language diversity in cyberspace, seeks to

- i. examine the extent of the endangerment of the traditional languages of the indigenous peoples of the Caribbean, with specific reference to Guyana, Belize, Dominica, St Vincent & the Grenadines, and Suriname,
- ii. identify the most endangered languages and make recommendations for the use the world wide web and appropriate information and communication technology (ICT) to aid in their protection, propagation and, where appropriate, their revival, and
- iii. prepare a proposal for the ongoing collection, storage and analysis of Caribbean indigenous language data, and for making this widely available through the hosting and management on a regional basis of a website which contains extensive and authoritative written, spoken and multimedia material in and about these endangered languages, using all existing technologies for the storage and dissemination.

International Context

Based on the 14th edition of *Ethnologue* (Grimes 2000), the number of languages spoken in the world is variously estimated at between 5,000 and 7,000. Maffi (1998) quotes statistics by David Harmon (1995) which suggest that half of the world's languages are spoken by communities of 10,000 people or fewer. In turn, communities of 1,000 speakers or fewer speak half of these. When we put together figures for 'small' languages having 10,000 or fewer speakers, 8 million people (that is, less than 0.2% of the world's population) speak one-half of the total number of languages.

Justification

The indigenous languages of the Caribbean and the cultures which they transmit have taken thousands of years to develop. These languages have been threatened in a variety of ways. The traditional threat has been through the physical extermination of their speakers in the wake of European colonisation. In modern times, this threat has receded to be replaced by new ones. The first of these involves formal and informal discrimination by the state and non-indigenous communities against speakers of indigenous languages. More insidious, however, has been an acceptance by members of indigenous language speech communities that their ancestral languages represent a

barrier to economic and social advance. This produces unwillingness amongst older members of the community to transmit these languages to the young and/or unwillingness amongst the young to acquire and use these languages.

One assumption made here, based on research on this issue, is that indigenous languages of the Caribbean do not present a barrier to economic and social advance and access to modern information and technology. Access to communication outside the community of speakers of indigenous languages can be had in two ways. Material from languages of wider communication (LWCs) such as English, Spanish and French, can be translated into the community language. In addition, members of the indigenous language speech community can develop multilingualism, involving their native languages and LWCs learnt as second and third languages. The general consensus of research on the issue is that bilingualism or multilingualism in a community language and languages of wider communication (LWCs) does not have a negative effect on competence in LWCs. In fact, bilingualism and multilingualism seem, when formally promoted by the education system, do give a slight advantage to bilinguals and multilinguals using LWCs, by comparison with monolingual speakers of these LWCs.

Another assumption is that indigenous languages and the cultures which they transmit have evolved over thousands of years and represent an important aspect of the heritage of mankind. What is involved is not simply the preservation of things past but of maintaining bodies of knowledge, technology and beliefs which can prove useful to humanity in the present and the future. Maffi (1998) suggests, in keeping with existing research on this question, that there is a close relationship between linguistic diversity and biological diversity. Large land masses having a wide variation in terrain, climates and eco-systems, tend to have great biological diversity as well as large numbers of species endemic to the locale. Tropical climates tend to produce high numbers and densities of different species. It so happens that the areas of the world with the highest levels of biodiversity, e.g. tropical South America, Central Africa, and Papua-New Guinea, are also places of enormous linguistic diversity.

Maffi (n.d.) proposes that the link between biological and linguistic diversity is the result of human communities co-evolving with their local eco-systems. Over the centuries, these communities interacted with their local environment, modified it and developed a detailed knowledge of it. They encoded this knowledge in language and used their languages to transmit this knowledge to new generations within their communities in order to ensure group survival. Indigenous language communities constitute a network of communication amongst people who have devised ways of occupying a particular ecological niche, becoming the most efficient users of this niche. They have specialised knowledge of these niches and ways of sharing this knowledge with others through the community language.

The conclusion is that indigenous languages of the Caribbean are not historical relics standing in the way of the modernisation and development of the groups which traditionally spoke them. Rather, these languages and the communities which speak them represent an accumulation of communal knowledge of how to interact with Caribbean environments in a sustainable fashion. The endangerment of Caribbean indigenous languages ultimately endangers the chances of Caribbean people surviving and prospering in the geographical spaces they currently occupy. Protecting, preserving, promoting and even reviving Caribbean indigenous languages is, therefore, of importance to all Caribbean people, whether they are themselves of indigenous origin or not, and to mankind as a whole.

This approach is one which has been adopted by UNESCO (2003) which, at its General Conference adopted the International Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. 'Oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of the intangible cultural heritage, the performing arts, social practices, rituals and festive events, as well as knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe and traditional craftsmanship, now benefit from an international legal instrument to safeguard intangible heritage through cooperation' (UNESCO, 2003).

The convention proposes to create national inventories of cultural property that should be protected, and to set up an Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. It also proposes to have drawn up a Representative List of the Intangible Heritage of Humanity and another list of the Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding.

To the first list would be added the Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity, named by UNESCO. One of these twenty named masterpieces of Latin America and the Caribbean is 'the Garifuna Language, Dance and Music' named by UNESCO in 2001 (UNESCO, 2003). Garifuna is an Arawakan language, formerly spoken in St. Vincent and now mainly used in Central America, notably Belize, by the descendants of the Garinagu or Black Caribs, deported from St. Vincent by the British after an uprising in 1796. Another is the Maroon Heritage of Moore Town in Jamaica, named by UNESCO in 2003. As we shall see, all or nearly all of the other indigenous languages of the region are eligible to be put on the second of the two lists, i.e. that of the Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding.

Survey of Caribbean Indigenous Languages

The Statistics

In the table below is presented data on the indigenous languages linked to Belize, Dominica, Guyana, St. Vincent and Suriname. It has been relatively easy to get statistics about the numbers of people who are members of the ethnic group linked to these languages. The figures for these have, in the main, been derived from *Ethnologue* (Grimes, 1997). Much more difficult was finding out how many people actually spoke the language, with what level of competence and the extent to which the language was being passed on to children. *Ethnologue* (Grimes 2000) was sometimes helpful, but had to be supplemented by several additional sources, the *UNESCO Redbook on Endangered Languages* (2003), as well as notably Forte (2003) and Melville (2003) for Guyana, by Carlin & Boven (2003) and Carlin (2002), by Taylor (1977) for Dominica, St. Vincent and Langworthy (n.d.) for Belize.

Language	Country	Fam.	Ethnic Nos.	Speaker Nos.	5+	40+	60+
Akawaio	Guy./Ven.	CRB	4,300	4,300	+	+	+
Akurio	Sur.	CRB	40	40	-	-	+
Arawak	Guy., Sur	ARK	15,000	15,00	-	-/+	+
Garifuna	G./H./Bze./SV.	ARK	98,000				
	Bze.		20,000				
	SV.		6,000	0			

Kalihna	Guy./Sur./Ven.	CRB	10,000	?	+	+	+
	Guy.		2,700	475	?	?	?
	Sur.		2,390	?	?		
Karifuna	Dom.	ARK	3,400	0	-	-	-
Kekchí	Gua./ES./Bze.	MYA	421,300	421,300	+	+	+
	Bze.		9,000	9,000	?	?	?
Macushi	Guy./Bra./Ven.	CRB	13,000	13,000	+	+	+
	Guy.		7,000	7,000	+	+	+
Mopán Maya	Bze./Gua.	MYA	10,350	?	?		
	Bze.		7,750	?	?		
Patamona	Guy.	CRB	4,700	4,700	+	+	+
Pemon	Ven./Bra./Guy.	CRB	5,930	5,930	+	+	+
	Guy. (Arecuna)		475	475	+	+	+
Sikĩyana	Suriname	CRB	40	40	-	-	-
Trio	Sur./Bra./Guy.	CRB	1,130	1,130	+	+	+
Tunayana	Sur.	CRB	40	40	-	-	+
Wai-wai	Bra./Guy.	CRB	7,700	7,000	+	+	+
	Guy.		200	200	+	+	+
Wapishana	Guy./Bra.	ARK	10,500	10,500	+	+	+
	Guy.		9,000	9,000	+	+	+
Warao	Ven./Guy./Sur.	-	19,700				
	Guy.		4,700	100	-	-	
Wayana	Sur./Bra.	CRB	600	?	-		
Yucatán	Mex./Bze.	MYA	700,000	?			
	Bze.		5,000	2,000	-	+	+

Key

Countries Key: Bze = Belize, Dom = Dominica, ES = El Salvador, Guy = Guyana, Gua = Guatemala, Hon = Honduras, SV = St Vincent, Ven = Venezuela,

Language Family Key: ARK = Arawakan, CRB = Cariban, MYA = Mayan.

Analysis

In the statistics above, there is not always a direct correlation between the ethno-cultural group associated with a language and speakers of that language. A glaring example is that of the Arawaks, the largest indigenous ethnic group in Guyana, making up 33% of the indigenous population. No more than 10% of the group, however, are reported to be speakers of Arawak (Lokono), the historical language of the group.

Another feature of the above statistics is that of languages which straddle international boundaries. Of the 19

languages listed above, only 5 are listed as spoken within the boundaries of one country. One of these, Karifuna, is listed as extinct. Three others, Tunayuna, Akurio and Sikiyana, have fewer than a hundred speakers. This means that, in general, efforts to protect the indigenous languages of the area has to take place in a transnational context.

The pattern for many languages such as Arawak, Kalinya and Kekchi is that they are spoken across two or more neighbouring countries. Potentially, therefore, a language which is endangered in one country may not be in another. The relative strength of a language in one country might even serve to support its use in the country where it might otherwise have been endangered. The fact, however, is that the indigenous languages of the Caribbean are all relatively low status languages. They are spoken in countries where a European language, Dutch, Spanish or English, is the sole official language, the major language of wider communication and the dominant language of education. Efforts by members of indigenous linguistic groups to engage with the wider society almost inevitably lead to transitional bilingualism at the community level, with the dominant language replacing the indigenous language in two or three generations.

In all cases of indigenous languages still in use listed above, the number of persons identifying themselves as members of an ethnic group is significantly larger than those who speak the language of that group. In addition, even though some languages appear to be being transmitted to children, invariably the proportion of the children acquiring the language is falling with each passing generation. All of the languages listed above, therefore, can be considered to some degree endangered. However, with the relatively large population of speakers of Yucatán Mayan and Kekchi in Mexico, these can be regarded as the least threatened of the languages.

If we ignore Yucatán Mayan and Kekchi for the moment, Garifuna would appear to be the healthiest of the remaining languages. However, some estimates suggest that only about half of the ethnic Garinagu speak the language. Also, even though the language is being transmitted to children, this appears in the case of Belize, to be happening in only one of the five Belizean ethnic Garinagu communities (Langworthy, n.d.). In Hopkins, the one community where transmission is claimed to be taking place, children are bilingual in Belizean Creole and Garifuna. However, my observation on two field trip visits to Hopkins in 2001 and 2002 is that Belizean Creole is the language of choice of the playground in the community primary school. This is in spite of the fact that the vast majority of the children are ethnically Garinagu.

If we move along the scale of levels of endangerment, there is the case of Arawak in which only 10% of the ethnic Lokono (Arawak) community is estimated to be able to speak the language. Again, however, the level of endangerment varies from community to community. In Tapakuma, on the West Coast of the Essequibo in Guyana, for example, out of a population of several hundred, only 5 persons, all over 65, could speak the language. In another community up the Wakapau Creek on the Pomeroon, much more remote than Tapakuma, persons over the age of 50 invariably were speakers of the language in 2003 (Ian Robertson, p.c.). Because of this variation in the level of attrition across the largest indigenous ethnic group in Guyana, surveys need to be done in order to identify the communities where the chances of arresting and reversing language loss are greatest, i.e. where there is the greatest concentration of relatively young speakers. Language attitudes, of course, also play an important role in this process.

There are finally those cases of endangered languages where speakers number in the tens rather than hundreds and are all over 60. These are potentially the most difficult cases in which to conceive of any successful effort to reverse language loss. Here, the focus has to be on a complete and thorough documentation of the language.

PROJECT PROPOSAL

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Suriname

Suriname, with its large number of small linguistic groups, shows the least signs of community level activity in the area of protecting indigenous language.

Guyana

Macushi/Makushi

There is a series of community initiatives in the preservation of indigenous endangered languages of Guyana. Miranda La Rose (*Stabroek News*, 2 April 2003) reports on the launch of two books, a 19-page primer written by Miriam Abbott (2003a,b), entitled 'Let's Read and Write Makushi', with illustrations by the Makushi Teachers' Language Workshops, as well as a beginners' book with the title 'My First Grammar Book' aimed at Makushi-English speakers. According to the *Stabroek News* (2 April 2003), this was the outcome of a series of four workshops, involving 26 teachers and Makushi researchers, aimed at developing the teaching of Makushi literacy in primary and nursery schools in the Rupununi area. As part of this thrust, a tri-lingual, Makushi-English-Portuguese dictionary is being developed to cater, not just for that section of the Makushi population, estimated at 9,000, living in Guyana where English is the official language, but also the estimated 14,000 living in Brazil where Portuguese plays that role.

Wapishiana/Wapishana

Basing themselves on work already undertaken by linguists from 1967 onwards, the Wapishiana Writers Workshop, has been in operation. It consists mainly of teachers who have as their goal the promotion of literacy in Wapishiana in their schools and communities. They are reported as having produced a number of publications in the language (La Rose, 2003), as many as 20 according to Melville (2003, p. 3). Other Wapishiana language promotion activities at the community level have included training nursery school teachers to read, write and make teaching aids in Wapishiana. In addition, a Wapishiana dictionary is being compiled by a speaker of the language, Collette Melville (GINA, 2003). At the level of overall language policy and practice, Adrian Gomes, the coordinator of the Wapishiana Literacy Association and head teacher of the Aishalton Secondary School is reported as seeming to favour a formal policy on native language literacy and bi-lingual education (GINA, 2003).

Lokono (Arawak)

Melville (2003:3) reports the absence of any focused activity in favour of Lokono (Arawak). He does suggest, however, that some villages have, from time to time, organised classes. He indicates, however, that the work of the group organised by the Catholic Church at Santa Rosa, a Lokono community, appeared to be developing well. All of this is against the background of the pioneering work done by Father John Bennett, a Lokono Anglican priest, who has produced an Arawak-English dictionary as well as a set of ten lessons in Lokono.

Belize

Garifuna

It is difficult to deal with the fate of Garifuna in Belize without linking it to its fate in the other countries where it is or has been spoken. In the country of origin, St Vincent, Langworthy (n.d. pp. 42-46) suggests the last speaker of Vincentian Garifuna died in 1932. Fortunately for the survival of the language, the majority of the Garifuna speaking population of St. Vincent had been deported by the British to Central America at the end of the 18th century, as a result of an uprising against the British. In Central America, the language has thrived and spread across several countries, notably Guatemala, Honduras and Belize.

In Honduras, within the ethnic Garifuna community, some children are L1 Garifuna speakers, others have passive competence and others have no knowledge of the language. The state of affairs varies from one community to another. A bilingual education programme has been pioneered for Garifuna communities in Honduras. In Honduras, isolation and the concentration of the Garifuna community has helped with language preservation but language shift is taking place there as well. In the case of Belize, five out of the six Garifuna communities have reportedly shifted to Creole. The apparent exception is Hopkins.

A significant bold step in the area of language policy with reference to Garifuna was taken when the Central American Black Organisation (CABO) issued a declaration in 1997, on the initiative of the National Garifuna Council of Belize, in the form of a 'Language Policy of the Garifuna Nation', along with the 'Garifuna National Language Preservation Plan'. According to Langworthy (n.d., p. 45), however, the response to this quasi-legal framework at the level of individual communities seems to have been patchy. Individual communities have initiated small scale language preservation activities but this has been localised and limited in its effect. The trans-national nature of the project and the assumption that 'trickle down' would work has proven to be false. The suggestion is that the declaration must be made more widely available to the Garifuna communities and language maintenance materials shared across communities. Teachers and language activists need to meet more regularly to share materials, strategies and methodologies, in particular for teaching literacy in Garifuna and for teaching the language as a second language. Hopkins has been suggested as the venue for an immersion summer school programme in the language for children from communities such as St. Vincent where the language has been lost.

Significant amongst the developments supporting Garifuna in Belize is the compilation of Garifuna-English English-Garifuna dictionary (Cayetano 1993). There is, as well, an orthography which has been agreed upon for the language by speakers of the language across the various countries within which the language is used.

At the level of international recognition, Garifuna stands out head and shoulders above the other Caribbean indigenous endangered languages. In 2001, UNESCO declared Garifuna to be one of the 19 masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity (UNESCO 2003).

In keeping with its relatively high profile, Garifuna is the only one of the indigenous languages under discussion that has significant support at the level of the Internet and the Worldwide Web. Links between Garifuna activists across the various countries in which speakers reside have been fostered by the GarifunaLink, an e-mail list, and the Garifuna-World Web site. However, the vast majority of users of these technological resources do not reside in Central America and the Caribbean but rather in North America. The home communities within which the language

still resides and within which it is threatened, remain on the periphery of the information and communications technologies being employed for language preservation.

St. Vincent and Dominica

There are community groups representing indigenous communities in St. Vincent and Dominica which have expressed an interest in the revival of Garifuna and Karifuna, the two closely related Arawakan languages which became extinct in these two countries in the first decades of the 20th century. In the case of St. Vincent, there is the potential for help coming from the Garifuna of Belize and the rest of Central America.

APPENDIX, REFERENCE and ADDITIONAL NOTES

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Listing of Indigenous Languages by Country (*Ethnologue, SIL*)

Belize

- GARÍFUNA** GARÍFUNA [CAB] 12,274 in Belize (1991 census). Another estimate is 20,460 (1989). Stann Creek and Toledo along the coast. Alternate names: CARIBE, CENTRAL AMERICAN CARIB, BLACK CARIB. Classification: Arawakan, Maipuran, Northern Maipuran, Caribbean.
[\[More information\]](#)
- KEKCHÍ** [KEK] 9,000 in Belize (1995 SIL). Southern Belize. Alternate names: KETCHÍ, QUECCHÍ, CACCHÉ. Classification: Mayan, Quichean-Mamean, Greater Quichean, Kekchi.
[\[More information\]](#)
- MAYA, YUCATÁN** [YUA] 5,000 in the ethnic group in Belize (1991). San Antonio and Succoths in Cayo District. It may still be spoken in the Orange Walk and Corozal districts near the Mexico border. Alternate names: YUCATECO. Classification: Mayan, Yucatecan, Yucatec-Lacandon.
[\[More information\]](#)
- MOPÁN MAYA** [MOP] 7,000 to 7,750 in Belize. Population total both countries 9,600 to 10,350. Alternate names: MAYA MOPÁN, MOPANE. Classification: Mayan, Yucatecan, Mopan-Itza.
[\[More information\]](#)

Guyana

AKAWAIO (ACEWAIO, AKAWAI, ACAHUAYO, KAPON) [\[ARB\]](#) 3,800 in Guyana, 9% of the Amerindians (1990 J. Forte); 500 in Brazil; very few in Venezuela with no villages there (1982 D. Wall WC); 4,300 or more in all countries. West central, north of Patamona. [Carib](#), Northern, East-West Guiana, Macushi-Kapon, Kapon. Important differences in vocabulary from Patamona. Language attitudes indicate separate literature is needed. They and the Patamona call themselves 'Kapon'. Tropical forest. Upland. Hunter-gatherers, fishermen. Traditional religion. Bible portions 1873. Work in progress.

ARAWAK (LOKONO, AROWAK) [\[ARW\]](#) 1,500 speakers (1984) out of 15,000 in the ethnic group in Guyana (1990 J. Forte); 700 in Surinam; 150 to 200 in French Guiana; a few in Venezuela (1977 SIL); 2,400 total speakers. West coast and northeast along the Corantyne River. [Arawakan](#), Maipuran, Northern Maipuran, Caribbean. Reported to be used only primarily by the elderly in Guyana and Surinam. Others are bilingual. The ethnic group in Guyana

represents 33% of the Amerindians. Bible portions 1850-1978. Survey needed.

KALIHNA (CARIB, CARIBE, KALINYA, CARIÑA, GALIBÍ) [[CRB](#)] 475 or more in Guyana (1991) out of 2,700 in the ethnic group (1990 J. Forte); 2,500 in Surinam; 1,200 in French Guiana; 100 or fewer in Brazil (1991); 4,000 to 5,000 in Venezuela (1978 J.C. Mosonyi); 10,000 total (1991). West coast and northwest. [Carib](#), Northern, Galibi. Dialect: MURATO (MYRATO, WESTERN CARIB). The ethnic group in Guyana represents 6% of the Amerindians. Work in progress.

MACUSHI (MAKUSHI, MAKUXI, MACUSI, MACUSSI, TEWEYA, TEUEIA) [[MBC](#)] 7,000 in Guyana, 16% of the Amerindians (1990 J. Forte); 3,800 in Brazil (1977 Migliazza); 600 in Venezuela (1976 UFM); 11,400 to 13,000 in all countries. Southwestern border area, Rupununi north savannahs. Spread out in small settlements up to the foothills of the Pakaraima Mts. [Carib](#), Northern, East-West Guiana, Macushi-Kapon, Macushi. Close to, but not intelligible with, Patamona. The second language is English in Guyana, Portuguese in Brazil, Spanish in Venezuela. Typology: OVS. NT 1981. Bible portions 1923-1975. Work in progress.

PATAMONA (INGARIKO, EREMAGOK, KAPON) [[PBC](#)] 4,700, 10% of the Amerindians (1990 J. Forte). West central, about 13 villages. [Carib](#), Northern, East-West Guiana, Macushi-Kapon, Kapon. Close to Macushi but not inherently intelligible. Marginally intelligible with Arecuna. Closest to Akawaio, but vocabulary differences and language attitudes make separate literature necessary. The Akawaio are less acculturated than Patamona. 'Ingariko' is the Macushi term for 'bush people'. People in the village of Paramakatoi are literate in English and Patamona. Some in other villages are literate in English. NT 1974. Bible portions 1963-1967.

PEMON (PEMONG) [[AOC](#)] 475 Arecuna in Guyana, 1% of the Amerindians (1990 J. Forte); 220 Taulipang in Brazil; 459 Ingarikó in Brazil; 4,850 Pemon in Venezuela (1977 Migliazza); 5,930 in all countries. Paruima Settlement. [Carib](#), Northern, East-West Guiana, Macushi-Kapon, Kapon. Dialects: CAMARACOTO, TAUREPAN (TAULIPANG), ARECUNA (ARICUNA, AREKUNA, JARICUNA). Marginally intelligible with Patamona and Akawaio. Camaracoto may be distinct. Typology: OVS. Work in progress.

WAIWAI (UAIUAI, UAIEUE, OUAYEONE, PARUKOTA) [[WAW](#)] 886 to 1,058 in both countries (1986 SIL). Southwest Guyana, headwaters of the Essequibo River. Also in Brazil. [Carib](#), Northern, East-West Guiana, Waiwai. Dialect: KATAWIAN (KATWENA, KATAWINA). Tropical forest. NT 1984. Bible portions 1966-1976.

WAPISHANA (WAPITXANA, WAPISIANA, VAPIDIANA, WAPIXANA) [[WAP](#)] 9,000 in Guyana (1993 SIL), 14% of the Amerindians (1990 J. Forte); 1,500 in Brazil (1986 SIL); 10,500 total. Southwest Guyana, south of the Kanuku Mts., northwest of the Waiwai; a few villages. [Arawakan](#), Maipuran, Northern Maipuran, Wapishanan. Dialects: ATORAI (ATORTI, DAURI), MAPIDIAN (MAOPITYAN, MAWAYANA), AMARIBA. Speakers' second language is English, which is taught in school. Amariba may be extinct. 40 Mapidian are intermarried with Waiwai speakers and speak fluent Waiwai. Savannah. Swidden agriculturalists: cassava. Traditional religion, Christian. Bible portions 1975. Work in progress.

WARAO (WARAU, WARRAU, GUARAO, GUARAUNO) [[WBA](#)] A few speakers in Guyana out of 4,700 in the ethnic group (1990 J. Forte); a few in Surinam; 15,000 in Venezuela (1975). Northwestern Guyana near coast, mixed with

Arawak and [Carib](#). Language Isolate. In Oreala, Guyana, only the older people speak the language. NT 1974. Bible portions 1960-1967.

Suriname

AKURIO (AKOERIO, AKURI, AKURIJO, AKURIYO, AKULIYO, WAMA, WAYARICURI, OYARICOULET, TRIOMETESEM, TRIOMETESEN) [[AKO](#)] 40 to 50 (1977 WT). Southeast jungle. [Carib](#), Northern, East-West Guiana, Wama. Related to, but not inherently intelligible with, Trió. All but one group is living with the Trió, becoming bilingual in Trió. Contacted in 1969. Dialects or related languages: Urukuyana, Kumayena. Nearly extinct.

ARAWAK (LOKONO, AROWAK) [[ARW](#)] 700 speakers out of 2,000 in the ethnic group in Surinam; 1,500 speakers (1984) out of 15,000 in the ethnic group in Guyana (1990 Forte); 150 to 200 in French Guiana; a few in Venezuela; 2,400 total speakers. Scattered locations across the north of Surinam. [Arawakan](#), Maipuran, Northern Maipuran, Caribbean. Reported to be used only by the elderly in Surinam and Guyana. The young people use Sranan. Dictionary. 25% to 50% literate. Bible portions 1850-1978. Survey needed.

KALIHNA (CARIB, CARIBE, CARIÑA, KALINYA, GALIBÍ, MARAWORNO) [[CRB](#)] 2,500 in Surinam (1989 SIL); 475 or more in Guyana; 1,200 in French Guiana; 100 or fewer in Brazil (1991); 4,000 to 5,000 in Venezuela (1978 J.C. Mosonyi); 10,000 in all countries (1991 SIL). Various locations along the north coast. The eastern dialect in Surinam is primarily in the Albina area and in French Guiana, Brazil, and Venezuela; the western dialect is in the central and western areas of Surinam and in Guyana. [Carib](#), Northern, Galibi. Dialects: MURATO (MYRATO, WESTERN CARIB), TYREWUJU (EASTERN CARIB). In some areas the language is used by all ages. The eastern dialect is the prestige dialect in Surinam. Speakers of the central dialect are reported to be bilingual and switching to Sranan. Dictionary. Grammar. 25% to 50% literate. Work in progress.

TRIÓ (TIRIÓ) [[TRI](#)] 800 in Surinam (1977 WIM); 329 in Brazil (1995 AMTB); 1,130 in both countries. South central, villages of Tepoe and Alalapadu. [Carib](#), Northern, East-West Guiana, Wayana-Trio. 25% to 50% literate. NT 1979. Bible portions 1974.

WARAO (WARRAU, GUARAO, GUARAUNO) [[WBA](#)] A very small number of older individuals in Surinam and the Oreala, Guyana border area; 15,000 in Venezuela (1975). Near Guyana border. [Language Isolate](#). They speak Guyanese in Surinam and Guyana. NT 1974. Bible portions 1960-1967.

WAYANA (OAYANA, WAJANA, UAIANA, OYANA, OIANA, ALUKUYANA, UPURUI, ROUCOUYENNE) [[WAY](#)] 600 in Surinam; 150 in Brazil; 200 in French Guiana (1977 WT); 950 total. Villages in southeastern Surinam. [Carib](#), Northern, East-West Guiana, Wayana-Trio. 25% to 50% literate. NT 1979. Bible portions 1970.

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Notes

There are an estimated 5,000 to 7,000 languages spoken today on the five continents (Krauss 1992; Grimes 1996). *Ethnologue*, the best existing catalogue of the world's languages (13th edition, Grimes 1996), gives a total of

6,703 languages, of which 32% found in Asia, 30% in Africa, 19% in the Pacific, 15% in the Americas, and 3% in Europe. Of these languages, statistics put together by conservationist David Harmon (Harmon 1995, based on the 12th edition of the *Ethnologue*, Grimes 1992) indicate that about half are spoken by communities of 10,000 speakers or fewer; half of these, in turn, are spoken by communities of 1,000 speakers or less. Overall, languages with 10,000 speakers or under total about 8 million people, less than 0.2% of an estimated world population of 5.3 billion (ibid.) (Maffi, 1998) .

COMMUNITY LANGUAGE ACTIVITY BY COUNTRY

Project Report: UNESCO Contract N: 891.741.3 (cont'd)

Suriname

Suriname, with its large number of small linguistic groups, shows the least signs of community level activity in the area of protecting indigenous language.

Guyana

Macushi/Makushi

There is a series of community initiatives in the preservation of indigenous endangered languages of Guyana. Miranda La Rose (Stabroek News, 2 April 2003) reports on the launch of two books, a 19-page primer written by Miriam Abbott (2003a,b), entitled 'Let's Read and Write Makushi', with illustrations by the Makushi Teachers' Language Workshops, as well as a beginners' book with the title 'My First Grammar Book' aimed at Makushi-English speakers. According to the Stabroek News (2 April 2003), this was the outcome of a series of four workshops, involving 26 teachers and Makushi researchers, aimed at developing the teaching of Makushi literacy in primary and nursery schools in the Rupununi area. As part of this thrust, a tri-lingual, Makushi-English-Portuguese dictionary is being developed to cater, not just for that section of the Makushi population, estimated at 9,000, living in Guyana where English is the official language, but also the estimated 14,000 living in Brazil where Portuguese plays that role.

Wapishiana/Wapishana

Basing themselves on work already undertaken by linguists from 1967 onwards, the Wapishiana Writers Workshop, has been in operation. It consists mainly of teachers who have as their goal the promotion of literacy in Wapishiana in their schools and communities. They are reported as having produced a number of publications in the language (La Rose, 2003), as many as 20 according to Melville (2003, p. 3). Other Wapishiana language promotion activities at the community level have included training nursery school teachers to read, write and make teaching aids in Wapishiana. In addition, a Wapishiana dictionary is being compiled by a speaker of the language, Collette Melville (GINA, 2003). At the level of overall language policy and practice, Adrian Gomes, the coordinator of the Wapishiana Literacy Association and head teacher of the Aishalton Secondary School is reported as seeming to favour a formal policy on native language literacy and bi-lingual education (GINA, 2003).

Lokono (Arawak)

Melville (2003:3) reports the absence of any focused activity in favour of Lokono (Arawak). He does suggest, however, that some villages have, from time to time, organised classes. He indicates, however, that the work of the group organised by the Catholic Church at Santa Rosa, a Lokono community, appeared to be developing well. All of this is against the background of the pioneering work done by Father John Bennett, a Lokono Anglican priest, who has produced an Arawak-English dictionary as well as a set of ten lessons in Lokono.

Belize

Garifuna

It is difficult to deal with the fate of Garifuna in Belize without linking it to its fate in the other countries where it is or

has been spoken. In the country of origin, St Vincent, Langworthy (n.d. pp. 42-46) suggests the last speaker of Vincentian Garifuna died in 1932. Fortunately for the survival of the language, the majority of the Garifuna speaking population of St. Vincent had been deported by the British to Central America at the end of the 18th century, as a result of an uprising against the British. In Central America, the language has thrived and spread across several countries, notably Guatemala, Honduras and Belize.

In Honduras, within the ethnic Garifuna community, some children are L1 Garifuna speakers, others have passive competence and others have no knowledge of the language. The state of affairs varies from one community to another. A bilingual education programme has been pioneered for Garifuna communities in Honduras. In Honduras, isolation and the concentration of the Garifuna community has helped with language preservation but language shift is taking place there as well. In the case of Belize, five out of the six Garifuna communities have reportedly shifted to Creole. The apparent exception is Hopkins.

A significant bold step in the area of language policy with reference to Garifuna was taken when the Central American Black Organisation (CABO) issued a declaration in 1997, on the initiative of the National Garifuna Council of Belize, in the form of a 'Language Policy of the Garifuna Nation', along with the 'Garifuna National Language Preservation Plan'. According to Langworthy (n.d., p. 45), however, the response to this quasi-legal framework at the level of individual communities seems to have been patchy. Individual communities have initiated small scale language preservation activities but this has been localised and limited in its effect. The trans-national nature of the project and the assumption that 'trickle down' would work has proven to be false. The suggestion is that the declaration must be made more widely available to the Garifuna communities and language maintenance materials shared across communities. Teachers and language activists need to meet more regularly to share materials, strategies and methodologies, in particular for teaching literacy in Garifuna and for teaching the language as a second language. Hopkins has been suggested as the venue for an immersion summer school programme in the language for children from communities such as St. Vincent where the language has been lost.

Significant amongst the developments supporting Garifuna in Belize is the compilation of Garifuna-English English-Garifuna dictionary (Cayetano 1993). There is, as well, an orthography which has been agreed upon for the language by speakers of the language across the various countries within which the language is used.

At the level of international recognition, Garifuna stands out head and shoulders above the other Caribbean indigenous endangered languages. In 2001, UNESCO declared Garifuna to be one of the 19 masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity (UNESCO 2003).

In keeping with its relatively high profile, Garifuna is the only one of the indigenous languages under discussion that has significant support at the level of the Internet and the Worldwide Web. Links between Garifuna activists across the various countries in which speakers reside have been fostered by the GarifunaLink, an e-mail list, and the Garifuna-World Web site. However, the vast majority of users of these technological resources do not reside in Central America and the Caribbean but rather in North America. The home communities within which the language still resides and within which it is threatened, remain on the periphery of the information and communications technologies being employed for language preservation.

St. Vincent and Dominica

There are community groups representing indigenous communities in St. Vincent and Dominica which have expressed an interest in the revival of Garifuna and Karifuna, the two closely related Arawakan languages which

became extinct in these two countries in the first decades of the 20th century. In the case of St. Vincent, there is the potential for help coming from the Garifuna of Belize and the rest of Central America.