Memoria del VI Congreso Internacional de Lingüística Aplicada

Sherry E. Gapper (ed.)

Colección Inventarios

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con la colaboración de Francisco Javier Vargas Gómez

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Resistance or Forgetting: Limonese Creole in Limón Province, Costa Rica[1]

Resistencia u olvido: la lengua criolla limonense de la provincia de Limón, Costa Rica

Luz Marina Vásquez Carranza[2]
Universidad de Costa Rica, Costa Rica

Abstract
This study addresses key concepts which highlight the relationship between language, culture, identity, and tradition. It sustains that the strengthening of the Limonese Creole vernacular language will depend younger generations, with support from family and community, from parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and communities They should ensure means to help the new generations maintain and strengthen this language in favor of the Afro-Limonese identity and cultural practices. The Creole language is a very personal intimate language for this community and they are very anxious for it to be revitalized and transmitted to future generations.

Resumen
El estudio analiza conceptos esenciales para comprender la relación entre lengua, cultura, identidad y tradición. Sostiene que el fortalecimiento de la lengua criolla es una tarea que dependerá de las generaciones jóvenes, con el apoyo de sus padres, abuelos, tíos y la comunidad; deberán garantizar manera de ayudar a las nuevas generaciones a mantener y fortalecer esta lengua en pro de la identidad y las prácticas culturales afro-limonenses. La lengua criolla constituye un asunto muy íntimo y personal para esta comunidad y que ellos sueñan con revitalizarla y transmitirla a las futuras generaciones.

Keywords: Creole languages, vernacular languages, language revitalization, Limonese Creole

Palabras clave: lenguas criollas, lenguas vernáculas, revitalización de lenguas, criollo limonense

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1 Results of a project registered at the Research Center on Cultural Diversity and Regional Studies (CIDICER), University of Costa Rica, Western Campus (Pry01-1602-2018-Entre la resistencia y el olvido. Estrategias de preservación y fortalecimiento del criollo en familias afrolimonenses).

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Introduction

According to Padilla and Borsato, "Language gives meaning to an ethnic group because it connects the present to the past through its oral tradition… So important is language that any threat to its group's language by means of colonization or legislation is a call to arms."[3] Yet, the Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger published by UNESCO (2010)[4] reports that approximately half of the languages spoken worldwide today are in danger of extinction, but this process is not inevitable or irreversible.

In fact, Fishman and Garcia[5] report that languages have been dying out through history. For instance, Gothic and Etruscan, both European languages, became extinct. The same happened to many East Coast indigenous languages in North America after the arrival of Europeans.

Similar stories can be told about numerous languages all over the world, most of which have died out, as communities have failed to revitalize vernacular languages for centuries. In recent years some communities have realized how important it is to rescue their vernacular languages and have come up with various proposals to do so. For example, Galicia in Spain has made efforts to revitalize their language, Paraguay has made efforts to make the Guarani language official, Peru has worked on policies to strengthen the Quechua and Aimará languages; Honduras is working on reinforcing indigenous languages such as Miskito, and Nicaragua, our closest neighboring country to the north, has made efforts to safeguard the Creole language spoken by its Afro descendant population.

Spence Sharpe[6] rightly points out that what causes the growth or decline of a language is not a linguistic phenomenon per se; instead, it derives from extra linguistic, political, financial, social, educational, urbanistic, and migratory factors. Romaine,[7] along the same lines, claims that "there is no one-size-

3 Amado Padilla and Graciela Borsato, "Psychology," Joshua Fishman and Ofelia García, eds. *Handbook of Language and Ethnic Identity*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010) 5-17. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1017/s0047404512000358.

4 The first language Atlas, edited by Stephen Wurm, was published in 1996, with 600 languages. In 2001 the Atlas was expanded by UNESCO, with 800 languages. The last Atlas of the World was published in 2010, with 2500 endangered languages worldwide. Mosely, Christopher Mosely, ed. *Atlas of the World´s Languages in Danger*, 3rd ed. (Paris: UNESCO, 2010). Disponible en: <http://www.unesco.org/culture/en/endangeredlanguages/atlas>.

5 Joshua Fishman and Ofelia García, eds. *Handbook of Language and Ethnicity,* 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010). DOI: https://doi.org/10.1017/s0047404512000358.

6 Marva Spence Sharpe. "Migración, aculturamiento y sustitución lingüística entre la comunidad criolla de Costa Rica," *Praxis* 57 (2004a): 49-58.

7 Susan Romaine. "Preserving Endangered Languages," *Language and Linguistics Compass* 1, 1-2 (2007): 115-132. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1749-818X.2007.00004.x.

fits-all solution for revitalization and preservation. The immediate need is to identify and stabilize languages under threat so that they can be transmitted to the next generation in as many of their functions as possible."

In an aim to analyze the current reality around Limonese Creole, as well as to learn adults' perceptions on the future of this vernacular language, this article reports on the opinions by a group of Afro-Costa Rican parents and grandparents about their ancestral language.

A Historical View at the Province of Limón

In Costa Rica, on the Caribbean coast, there lives a large Afro-Limonese (i.e., from the Limon Province) community whose mother tongue is an English-based Creole. Yet, during the last decades, this community has undergone various socio-economical tensions to accommodate to the majority community and, as one might predict, the original language appears to be in decline.[8]

For researchers such as Hutchinson-Miller and Spence Sharpe, the first African peoples arrived along the Costa Rican Caribbean Coast as slaves from the Bantu ethnic group in Congo and Angola. Later on, slaves from the Sudan settled. The great majority of these slaves worked on cocoa plantations in the Matina Valley in the Limon Province. Afterwards, slaves from Jamaica scattered along the Misquito coast throughout Central America were brought by the Spaniards to work in agriculture, though many of them migrated to the Central Valley for various reasons, mainly looking for better job opportunities. Reportedly, in 1821 when Costa Rica became an independent republic, 17% of its population was of African descent, whereas 9.5% were Spanish and the remaining 73% were Mestizo. The largest number of Afro-Costa Ricans, however, arrived for the construction of the railroad to the Limon Province in 1870. Once the railroad was concluded in 1890, alliances with American companies such as the United Fruit company were established; this constituted the main labor force for the Afro-Costa Rican population. Spence Sharpe points out that, given that the Afro-Costa Rican population spoke an English-based Creole, they were able to easily communicate with their employers whose first language was English.

According to Spence Sharpe, even though these immigrants did not intend to remain in Costa Rica, due to various reasons, they stayed. Firstly, Limon had become an enclave for these Afro-descendants to live in, given the jobs offered by the United Fruit Company; second, between 1930 and 1940, some laws prohibited them from obtaining jobs outside the Port of Limon; third, there was a clear linguistic barrier, as the majority of the population were Spanish monolinguals; fourth, the Costa Rican government showed no inter-

8 Carmen Hutchinson Miller. *The Province and Port of Limon* (Heredia: Editorial Universidad Nacional, EUNA, 2015).

est in incorporating the Afro-Limonese culture into its society. Spence Sharpe summarizes this reality as follows: "in general, as a consequence of its exclusion within the Costa Rican society and to the presence of a great employer, the United Fruit Company, the Afro-Caribbeans were able to hold on to their cultural and linguistic values."[9]

Herzfeld[10] adds that, although gradually people from the Central Valley migrated to Limon Province in search of job opportunities, unbelievably, it was not until 1948 that the Afro-Costa Rican people were given Costa Rican citizenship. Spence Sharpe claims that it is at this point when the *Afro-Costa Rican* culture begins; as a result, a process of acculturation and new linguistic values began, as it implied the survival in this new socio-economic context. Gradually, the process of replacing the Creole language with the national language, the Spanish language, began.

Sánchez Avendaño[11] adds that Limonese Creole is spoken by a minority group, historically marginalized from the centers of power and decision making as a result of the stigmatization of its roots, its phenotype and socio-economical condition, as well as for its cultural practices.

Likewise, Sánchez Avendaño argues that the main reason why Limonese Creole was maintained is its geographic isolation as well as the limited interaction with the majority language.

Key Concepts on Limonese Creole

Creole Languages

According to Spence Sharpe, *creole*

> comes from the Portuguese word *crioullo* which referred to a slave born and raised in his master's house, then it meant 'son of European parents born in a colony'. Later, the term was used to refer to some languages spoken in the Caribbean, in Western Africa, in the Indic Ocean, and in the Far East. [12]

Spence Sharpe adds that the best well-known Creole languages are those spoken by the descendants of Black slaves brought to the Caribbean to work

9 Spence Sharpe (2004a), 52 (my translation).

10 Anita Herzfeld. "La autoimagen de los hablantes del criollo limonense," *Letras* 25-26 (1992): 139-158.

11 Carlos Sánchez Avendaño. "Situación sociolingüística de las lenguas minoritarias de Costa Rica y censos nacionales de población 1927-2000: Vitalidad, desplazamiento y auto afiliación etnolingüística," *Filología y Lingüística* 35, 2 (2009): 233-273.

12 Marva Spence Sharpe. "Educación en lengua criolla: las actitudes de los educandos en la costa atlántica de Nicaragua," *Revista Intersedes* 5, 8 (2004b): 1-14 (2); my translation.

on the sugar and banana plantations. She further points out that most of these Creole languages lack a writing system.

Fishman and Garcia point out that creoles and even pidgins are capable of revitalizing their social status "via planned or unplanned attributional modification."[13] In fact, they say, "the much-valued English language was widely considered no more than a crude Johnny-come-lately creole little more than half a millennium ago, and its remarkable rise in the interim should prompt us to realize that it could yet experience a similarly remarkable reversal of fortune while other languages might yet supplant it in its most valuable functions in centuries still unforeseen."[14]

Language as a Manifestation of Culture

Padilla and Borsato define *language* as the means through which we "transmit information about our culture from one generation to another. In other words, language and culture are intimately bound together… language is, in a very real sense, the glue that holds a single social group together."[15] Fishman and Garcia add that, "through language, the child learns what her parents and community value by way of their cultural beliefs and practices. Thus, language becomes associated with the emotions and behavioral texture of what it means to be a member of a cultural group."[16]

Padilla and Borsato claim that language constitutes a symbol of the vitality of an ethnic group, hence the use of terms such as *mother tongue*. That is, "language, like a mother, provides the nurturance and stability so necessary for healthy development and fulfillment. Language gives meaning to an ethnic group because it connects the present to its past through its oral traditions, literacy forms, music, history, and customs."[17]

Ethnicity

Padilla and Borsato define *ethnicity* as "an individual's membership in a social group sharing a common ancestral heritage."[18] They add that "a language becomes a crucial element of what constitutes racial and ethnic identification… it becomes part of a person's identity and is highly valued as a critical element in what it means to be a member of an ethnic group."[19] Fishman and Garcia point out that the concept *ethnicity* still has negative connotations due

13 Fishman and García, xxv.

14 Fishman and García, xxv.

15 Padilla and Borsato, 6-7.

16 Fishman and García, 12.

17 Padilla and Borsato, 12.

18 Padilla and Borsato, 11.

19 Padilla and Borsato, 12.

to historical events which go back for centuries. Yet, an awareness of identity may be fostered by political, religious, economic, and special interest groups.

Social Identity

Spence Sharpe[20] and Padilla and Borsato argue that people identify with a particular racial or ethnic group through their primary socialization with parents, other family members and friends, and of course, peers and teachers, as argued in Hirschfeld.[21] Through socialization, children acquire their own *social identity*; socialization occurs through one's mother tongue.

Generally, socialization comes about through a combination of direct instruction, modeling, feedback, and other-generated experiences. According to Spence Sharpe, direct instruction consists of verbal exhortations reflecting the appropriateness of various behavioral alternatives.[22] Modeling consists of observational learning through identification with and imitation of significant others, such as parents and teachers. Feedback consists of rewards and punishments indicating the appropriateness of various behavioral alternatives. Other-generated experience refers to selective exposure to environments that guide behavior and are determined by the socialization agent. All these forms of socialization take place through one's home and community language.

Hoffman[23] argues that "language plays a large role in identity formation, and the loss of a language has significant consequences for its speakers. Endangered language communities also start to lose valuable cultural practices, such as oral histories, traditional songs and poetry, and other art forms that are tied to language." Moreover, "Your native language also binds you to others and creates a community of speakers".[24]

Language Vitality

Zimmermann[25] defines linguistic vitality as "the willingness of a speech community to use its language in the most possible functional domains."[26]

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20 Spence Sharpe, 2004a.

21 Lawrence Hirschfeld. "Children's Developing Conceptions of Race," Stephen M. Quintana and Clark McKown, eds. *Handbook of Race, Racism, and the Developing Child* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons, 2008) 37-54. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118269930.

22 Spence Sharpe, 2004a.

23 Maureen Hoffmann. "Endangered Languages, Linguistics, and Culture: Researching and Reviving the Unami Language of the Lenape," *Thesis,* Bryn Mawr College (2009) 3.

24 Hoffman, 21.

25 Klaus Zimmermann. "Ecología lingüística y planificación lingüística," Lluís Vidal-Folch and Azucena Palacios Alcaine, eds. *Lenguas vivas en América Latina* (Barcelona: Institut Català de Cooperació, 2004): 93-125.

26 As cited in Sánchez Avendaño, 236 (my translation).

Likewise, Sánchez Avendaño suggests that to determine the vitality of a language, one shall rely on ethnographic field work as well as on statistical data by observing *in situ* the contexts in which the language is used by the social group, the people with whom the language is spoken, which is the language used in the socialization of children by parents and grandparents, the ages of the people who do use the language, and the number of people who know and use the vernacular language.

Giles, Bourhis y Taylor,[27] on the other hand, propose three main factors which are needed to measure linguistic vitality: status, demographic weight, and official support. This concept is key in the current study, as Limonese Creole appears to lack such status outside as well as inside its community. Spence Sharpe has insisted that given a feeling of inferiority, maintaining a language is difficult without official support.[28]

Language Endangerment

Zimmermann[29] defines linguistic vitality as "the willingness of a speech community to use its language in the majority of possible functional domains."[30]

In 2003, the UNESCO additionally defined six degrees of endangerment, namely: safe, vulnerable (children speak the language but only in certain domains such as the home), definitely endangered (children no longer learn the language as mother tongue in the home), severely endangered (language is spoken by grandparents and older generations; while the parent generation may understand it, they do not speak it to children or among themselves), critically endangered (the youngest speakers are grandparents and older, and they speak the language partially and infrequently), and extinct (when there are no speakers left).

Romaine points out that language endangerment of minority languages is a natural process, as language usage

> declines in domains where the language was once secure, e.g., in churches, the workplace, schools, and, most importantly, the home, as growing numbers of parents fail to transmit the language to their children. Fluency in the language

27 Howard Giles, Richard Y. Bourhis and Donald M. Taylor. "Towards a Theory of Language in Ethnic Group Relations," Howard Giles, ed. *Language, Ethnicity and Intergroup Relations* (London: Academic Press, 1977) 307-48.

28 Marva Spence Sharpe. "Language Attitudes of Limon Creole Speakers," *Revista de Filología y Lingüística* 24 (1998): 101-112. DOI 10.15517/RFL.V24I1.20432.

29 Zimmermann.

30 As cited in Sánchez Avendaño, 236 (my translation).

> is higher among older speakers, as younger generations prefer to speak another (usually the dominant societal) language.[31]

Romaine further argues that "the pulse of a language quite clearly lies in the youngest generation. Languages are at risk when they are no longer transmitted naturally to children in the home by parents or other caretakers. UNESCO suggests that languages being learned by fewer than 30% of the younger generation may be at risk."[32]

Linguistic Substitution / Linguistic Replacement

Spence Sharpe claims that the model of *linguistic substitution* starts with a monolingual generation in the minority language (in the case of the Limon Province, the English-based Creole), followed by a bilingual generation where either language might be dominant; the third generation is bilingual but the dominant language is the majority language, in this case, the Spanish language. She argues that "The inability of the community to hinder the intrusion of the Spanish language with its interlocutors in an intimate relationship (grandparents, spouses, children, grandchildren) is decisive for the displacement of the vernacular language."[33]

Similarly, Sánchez Avendaño points out that linguistic replacement—the processes that come before the extinction of a language and imply the redistribution of the languages involved according to their function in the social context—occurs in a three-generation period wherein two languages first come into contact, then the minority community becomes bilingual as its members maintain their vernacular language and acquire a majority language, but then the autochthonous language begins to recede, resulting in what he refers to as unstable bilingualism. This stage is followed by monolingualism in the majority or dominant language when the bilingual generation only transmits the dominant language to their children.[34] According to Fasold,[35] linguistic replacement occurs because the vernacular language is seen as inferior and the rate of substitution of words from the dominant language for words from the minority language increases.

31 Romaine, 117.

32 Romaine, 122.

33 Spence Sharpe, 2004a, 56 (my translation).

34 Based on Brenzinger, 2007.

35 Ralph Fasold. *La sociolingüística de la sociedad. Introducción a la Sociolingüística* (Madrid: Visor Libros, 1996).

Studies on the Vitality of Limonese Creole

A study conducted at the National University of Costa Rica (Universidad Nacional; henceforth, UNA)[36] by a group of linguists including René Zúñiga and Juan Diego Quesada revealed that before the year 2000, 55,000 people spoke Creole in Costa Rica, but this number has not been updated given that the national censuses have not included this question since then.

In an article published in 1992, Herzfeld argues that in the province of Limon, the children were bilingual from the onset. They learned a Creole language—referred to as Limonese Creole (henceforth, LC)—at home and Spanish with their white friends in the neighborhood and in kindergarten. They played in LC if everyone was black and in Spanish if there were white children or some other minority children in the group. At home, normally LC was spoken, especially when the grandparents were present.

In a more recent study, Spence Sharpe[37] shows a different, not so encouraging picture. She assessed the linguistic ability of the Afro-Costa Rican Creole speakers from the urban area in the Limon province via a questionnaire wherein participants assessed their own linguistic ability in Creole as well as in Spanish. The results showed a clear difference depending on the participants age; while the majority of those older than 21 reported speaking Creole *perfectly* or *very well*, the majority of the participants younger than 21 reported speaking Creole *moderately* (60%); 29% argued speaking it *very well*, and only 16% reported speaking it *perfectly*.

Spence Sharpe[38] additionally reports that the younger the participants, the more likely it was that the first language which they were exposed to was Spanish. A positive finding in Spence Sharpe's study (2004b) was that Creole is the language preferred for activities deeply-rooted in the Limonese tradition.

Government Initiatives to Support the Limonese Creole

In Costa Rica, according to Article 76 of the Political Constitution, it is mandatory to maintain the indigenous languages that are still alive in Costa Rica (including specifically; Bribrí, Cabécar, Guamí, and Guatuso); however, Limonese Creole is not contemplated, as it is not an indigenous language despite being a minority language.

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36 Rodolfo Marín. "Limón quiere su lengua criolla en las aulas y juicios. Decenas de limonenses impulsan reforma legal para rescatar el lenguaje," *La Nación. El País*, 28 febrero, 2016, <https://www.nacion.com/el-pais/limon-quiere-su-lengua-criolla-en-aulas-y-juicios/HJ3ZGLXOPZFVNE7FG774GZAF6A/story/>.

37 Marva Spence Sharpe. "El criollo limonense: diglosia o bilingüismo," *Revista Intersedes* 8 (2004b): 1-14.

38 Spence Sharpe, 2004b.

Nonetheless, as a result of various efforts by congressmen, academics, and Afro-Costa Ricans, the Legislative Assembly finally approved the establishment of August 30 as the day of the Creole language, besides the day to promote educational and cultural activities that may contribute to the recognition of the creole Language as one more language spoken in the country.[39]

The efforts made in the last two years by Costa Rican government authorities are optimistic for those who believe in rescuing the identities of minority communities; yet, I believe that although this initiative is officially recognized by government authorities, that does not guarantee that Limonese Creole be revitalized, as it will depend on the Limonese community itself to find ways to ensure that they preserve their language. As argued by Spence Sharpe, "the fight to redeem these languages so that they be used with educational purposes have been diligent on the part of linguists and different Creole communities; nonetheless, the politics by governments has been that of ignoring such proposals."[40]

Language Revitalization Efforts

In recent years, efforts to support, preserve, and revitalize minority languages have been made around the world. Romaine points out that by and large, communities turn to education to strengthen and preserve minority languages through immersion programs, as is the case in Hawaii where children learn Hawaiian from pre-school onwards, whereas English is introduced in the fifth grade. She adds that some other communities teach the target language as a subject a few hours a day, instead. Reportedly, a similar scenario occurs in Quebec to preserve the Mohawk language, as well as in Ireland where Irish is taught mainly as a second language.

In contrast, Romaine points out that in California, native languages are being preserved through what she refers to as Master–Apprentice program, "which brings together a fluent elder and a learner, who use the language for everyday activities."[41] She describes yet an additional strategy wherein elders lead immersion camps for several days with learners of various ages, normally during summer; these camps include cultural activities where the native language is used.

Romaine insists that formal education or initiatives lead by dominant cultures are not likely to succeed in revitalizing endangered languages. She states: "Nowhere have language movements succeeded if they relied on the school or

39 Aarón Chinchilla. "Congreso aprueba ley para celebrar día de la lengua criolla limonense," *ElPeriodicocr*, 19 setiembre, 2018, <https://elperiodicocr.com/congreso-aprueba-ley-para-celebrar-dia-de-la-lengua-criolla-limonense>.

40 Spence Sharpe, 2004b, 2-3 (my translation).

41 As reported in Hinton, 2002, 26.

state to carry the primary burden of maintenance or revival."[42] Proposals on revitalizing dying languages usually come from small groups of intellectuals; the real challenge is to achieve this goal from within the community, from its foundation.

In Paraguay, initiatives have been made to declare *Guaraní* as an official language alongside Spanish, i.e., the dominant language. Guaraní was recognized in 1992; yet, according to Perasso, "little has been done to capture the bilingual nature of the country in official matters."[43]

In Nicaragua, as reported in Spence Sharpe, important efforts were made to maintain the Creole language spoken by the Afro communities through what is referred to as Intercultural Bilingual Education. This educational initiative refers to schools for minority communities whose aim is to educate students, first, in the minority language, and gradually introduce the majority language. Nonetheless, most speakers of Creole languages do not know the writing system nor do the teachers know how to teach such languages because they lack training or the proper methodologies.

Now, if we turn to analyze what has happened in Costa Rica regarding educational policies on minority languages we find that the educational authorities in Costa Rica insisted, even since the time of Independence in 1821, that it was unfavorable to maintain the Afro-Costa Rican children in church schools where they learned their ancestral language.[44] That idea got to the Afro-Costa Rican parents who by and large withdrew their children from such schools and these eventually closed. The so-called official schools helped teach the new language along its values. In fact, Spence Sharpe[45] argues that physical punishment was often used to obtain such linguistic goals.

Additionally, Herzfeld claims that back in 1974, there was interest to promote the teaching of English in Limon grade schools, but the assimilation of the Limonese community to the dominant culture called for the teaching of Spanish instead. Furthermore, a native from Limon, Eulalia Bernard, together with authorities from the Ministry of Public Education offered training seminars in an effort to teach Limonese Creole, but the initiative did not succeed, as Limonese people in positions of power in the educational system refused to accept the existence of Creole.

Overall, Herzfeld reports that in Costa Rica, the legislation requires the educational process to be conducted in Spanish, the majority language, and that English be taught as a second language, though Limonese children soon

42 Romaine, 126.

43 Valeria Perasso. "Paraguay: impulsan el guaraní como 'lengua oficial.'" *BBC Mundo*, Cono Sur (agosto 2010) 1 (my translation).

44 Spence, 2004a.

45 Spence, 2004a.

get bored in the English class and hence resort to speaking Creole. She further states that Spanish is the language used in teaching, the media, commerce, public services, politics, official and legal transactions, and at governmental offices, among others. The Limonese have been taught that their vernacular language is but broken English, or a dialect, but not a true language. In fact, she argues, the Limonese themselves associate their Creole with "lack of education, primitive ways of behavior, belief in superstitions, poverty, slavery, and lack of the necessary contact to acquire a certain social status (my translation).[46]

Nevertheless, in the last two years, educational authorities, Limonese communities, and government officials have begun to work on proposals to strengthen Limonese Creole. For example, in 2016, UNA researchers started working on the first illustrated Creole alphabet and are working on writing the first descriptive grammar of this language. The *Illustrated Creole Alphabet* was finally published in August 2018 by linguists Rene Zúñiga and Claudia Thompson, and presented in Puerto Viejo, Limon, on August 10, 2018.[47] This, of course, is great news for those who believe in rescuing the identities of minority communities such as the Afro communities in Limon. Nonetheless, based on experiences of other countries, some of which have been reviewed in this article, the fact that this initiative was made official by government authorities does not guarantee that Limonese Creole can be revitalized, as it will be up to the Limonese community itself to find ways to ensure that they maintain their language.

The Study

To determine the vitality of Limonese Creole (LC), the study first included a questionnaire distributed to 45 parents with children under 16 from three districts in the Limon Province: Limon center, Cahuita, and Puerto Viejo. The 35-item questionnaire inquired on participants' perceptions about being afro-descendants and on the role played by the LC within their social imaginaries, whether they are proud to speak LC, possible benefits in speaking this vernacular language, and their disposition to promote and strengthen the LC among the younger generations. The questionnaire was answered by 30 mothers and 15 fathers from these three communities, who had volunteered to be part of the study. In addition, this article reports on opinions and reactions by other Afro-Limonese adults who participated in the presentation of the preliminary results as well as in 2 focus groups to compliment this report; these two complimentary activities took place at two sites: Limon center and Cahuita, as a way to triangulate the initial results.

46 Herzfeld, 1992, 150.

47 Monturiol, 2018.

Main Results

Through the questionnaire, participants referred to several reasons why they consider themselves Afro-Limonese people, highlighting the fact that they speak a Creole language. When asked to identify the features which might define the Afro-Limonese culture, they pointed out as the most relevant:

1. Their Afro-Limonese food
2. The Creole language
3. Living in extended families
4. Their calypso music

All participants further stated that they love their culture because it is unique, happy, rich in customs and traditions, with much flavor because of its African roots, and because of their Creole language; they highlighted the fact that they are proudly bilingual or multi-lingual.

Another fact which is highlighted is that they carry their culture within and love their skin color; they are furthermore pleased because of the contributions which Afro-descendants have made to the Costa Rican society and about how strong they have been despite adversity.

When asked about the things which they most love about their culture, they listed the calypso music (30 participants), their food (26 people), traditions such as marching bands, the celebration of Black People Day and their parades (22 people).

During the focal groups, participants also talked about what it truly means to be an Afro-descendant; for example:

> Participant 1: "being Afro-limonense is my life, it is part of my existence as Afro-limonense, it is my core, my past, my preset… a form of being" (my translation).

> Participant 3: "to me, it is part of a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural Costa Rica… it is the true living and living together among races and cultures which are distinct in true brotherhood/sisterhood. To me, it is the sun, the wind, the sand, the air… it is living" (my translation).

> Participant 6: "it is a duality, … it is to be a person with a legacy… who comes from another continent, who passed through the Caribbean, who rebelled, who arrived in Costa Rica as a migrant; it is living among this Afro-Caribbean legacy and also the Limonese one, the Costa-Rican one which adds another identity to the being. So, it is being someone with several identities" (my translation).

It should be highlighted here that although the focus groups were conducted in Spanish, very often participants turned to their Creole language and provided their responses in Creole; that, in and of itself speaks of the true meaning

which this language has for them, as it seems that they are more comfortable expressing their feelings about their own culture in their mother tongue.

Overall, they highlight *pride*, *heritage*, *legacy*, *identity, responsibility*, *brotherhood/sisterhood*, *survival* (*strength*), and *resistance* as words which define them as Afro-descendants.

Through the questionnaire, items related to *language* evidenced that 100% of the participants speak at least two languages, Spanish and Limonese Creole. Whereas 100% reportedly speak Spanish fluently (i.e., effortlessly), 8.2% speak LC at an advanced level, 11.1% at an intermediate level, and 6.6% at a basic level. Nonetheless, when asked what their dominant language is, 18 (40%) report Spanish whereas 26 (57.7%) report that it is the CL; 5 argue being balanced in both languages. These numbers, of course, are very positive. As for some reasons Spanish constitutes their dominant language, participants state:

1. Spanish is the language spoken the most in their communities, at work, and at schools.
2. Spanish is the language which they use to advance in the country; it allows them to relate to the majority of people.
3. One informant stated that at schools, "they force kids to speak Spanish, and Creole is not allowed."

Regarding their reasons why they believe LC is their dominant language, one is their mother tongue; besides, it is used daily with family and other with whom they are closest in their communities. Whereas 37 participants argue that they use LC with family, 29 reportedly use it with friends; 13, at social, religious, and sports activities; and only 11, work. Overall, these opinions suggest that Limonese Creole consists of a very personal, intimate language.

Furthermore, 43 of the participants claim that they would have chosen to learn LC, given that they very much enjoy speaking it. They are proud to speak their ancestral language because it tells them apart from other socio-cultural groups; the LC is a way to strengthen their cultural identity and the linguistic culture of the country; besides, it allows them to continue with their Afro tradition and identifies them as Afro-descendants.

Overall, 100% of the participants stated being proud to speak LC for reasons such as the following:

1. It is the language of their ancestors.
2. It defines them as Afro-Limonese people.
3. It is different.
4. It is the cultural language of the province.
5. It is part of their roots.
6. It made it easier for them to learn standard English.

7. It represents the Afro-Limonese community.
8. It reminds them of where they come from.
9. It represents their legacy.

During the presentation of preliminary results, one participant said: "something happens when I speak Creole;" speaking Creole opened doors for them to travel and work abroad, given how similar it is to Standard English.

When participants were asked to state reasons why it is useful to speak LC, the reasons shown in table 1 were provided:

Table 1. Reported Benefits in Speaking Limonese Creole

It strengthens the Afro-Limonese culture and identity	41
It maintains unity within Afro-Limonese families	24
It allows for the transmittal of their Afro traditions and culture to the younger generations	39
It facilitates the learning of other languages	14
It eases the acquisition of English	25
It allows them to obtain better jobs	11
It strengthens tourism in the area	18

Source: Information from questionnaire.

Participants were asked what would happen if the Creole language were lost. The majority answered that their traditions would also be lost (75%), their calypso music would die (44.4%), and family ties would weaken (31%).

Furthermore, participants agree that the Creole language shall be reinforced and revitalized for several reasons:

1. To strengthen and continue with their Afro-Limonese culture.
2. Because it is part of their being Limonese.
3. Because if the new generations do not learn it, it will be lost; the youngsters do not speak it anymore.
4. Because their ancestral legacy shall be rescued.
5. To guarantee that those children of white mothers learn Creole
6. Because even when it has weakened, we shall not allow the LC to die out.
7. Because it is a tourist attraction.

Participating parents were requested to provide ways in which the LC could be maintained, namely. They suggest the following:

1. Teaching the LC at schools and high schools or through private lessons.
2. Promoting the LC within their own families.
3. Creating groups within communities to practice their LC.
4. Designing activities for the youth to practice LC.

5. Teaching new generations about the value of LC as something that identifies them as Afro-Limonese people.

The adults participating in the presentation of preliminary results suggest, in addition, going back to the English schools wherein children would be instructed in English and then introduced to Spanish.

Given that the main objective in this research process was to determine the extent to which Afro-Limonese parents believe in the need to strengthen the Creole language by teaching it to the new generations, parents were asked if they speak Creole at home. Some 75.5% of the participating parents argue that they do indeed speak Creole to their children, though the remaining parents do not do so, mainly because their Creole is limited, because the other parent is monolingual in Spanish, or because they do not live with their children. In fact, 65% of the parents report that they speak mainly Creole to their children, in contrast with 35% who do report speaking mostly Spanish to their children.

Those parents who do allegedly speak mainly Creole to their children uphold that the ways in which they preserve the Creole language is through the strategies listed in table 2:

Table 2. Strategies Used by Parents to Maintain the LC in their Children

Strategies Used	Women	Men	Total
We only speak to them in Creole	17	3	20
We speak to them mainly in Creole	11	3	14
They spend time with their grad parents so they can learn Creole better	1	2	3
We organize family and social activities for them to practice Creole	3	2	5
We have groups of parents to help strengthen their Creole	5	0	5
We only speak creole to them	0	1	1

Source: Information from questionnaire.

During the focus groups, participating adults express concern about the fact that despite their believing in the importance of revitalizing and maintaining the heritage language, youngsters do not want to do so. They believe that the perception of the younger generations is not surprising, as it is the result of a process of discrimination which Afro-costa Ricans have been subjected to. For instance, from within families, children are told that it is better to be white, that it is a plus if one is "not very dark" (participant 2, my translation).

Additionally, participants argue that youngsters might not feel identified as Afro-descendants because they do not feel represented politically or socially; the province itself *expels* youngsters so they can survive in this capitalist society; it does not provide them with the necessary tools because the process

of self-identity is taken over by the formal educational system. Youngsters have no tools to feel pride of their ancestry inside or outside the province of Limon. They do point out, nonetheless, that some, even if they move to the Central Valley as youngsters, end up returning to the province of Limon and feel proud of being Afro-descendants. As Participant 4 points out, being proud of your Afro background depends largely from the home: "… they maintained their identity, and that has to do with the support system and the work done at home, what is given from home" (author's own translation).

Participant 1 even states: "…now, they are the ones who are saying, I urgently need that I be given my Creole, because I am a part of this. So, they come to bible schools on vacation, they walk into other kids, and they feel embarrassed" (author's own translation). Likewise, Participant 2 states that it is a fact that sometimes when the Afro-Limonese teenagers do not know how to speak Creole, they feel left out by other Afro-Limonese peers who do speak Creole.

Nonetheless, Participant 6 states that she is often surprised to come up to a youngster and speak to him/her in Creole, expecting an answer and getting a 'yo no hablo inglés' (I do not speak English) as a response.

Finally, Participant 7 states: "I think they must learn it because it is their legacy, and if they do not learn it, it will be lost. You have to tell youngsters to learn it because it is a legacy" (author's own translation).

Finally, these adults additionally state that it is important to teach youngsters their Creole language and not just Standard English, "even if it implies speaking a language which they do not read, and reading and writing in a language which they do not speak" (participant 4).

Concluding Remarks

As seen from the beginning of this article, languages strengthen and transmit our cultural values; languages define who we are, our identity. It is paramount to recognize the right which all individuals have to use their vernacular languages, regardless of whether they are a minority language or not, as they are the way in which a groups' identity can be maintained.

If we take into account Padilla and Borsato's[48] argument that language constitutes the means through which we transmit knowledge about our culture and hence these two concepts are inseparable, the ability to comprehend the perceptions on the meaning which the Creole language has for the Afro-Limonese population becomes vital. The results of this study certainly point to that these people do value their language as being an inherent part of their cultural heritage and that they hence believe in reinforcing and maintaining it as a way to preserve their Afro identity.

48 Padilla and Borsato.

Nonetheless, it is also clear in this study that strengthening LC is a task which depends on new generations. As argued by Fishman and Garcia, it is through the home language that children learn to appreciate their culture and hence, their identity, cultural beliefs and practices. Language binds us to our roots, and if that language is a vernacular language, then it must be protected and cherished in the home. Communities whose vernacular languages are lost can also lose an essential part of their identity; as vernacular languages vanish, so do oral traditions, songs, and any other art and cultural forms realized through it. As stated by Hoffman, language creates and maintains communities, and binds them together.

Although Limonese Creole has historically been given a low status because of socio-political reasons, the Afro-Limonese community today is still claiming their need to preserve the language by fostering it among the younger generations. To do so, this language shall be reinforced first, from within families, and then outside the home by including it in as many socio-cultural activities as possible, so as to change people's minds regarding its status; this is the only way to ensure its survival. In fact, the lack of spaces in which Creole can be used is translated into an imperfect acquisition in the younger generations.

This is precisely what is suggested by the group of parents and grandparents who participated either in the written questionnaire or in the focus groups. They believe that the LC shall be reinforced from within the family and the community. To do so, however, Afro-Limonese people should first work on reinforcing the value that their vernacular language has and has had as part of their identity and tradition.

Fortunately, if we take into account the degrees of endangerment provided by UNSESCO, we could refer to Limonese Creole as having a *vulnerable* status, as Afro-Limonese children do speak it, but only in certain domains, and only a percentage of them do so (this percentage, of course, is still to be determined). The good news is that Limonese Creole cannot be defined as an endangered language just yet, but measures must be taken as soon as possible to prevent this from happening. It is up to the new generations, with the support of their adult relatives, be it parents, grandparents, aunts, and uncles, who must take control; for "the pulse of a language quite clearly lies in the youngest generation."[49] In fact, and as was already stated by Spence Sharpe: "The inability of the community to hinder the intrusion of the Spanish language with its interlocutors in an intimate relationship (grandparents, spouses, children, grandchildren) is decisive for the displacement of the vernacular language" (my translation).[50]

49 Romaine.

50 Spence Sharpe, 2004a. 56.

What must be avoided at all costs is what Sánchez Avendaño refers to as a type of recession of the vernacular language, which is followed by a stage of unstable bilingualism, and in turn, followed by monolingualism in the majority or dominant language.

Other strategies which could be used to ensure that LC is strengthened include what Romaine reports for native languages in California, namely the use of a sort of Master-Apprentice program wherein fluent adults and elderly serve as tutors for young children during daily activities. To expect that the preservation of a Creole language can be achieved solely through formal means such as formal educational programs is a bit naïve, as it has been shown that no political or educational initiatives have been able to do so.

Este tomo reúne los documentos más valiosos del VI Congreso Internacional de Lingüística Aplicada, efectuado en 2019 en la Universidad Nacional (UNA, Costa Rica). En la actividad confluyeron las aportaciones en los campos de los estudios literarios, la lingüística general, la lingüística aplicada, la enseñanza de lengua y la traductología. Se incluyen las conferencias de apertura y clausura, que trataron asuntos fundamentales del congreso, que fueron posteriormente tratados a profundidad en las sesiones de trabajo, entre los numerosos ponentes que participaron. La Escuela de Literatura y Ciencias del Lenguaje, entidad organizadora, ofrece esta memoria en sus versiones impresa y digital, para garantizar el libre acceso a la información, como lo demandan los tiempos.

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