

## Reexamining the classification of an endangered language: The vitality of Brunca

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In 2010, linguists declared Boruca (Brúncakjk) or Brunca (brn), an Indigenous language originating in what is now Costa Rica, to be extinct, basing their assessment on the number of living fully fluent native speakers. Since 2010, there has been no written verification of the current state of the language. Brunca classes are offered in the elementary schools as the primary way the language is being maintained, but they have not been taken into account in prior analyses. According to published research from almost two decades ago, Brunca appears to be losing ground. This has led to its designation as “critically endangered” or “dormant” by most established scales. In order to determine the actual status of the language in the community, we conducted participant observations in the Brunca classes and a series of interviews with the Boruca Culture Council, community elders, and a linguist currently involved in revitalization efforts elsewhere in Costa Rica. Through the present analysis of local stakeholders’ responses, data emerged on truncated but existent efforts to bring back the language. Thus, the present study is at the cutting edge of trying to define what should be measured to determine language vitality and progress in revitalization.

**1. Introduction**<sup>1</sup> Beginning with the colonization by the Spanish in the late 16th century and the encroachment of the Spanish language and expanding economic industry (i.e., the Inter-American Highway, the Boruca Dam project, etc.), the Indigenous peoples and cultures of what is now Costa Rica have suffered great costs. One of the greatest costs is in regards to their languages. All of the six remaining Indigenous languages in Costa Rica are threatened (Rojas Chaves 2002). The one in the gravest danger is Boruca (or Brunca, Brúncakjk). The territories in which Brunca was traditionally spoken are adjacent to each other in the south central part of Costa Rica, in the county of Buenos Aires, in the province of Puntarenas.

The first written mention of the Brunca people was in 1562 (Vázquez de Coronado 1562/1977). Boruca was along the route between the Spanish colonial capital of Cartago and Panama City, making it a perfect stopover for travelers. Nevertheless, due to geographic buffers and the lack of sufficient communication systems, the

<sup>1</sup>The author thanks all interviewees and members of the community for their time and help. The author also acknowledges that some of the questions asked in the interviews were generated by her students, and thanks them for their enthusiasm about the research and for helping her document some of the details. This research was made possible through the Marie-Louise and Eugene Jackson International Fund for Faculty Development.

people of Boruca were able to protect and maintain their language and cultural traditions and values for a period of time. Also due to the treacherous terrain surrounding Boruca, but mostly due to the strong character of the Brunca people, the Spanish settlers were not successful in conquering them for many decades. Although many Indigenous people died from exposure to settler diseases, there appears to have been a steady population regrowth after colonial times. More than 100 Brunca families were counted in 1889 (Fernández 1889:315); in 1900, 250 were counted (Sanabria Martínez 1992:129); and in 1949, 641 Indigenous people were counted in the area (Stone 1949:3). According to the Costa Rica National Census of 2011, the most recent data available, there were 1,933 people in Boruca who identified as Indigenous, of which 115 or 5.6% stated that they spoke the Indigenous language.<sup>2</sup> There was no qualification in the document of what “speaking the language” entailed, which leaves the fluency of these speakers open for investigation.

There have been differing judgments made on the state of vitality of the Brunca language in the literature. In 2002, Quesada Pacheco said “Adiós” to Boruca. In 2008, Castro declared the language “extinct”. Brunca was listed as “critically endangered” by UNESCO’s Atlas of the World’s Languages in Danger, which cites the 2000 census.<sup>3</sup> With all native fluent speakers having now passed away, Brunca appears to have reached an extreme point of decay in the work that has been published thus far. One hundred percent of the Boruca people speak Spanish. Their universal command of the Spanish language renders maintenance of their heritage language that much more difficult. With the lack of Indigenous political power in Costa Rica, maintaining the Brunca language in the education system and community is a way to ensure cultural autonomy (Díaz-Azofeifa 2012). The Brunca culture is strengthened if the Brunca language is vibrant. In turn, this will attract tourism, a viable and desirable source of employment and economic resources, which are still lacking (Pérez Stefanov 2011).

**2. Documentation and teaching of the Brunca language** The language of Boruca (as named in Spanish) or Brunca (a simplification of *Brúnkajk*, the endonym) was not written down nor described by linguists until the middle of the 19th century. The word *Brúnkajk* itself is believed to derive from *brun*, which means ‘ash’, and *kak*, which means ‘place’ or ‘country’ (Arroyo Soto 1966). According to Arroyo Soto (1966:21), this is because the town of Boruca used to be situated in an area called *kramankrauxa*, where the land is similar in color to ash. It is important to note for reasons of language maintenance that Brunca is typologically very distinct from Spanish, the language that has become most prevalent in Boruca. Brunca belongs to the Isthmian branch of the Chibcha family of languages. Like most Chibchan languages, Brunca has two tones (high and low), a subject-object-verb (SOV) word order, and postpositions. Although Brunca has 17 consonants and 5 main vowels, which is similar to Spanish, it is an agglutinative language with no gender marking,

<sup>2</sup>Nacional de Estadística y Censos (Costa Rica). 2011. “X Censo Nacional de Población y IV de Vivienda 2011”. San José: Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos (INEC). [http://www.uned.ac.cr/extension/images/ifcmdl/02.\\_Censo\\_2011.\\_Territorios\\_Indigenas.pdf](http://www.uned.ac.cr/extension/images/ifcmdl/02._Censo_2011._Territorios_Indigenas.pdf). (Accessed 25 June 2018).

<sup>3</sup>UNESCO. “UNESCO Atlas of the World’s Languages in Danger”. 2017. <http://www.unesco.org/languages-atlas/index.php>. (Accessed 25 June 2018).

unlike Spanish. In Brunca, personal pronouns function as possessive adjectives, and plurality is marked with the use of the particle *rójc*, unlike in Spanish, which has distinct personal pronouns and possessive adjectives and marks plurality with the addition of the morphemes *-s* or *-es* (Quesada Pacheco 1996). Finally, Brunca has inflections that mark for tense, aspect, and mood, like Spanish, but no inflections that mark person or number, which is unlike Spanish (Arroyo Soto 1966). These significant typological differences between Spanish and Brunca may have an adverse effect on the early stages of acquisition of Brunca by Spanish-speakers due to negative transfer (Odlin 1989; Flege, Bohn, & Jang 1997; Wang & Liu 2013; Seibert Hanson & Carlson 2014).

According to Quesada Pacheco (1998), the first written materials on Brunca come from the second half of the 19th century (Valentini 1862; Gabb 1875/1886; Pittier, 1892–1896/1941; Thiel 1882), but these are only collections of vocabulary, and are extremely difficult to find in hard copy. The people of Boruca do not have access to them unless they have access to the Internet, which is not universal nor reliable. In the 1960s and '70s, Espíritu Santo Maroto Rojas, a self-taught linguist, was fearful of the decline of Brunca, so he transcribed Brunca legends and translated them into Spanish (Constenla Umaña & Maroto Rojas 1979/2011). These texts are the basis for the linguistic analysis of the language completed thus far (Quesada Pacheco 1998), but just as with the earlier documents, they are not available in the community now unless one has Internet access. Maroto Rojas also began teaching Brunca language classes informally in the community during the '70s. After his passing in 1981, there was a brief recess in the teaching of Brunca.

In 1985, after the national decree #16619 allowing education in Indigenous languages was passed, a petition by the community members asked for the implementation of Brunca language classes.<sup>4</sup> Shortly thereafter, Carmen Rojas Chaves of the Ministry of Public Education in conjunction with the University of Costa Rica implemented a teacher-training program for the community of Boruca. This program supplied the first instructors of Brunca to the elementary schools in the district. Rojas Chaves (1997) reported that the language teaching project at that time involved three itinerant teachers who had been trained at the University of Costa Rica, and were contracted to teach in the primary school in Boruca three hours a week. Currently, there are nine teachers for the elementary schools.<sup>5</sup>

Castro (2010) noted that the children who received language instruction in the primary school did not have access to continuing language studies in the high school. Additionally, the pressure was on to learn English as a second language (Castro 2010). Quesada Pacheco (1998) foreshadowed this concern about the decline of language propagation to the next generation by stating that the older generation, who had been physically beaten by their Spanish-speaking teachers for speaking Brunca, was understandably apprehensive about using the Indigenous language. Thus, even if the younger generations learned some Brunca, Quesada Pacheco (1998) predicted it

<sup>4</sup>Ministerio de Educación Pública. 1985. Decree #16619-MEP/1989. Decree #18967- MEP-C./1993. Decree #22072- MEP.

<sup>5</sup>Carmen Rojas Chaves in discussion with the author, May 2018.

would be hard for it to proliferate since those from the older generations would not engage in conversation in Brunca with them, and the initiative would slowly die out.

Twenty years later, the majority of these elders have passed, but some of the next generation who learned from the elders are invested in bringing back the language. In the present paper, I focus on assessing the current state not only of the teaching of Brunca in the elementary schools but also of the community use of the Brunca language in an attempt to show that the scales used thus far to measure language vitality and progress in revitalization do not match the reality on the ground.

**3. Analysis of vitality** Although there is more than one scale that has been put forth to measure language vitality, there is an overreliance on the number of native and fluent speakers to determine this vitality. For example, Fishman’s Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale, or GIDS (Fishman 1991), evaluated language endangerment based on intergenerational transmission. As the norms of use of a language fade, the domains in which the language is used change, which constitutes language shift. This unidirectional approach to categorizing language vitality leaves, as Fishman himself noted ten years later, an under-represented focus on applied directions and emphases within the GIDS (Fishman 2001). The Expanded Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale, or EGIDS, was later developed to expand this framework to apply to all languages including signed languages, and can account for some levels of language revitalization (Lewis & Simons 2010). Alternative labels for special situations have been included such as “reawakening” and “second language only”, two levels that characterize many languages in the process of being revitalized and which I propose would appear to better capture the status of Brunca.

In addition to EGIDS, UNESCO has their own 6-level scale of language endangerment and the *Catalogue of Endangered Languages* (ElCat) provides a Language Endangerment Index (LEI; see Lee & Van Way 2016), in which a language’s vitality is based on four elements:

1. The absolute number of speakers
2. Intergenerational transmission
3. Decreasing number of speakers
4. Decrease in domains of use

In the case of Brunca, if one of the aforementioned criteria has changed, then this would signal a change in the vitality of Brunca. The ElCat lists various conflicting statuses for Brunca: “awakening”, “dormant”, and “critically endangered”, depending on the source of the information. According to the ElCat, the website *Behind the Mask* is the source of the most optimistic of the three, “awakening”.<sup>6</sup> This website was created by community members with the aid of Elon University, and cites a revival of the language in the 1970s (referring to Santo Maroto’s work presumably). It

<sup>6</sup>Boruca: Behind the Mask. <http://www.boruca.org/en/language/>. (Accessed 2 July 2017).

states that the language currently is taught in the schools up until the fifth grade, and that there are 4–5 speakers remaining, the source of which is not documented. There have been no updates or changes to the website since I started visiting it in 2015, and it is unclear when it was first published. The source for the “dormant” distinction in the ElCat was Adolfo Constenla Umaña’s work from 2011. This is also the classification used on Ethnologue (<https://www.ethnologue.com/language/brn>), employing the EGIDS. Brunca was listed as “critically endangered” by UNESCO’s Atlas of the World’s Languages in Danger, which cites the 2000 census.

The last systematic study of the number of speakers of Brunca was in 1992, when Rojas Chaves determined there were only 10 fluent speakers of Brunca left, all bilinguals (in Spanish) and over the age of 50; she also enumerated 50 semi-speakers (Rojas Chaves 1992). A *semi-speaker* has been defined as someone who has “an imperfect command of the language because it was not the first and most important language in early infancy” (Quesada Pacheco 2000:66). As mentioned previously, Castro described the efforts towards revitalization as continued, but the state of the Brunca language as extinct (Castro 2008). She defined “extinct” as having no native fluent speakers as of 2003 and only one native non-fluent or semi-speaker left at the time of writing. This individual was Don Nemesio González, who passed away in April of 2018.

When I began the present research, I spoke with Miguel Ángel Quesada Pacheco, the most prolific linguist in regards to Brunca and co-author of the Spanish-Boruca bilingual dictionary. In April of 2015, Quesada Pacheco related to me why he is no longer working with the Boruca people, and that:

*No se ha publicado ningún estudio acerca de los alcances del proceso de revitalización de la lengua boruca, desde que empezó la enseñanza a los niños, hará una veintena de años. Sería, sin embargo, muy fructífero hacerlo.*

‘There hasn’t been any study on the extent of the Boruca language revitalization process, since they started teaching the children, it’d be about twenty years. It would be very fruitful to do so.’<sup>7</sup>

My consultation with Carmen Rojas Chaves, of the Department of Indigenous Education in the Costa Rica Ministry of Education and the co-author of the bilingual dictionary, has been ongoing. In her capacity as a government employee, her contact with the Brunca teachers is limited to what is allowed by the public workers’ union. Attempts to contact Damaris Castro, one of the few linguists who have studied Brunca, were unsuccessful.

**4. Method** In order to determine the current status of vitality of the language in the community from the perspective of the community members, I visited Boruca once in 2017 and two more times in 2018. In 2017, I brought a group of students with me to Boruca as part of my university course on language revitalization. In the course, the

<sup>7</sup>Miguel Ángel Quesada Pacheco in e-mail discussion with the author, April 2015.

students had learned about the Brunca culture and language status as documented in the aforementioned academic articles, but were instructed to question what they had read. They were asked to develop questions, translated into Spanish, to use in interviews with stakeholders to identify the true status of Brunca. The stakeholders included: community members, community leaders, and linguistics scholars focusing on the revitalization of Costa Rican languages.

Each interview was about an hour long. We asked questions about perceptions of the status of the language in the community, how many speakers there were currently, and the efforts to revitalize the language. In Boruca, we interviewed José Carlos Morales Morales and his wife Leila Garro Valverde. We also interacted with community members who taught us about the traditional arts such as weaving and mask making. These members used Spanish and a few words in Brunca to describe the processes. Then, we interviewed three leaders of the Boruca Culture Committee for an hour and a half. After we left Boruca, we visited and heard presentations on the efforts of revitalization in Costa Rica from scholars at the University of Costa Rica in San José. We also asked questions about the state of Brunca.

As part of a travel research grant, I returned to Boruca twice in 2018 to continue this research. During these times, I visited and observed Brunca classes in the elementary school in Boruca as well as interviewed the elder Brunca language teacher, Óscar Leiva Morales and the elder speaker, Doña Celedina Maroto, who is the daughter of Don Nemesio. She has been a willing informant on various language maintenance projects including relating many of the legends in *Narraciones Borucas* (Quesada Pacheco 1996), and thus has important expertise in the language, but was not counted among the speakers or semi-speakers enumerated in previous research.

**5. Results** The interview responses are divided below into three sections: (1) community members including José Carlos Morales Morales, his wife Leila Garro Valverde, and the Boruca Culture Committee representatives; (2) linguist Carlos Sánchez Avenaño at the University of Costa Rica, San José; and (3) community elder teachers Óscar Leiva Morales and Doña Celedina, retired.

**5.1 Community members** After a half-hour drive up a steep and bumpy dirt road off the Inter-American Highway, one is welcomed to Boruca in the Brunca language painted on faded wooden signs. One also sees these signs throughout the town of Boruca. In a discussion with José Carlos Morales Morales, the first Brunca to leave Boruca to go to high school and then on to college, I learned that these were part of a UNESCO project to bring back the language because it had mostly died out in the community.<sup>8</sup> Walking around town, one also sees a few small stores and a museum, the *Museo Comunitario Indígena de Boruca*, dedicated to the traditional crafts and workmanship of the Brunca people. Here, one can see how the traditional *ranchos* or small houses were made with local grasses for the roofs, a process which Morales Morales is trying to revive on his own farm. Also, one can see the colorful wooden

<sup>8</sup>José Carlos Morales Morales in discussion with the author, March 2015.

hand-carved masks, the primary source of income for the town, created by local artisans for the *Fiesta de los Diablitos*, a yearly festival that takes place in late December and in which community members dress up as ancestral spirits. The traditional woven bags and belts tinted with natural dyes are on display and for sale in the museum as well. Finally, one can read some of the legends of the Brunca people in both Brunca and Spanish. As alive and prosperous as these cultural arts are in the town of Boruca, one begins to wonder what the community members know of the language.

**5.1.1 José Carlos Morales Morales** A native Brunca who has served as a representative expert for Indigenous rights to the United Nations, José Carlos Morales Morales stated that he wants to keep the Brunca language and culture alive. Morales Morales is very passionate in maintaining the traditional ways of the Brunca and teaching others about them. His parents were part of the generation who were beaten in school for speaking Brunca. He, in turn, cannot speak the language very well, just short phrases and isolated words. He and his wife Leila Garro Valverde were the first of their generation to give their son a traditional Brunca name after a hiatus (as evidenced by his own Spanish name). They are also the founders of the Kan Tan Educational Estate, which strives to teach outsiders about the Brunca culture. Morales Morales' perspective on the revitalization of Brunca is that there could be more language in addition to the culture taught in the schools in Boruca.

**5.1.2 Leila Garro Valverde** Leila Garro Valverde, a non-Indigenous Costa Rican, was involved in maintaining the Brunca culture long before she met Morales Morales. One of the revitalization efforts that she spearheaded was that of the writing of a Brunca cookbook (Garro Valverde 2010). Along with the language, traditional Brunca food has been slowly replaced by packaged and non-native food due to outside influences. Garro Valverde has offered traditional cooking classes in the community in the past, but unfortunately, they are not offered anymore. She said that the young people have little interest in learning about traditional foods and recipes. She stated it is important to catalog traditional foods and recipes because their language can be directly lost through the loss of traditional food preparation. Her cookbook is an excellent resource since it uses Brunca words for traditional foods and recipes, but it has received little recognition from the community itself, as she is not Brunca. She noted that if she did not do this vital work, others may not step up, and then the information and language will be lost. "Sometimes we don't realize what we're losing," she said, "when we're adopting something new."

Garro Valverde has also been fundamental in bringing together some of the younger Brunca people to document the Brunca place names in the community through interviews with the elders. She has written a toponymy and aims to create an interactive map with the names of important places in Brunca and include GPS coordinates so that they will be discoverable by later generations. As of January 2019, this project

<sup>9</sup>Leila Garro Valverde in discussion with the author, May 2017.

was stalled due to conflicting opinions of community members about publishing GPS coordinates for sacred cultural places.<sup>10</sup>

**5.1.3 Boruca Culture Committee** The Boruca Culture Committee is made up of 14 members, one from each of the community councils. In 2017, my students and I interviewed three representatives. Together their goal is to preserve and maintain cultural aspects that have been suppressed through religion and education. They said that they are strongly in favor of revitalizing the Brunca language, and have been working on this for many years. The committee has solicited grants from the Costa Rica Ministry of Culture to support the Brunca teachers in the elementary school. According to the committee members, the children learn Brunca in school for one hour a day, but since the same teacher moves around to multiple schools, this is very inconsistent. The teacher happened to be away on the days we were visiting in 2017, and was unavailable for comment.

The Boruca Culture Committee also reported sponsoring Brunca classes twice a week for three hours during eight months of the year. These are for adults in the community who want to learn the language. However, I later learned that in early 2018, these classes were discontinued. Carmen Rojas Chaves, of the Ministry of Public Education, had been the teacher, yet due to complications of time and travel, she was not able to continue the classes.<sup>11</sup> The committee members said that people in the community are interested in learning the language, though this interest is difficult to measure. Many people begin the classes wanting to become a Brunca teacher, but few end up achieving a high enough proficiency, according to the representatives. There are no formal tests of proficiency to determine the level they reach.

According to the Boruca Culture Committee, there are 15 people who have an understanding of the Brunca language. This by no means suggests that they are fluent or have advanced understanding, they stated. There was no elaboration on who these 15 people were, but the majority of them had learned Brunca in the school and community classes. Most likely, these 15 included the language teachers. The committee has also worked to document the elders' speech in an effort to preserve what is left of the language. Don Nemesio, the last elder who remembered more Brunca than anyone else, was never a fluent speaker. At the time of the interview, he was the main resource for the language. The Committee members themselves remember being told as children that the Brunca language was "ugly" and were discouraged from using it. They now understand the importance of revitalization and have put forth some effort to make sure it does not fail. They agreed that their goal is full bilingualism for the community.

The Boruca Culture Committee, at the time of the interview, did not have any new projects in mind for revitalizing Brunca. However, they plan to keep applying to renew the education grant provided by the Ministry of Culture and plan to maintain an environment where kids and adults can learn Brunca. They stated that they would like more learning materials like books in Brunca to help with the education process,

<sup>10</sup>Carlos Sánchez Avendaño in discussion with the author, January 2019.

<sup>11</sup>Carmen Rojas Chaves in discussion with the author, May 2018.

but do not have the funds to make it possible. The only resource they said they have is a hard (and very worn) copy of *Narraciones Borucas*, a bilingual reader by Miguel Ángel Quesada Pacheco based on Don Espíritu Santo Maroto Rojas' notes, published in 1996, which they showed to us.

**5.2 Scholars at the University of Costa Rica** We heard presentations from various scholars from the University of Costa Rica, San José (UCR) about the Indigenous languages of Costa Rica and efforts to revitalize them. In particular, we interviewed Carlos Sánchez Avendaño, Professor of Linguistics at UCR. He has worked for many years helping to revitalize the Indigenous languages of Costa Rica, and has had success with the Bribri and the Malecú. He has created textbooks for adults and children's books in these languages, while the Brunca only have the dictionary (Quesada Pacheco & Rojas Chaves 1999) and the book of narrations (Quesada Pacheco 1996). He has only recently begun to work with Brunca because the Brunca people have only recently asked for help from the university. Sánchez Avendaño felt strongly that community members must reach out to the linguists at the university. He understood their lack of contact to mean that they were not interested.<sup>12</sup> He also noted that there is no standardized test that compares language competency among speakers of Brunca, and that he is very doubtful of the abilities of the reported 15 semi-speakers since they have never been formally evaluated. A recent positive development occurred in April of 2018, when Sánchez Avendaño organized a workshop on materials development with the Indigenous groups. In the workshop, the language teachers met with linguists to learn how to use different software to create more vivid and interesting pedagogical materials, and the Brunca teachers were in attendance.<sup>13</sup>

### 5.3 Community elder teachers of Brunca

**5.3.1 Óscar Leiva Morales** During my visits in 2018, I observed 10 different classes consisting of grade levels 1 through 6 at the Doris Stone Elementary School in Boruca. Students are in Brunca class three times a week for an hour, but there is great variability in this offering by week. In fact, for the second half of 2018 there were no classes at all due to a general strike by government workers. Óscar Leiva Morales is the sole Brunca instructor at Doris Stone Elementary. Although he warned me at the beginning of the visit that they do not use the language fluently in class, he exhibited a clear pride in the Brunca language in his teaching. For example, when describing conjunctions, he told the students that Brunca is a special and beautiful language because in Brunca the conjunction comes after the nouns it links (unlike in Spanish where it is located in between the nouns). Leiva Morales learned Brunca first from his grandmother and later with his father. He continued to practice the language so that he could become a teacher. He did not start teaching until he was thirty, however, which was in 1994. When I asked him how the next generation of teachers of Brunca

<sup>12</sup>Carlos Sánchez Avendaño in discussion with the author, May 2017.

<sup>13</sup>Carlos Sánchez Avendaño in discussion with the author, May 2018.

is trained, he said that it is a problem. We both agreed that some of the students in his classes seemed genuinely interested in the language and maybe could become the next generation of teachers. But, he said that after the sixth grade, “se muere” (‘the language dies’), because there is nothing in the language for the students after they leave elementary school.<sup>14</sup>

The materials he used in class included the bilingual dictionary (Quesada Pacheco & Rojas Chaves 1999) for reference, a few games like Bingo, and worksheets that he had created and printed out one-by-one on a small printer in the classroom. When I showed Leiva Morales a book on Brunca with stories translated into Spanish told by Espiritu Santo Maroto and gathered and published by Miguel Ángel Quesada Pacheco (Quesada Pacheco 1999), he said he had never seen it before. This is a great injustice since the publisher is the University of Costa Rica in San José, about a four-hour drive from Boruca. This text could easily be incorporated into stories for language teaching and as a text for the classes since there was no textbook. Instead, the children pasted each worksheet Leiva Morales had made for them into their notebooks.

Leiva Morales used the whiteboard often to write sentences down in Brunca and to guide the students through an activity. With the youngest group, the first graders, he conducted an activity in which they all stood in a line and introduced themselves to each other, taking advantage of their energy. I observed one class in which Leiva Morales taught culture instead of language. He recounted to the students how their ancestors, who were excellent mariners, traveled by boat to the sea to gather various resources. Intermixed with the stories and lessons were words in Brunca, but as he had foretold, there was no connected speech and most Brunca words were introduced with the Spanish determiner (perhaps because in Brunca, the determiner comes after the noun). After the classes, Leiva Morales told me how they are trying to change the methods to a more communicative style, but that developing activities to do in groups was challenging and that they needed more materials. He shared with me some of the colorful and rich pedagogical materials he and colleagues had developed in the workshop this past April at UCR, but told me they had not had the means to print them yet. There, the materials were, stuck on his laptop.

The last and most telling observation from these classes was that while Leiva Morales was teaching the students different animal names and colors in Brunca, a few were passing around short readers in English that their English teacher had lent them. They wanted to speak to me in English, and I held fast saying that I was there to learn Brunca and that we should all pay attention and learn more Brunca. Leiva Morales, as the elder teacher, faces many challenges, but perseveres with pride to teach the younger generations this beautiful language.

**5.3.2 Doña Celedina Maroto** Doña Celedina Maroto, the granddaughter of the great documenter and self-taught linguist Espiritu Santo Maroto, lives with her extended family in Curré, the neighboring Brunca town now bisected by the Inter-American Highway. When asked if she speaks Brunca, Maroto rattled off a few

<sup>14</sup>Oscar Leiva Morales in discussion with the author, May 2018.

phrases proudly. Once she realized I was truly interested in the language, she sprinkled words and phrases in Brunca throughout the conversation. She said that she learned Brunca from her grandfather, Espíritu Santo Maroto, but that her mother was not Brunca, just like Leiva Morales, who had a non-Indigenous father. She said all her children, who are adults now, speak Brunca because she had taught them. Her son, who lives in Europe, still speaks with her in Brunca when he calls. Her other son, who was present during the interview, was able to decipher the phrases she said in Brunca, but did not add any Brunca to the conversation that would show convincingly that he had acquired it. Maroto taught Brunca for many years in the schools. She lamented how most children leave the elementary school with the knowledge of only a few isolated words in Brunca. They also have lost the knowledge of pronunciation, for which she is a perfectionist. She was the informant who dictated many of the Brunca legends to Miguel Ángel Quesada Pacheco, which he documented in *Narraciones Borucas*, and stated how she is willing to continue to help bring the language back.

**5.4 Summary of results** Taken together, the responses from community members and elder teachers of Brunca exhibit a strong commitment to language revitalization. Morales Morales and Garro Valverde worked to bring recognition and validity to the Brunca people, culture, and language in the United Nations and with projects supported by UNESCO respectively as well as in their own educational programs at Kan Tan. In addition, the efforts by the Brunca elder teachers Leiva Morales and Doña Celedina in the classroom and in the community show that there is no shortage of passion for or interest in maintaining the Brunca language. The pride and confidence in the language revitalization process exhibited by the representatives on the Boruca Culture Committee echoes this in the absence of quantifiable outcomes of the community members learning the language. Leiva Morales and Doña Celedina Morales shared the perspective that the revitalization of Brunca was tenuous due to it constantly being challenged by a lack of resources and the ever-competing force of English, yet they themselves are deeply invested in the process. Even Garro Valverde, although she had experienced pushback for being non-Indigenous herself, believed that there is hope for the language's revitalization, striving to document recipes and place names while encouraging the younger generation to work to maintain the language. Community members including Morales Morales, Garro Valverde, Doña Celedina, Leiva Morales, and the representatives of the Boruca Culture Committee were in agreement that the Brunca language is an important component of Brunca culture and identity. All exhibited a passion for working to maintain the language and its presence in the community, regardless of their own language abilities or resources available to them.

The main disagreement that surfaced, however, was about how to classify the reported 15 semi-speakers who were learning Brunca. The members of the Boruca Culture Committee championed these learners' abilities while Sánchez Avendaño and Morales Morales portrayed more skeptical views of their abilities, basing their judgments on the lack of fluent speech in the classes and at home as a result. In regards to

documented numbers in the 1990s, the community members' perceptions of speakers differed greatly. Even without counting speakers or semi-speakers and without measuring fluency through language testing, which may be our first instinct as linguists, there still emerges a convincing narrative of the presence of the language in the community. I heard only disjointed phrases or isolated words in Brunca and not complex discourse, yet I observed an important and not insignificant hope expressed by the members of the community with whom I interacted. Certainly, Brunca is a case where maintaining motivation and hope, even in the face of dismal fluency measurements, might be the only way for the language to survive in some form. Whether documented as "extinct" or simply forgotten by linguists who have studied it in the past, Brunca still perseveres in the collective memory and conversations of Brunca community members.

**6. Interpretation of results** The researcher's dilemma is to not lose sight of the perspective of the community itself when considering the vitality of a language. The contradiction between previous scholarly findings with a Western bias towards measuring language revitalization success by fluency (Fitzgerald 2017), and the reports received here highlight this dilemma. In order to not privilege the work and ideas of Western scholars, I have attempted to show here the Boruca community's classification of their own language's vitality.

Relating our findings back to the EGIDS (Lewis & Simons 2010) and ElCat (Lee & Van Way 2016), Brunca's vitality appears to be "re-awakening" or "awakening". UNESCO also now includes the level of "revitalized" on their Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger, but Brunca is still listed as "critically endangered". By classifying those who know Brunca as *rememberers* (see Campbell & Muntzel 1989) instead of as "semi-speakers", we may help shift the view of Boruca elders who have language knowledge to a more positive and inclusive one. The use of *rememberer* allows for a more holistic conceptualization. Although there was only one elder *rememberer* (Don Nemesio) identified during my first visit, which was confirmed by all reports from the research of the previous decade, and he has since passed away, this is not the end of the line. Here we revealed another elder speaker, Doña Celedina, who had not been counted as such even though she has been and continues to be a crucial part of the documentation efforts. With the term *rememberer*, perhaps Doña Celedina would have been counted in previous work.

We found that there was no mention of increasing the domains of use of Brunca to community events per se, but the strong tradition of the three-day festival *Fiesta de los Diablitos*, 'Festival of the Little Devils', the use of some Brunca words for artisan work such as weaving and mask-making, which is still a viable economic pursuit, and the support of the Boruca Culture Committee for integrating the language into these cultural events, all feed an optimism that Brunca could be reinstated as an additional community language with some additional and sustained effort. With multiple Facebook groups integrating Brunca words occasionally in their posts about community events (for example, Rey Curré Yimba), there exists a new platform for language use that community members are utilizing to stay connected to their culture.

Not long ago, the community itself was apprehensive about reclaiming Brunca, but there is now demonstrated interest. For example, although thirty years ago Garro Valverde and Morales Morales felt ridicule when they named their child an Indigenous name, now others in the community have decided to give their children Indigenous names. Additionally, even though they each had only one parent who was Brunca, clearly Leiva Morales and Doña Celedina identify more strongly with being Indigenous, which could be attributed to their intimate knowledge of and interest in maintaining the Brunca language, thus highlighting its importance in Indigenous identity. The mere fact that the language is being taught in the elementary schools is an act of resistance to colonizing forces enacting language shift.

The data from the teacher Leiva Morales, and his and his colleagues' recent efforts to improve pedagogical resources, all signal an increasing number of children exposed to the language. While intergenerational transmission does not appear to be occurring yet, and support is desperately needed to continue teaching Brunca to community members of all ages, the next step in the revitalization of Brunca seems more possible than before with the renewed recognition of the value of Indigenous languages both worldwide<sup>15</sup> and within Costa Rica, with the recent inclusion of Indigenous languages as official in the Costa Rica Constitution.<sup>16</sup> In addition, in March of 2018, the government of Costa Rica signed the Executive Decree #40932-MP-MJP, the *General Mechanism for Consultation with Indigenous Populations*. This decree states that Indigenous peoples have rights and control over their own land and resources and requires 30-days consultation prior to any governmental change or project involving historical, cultural, and social circumstances. This could affect the position of Indigenous languages in education in a positive way. The concern with this type of legislation, however, is that while this decree was signed, and thus Brunca people's rights were recognized, the government of Costa Rica continues to treat the Brunca language as if it were dead, especially evidenced by the fact that these very documents were not translated into Brunca. In all, the acts by the Costa Rica government in regards to Indigenous languages appear to be symbolic in nature since the resources are not forthcoming. With the lack of evidence that Brunca is viable and re-awakening via sources produced in academia, the government has no impetus to provide more support to these efforts.

**7. Conclusion and future directions** Previously published work has described Brunca as a dead language (Quesada Pacheco 2002), but during my recent time in Boruca spent interacting with community members and stakeholders, it was clear that there are revitalization efforts in action. Through the current field research, we learned

<sup>15</sup>United Nations General Assembly. 2012. "Role of Languages and Culture in the Promotion and Protection of the Rights and Identity of Indigenous Peoples: Study of the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples". [http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/RegularSession/Session21/A-HRC-21-53\\_en.pdf](http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/RegularSession/Session21/A-HRC-21-53_en.pdf). (Accessed 25 June 2018).

<sup>16</sup>Sistema Costarricense de Información Jurídica. 2015. "Reforma constitucional del artículo 1 para establecer el carácter multiétnico y pluricultural de Costa Rica". [http://www.pgrweb.go.cr/scij/Busqueda/Normativa/Normas/nrm\\_texto\\_completo.aspx?param1=NRTC&nValor1=1&nValor2=80269&nValor3=101779&strTipM=TC](http://www.pgrweb.go.cr/scij/Busqueda/Normativa/Normas/nrm_texto_completo.aspx?param1=NRTC&nValor1=1&nValor2=80269&nValor3=101779&strTipM=TC). (Accessed 25 June 2018).

that the biggest obstacle to the revitalization of the Brunca language is in fact a lack of resources and a lack of access to the resources that exist, and not a lack of interest. Increasing access to the materials that linguists have gathered and produced in the past will aid the Brunca greatly in their efforts. Sánchez Avendaño and his colleagues have begun to do just that for other Indigenous languages of Costa Rica with their online database, *Diversidad y Patrimonio Lingüístico de Costa Rica*, ‘Linguistic Diversity and Patrimony of Costa Rica’, or DIPALICORI (<http://www.dipalicori.ucr.ac.cr/>). The plan is to eventually include resources for learning Brunca as well that will be accessible by anyone with an Internet connection, which is another present but not unconquerable challenge in Boruca. Additionally, I have worked in conjunction with Leiva Morales and his colleagues in the Boruca elementary schools on the production of classroom didactic materials in Brunca on the human body and daily routine vocabulary. There are plans to continue this collaboration in the near future.

However, just as Allweiss (2016:12) questioned her “complicity in the troubled colonialist and imperialist history of qualitative research” in marginalized communities, it is important to remember that the aim is to conduct research that stems directly from the people’s wishes and gives back accordingly. By amplifying their voices, not just the voices of the Western tradition, we work from the perspective of the communities themselves. Learning about the struggles the Brunca people have endured and hearing directly from the community stakeholders about their challenges in maintaining their culture and language helped to identify the needs of the community. Through the present analysis of stakeholders’ sometimes conflicting responses, it is clear that grassroots efforts are being made to bring back the language and that there exists an albeit small, and possibly not fluent, but potentially growing faction of speakers of Brunca.

Additionally, we must continue to examine the scales used currently to qualify (and quantify) language endangerment and vitality. In the spirit of Leonard (2017), we can affirm that some community members in Boruca have identified the language reclamation process as an important goal, and attempts to achieve this goal persist, regardless of actual achieved linguistic fluency of the speakers. In classifying the Brunca language and its process of revitalization, we must not underestimate the power of the role of teaching in language revitalization movements nor the importance of the presence of at least one highly motivated community member (Shah & Brenzinger 2018). With these two components, language revitalization movements have a chance of success. Thus, the present report provides evidence of the positive interest in and continued efforts to maintain Brunca’s vitality, as measured from the perspective of members within the community itself.

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