

Language Vitality among the Mako Communities of the Ventuari River

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Mako [ISO 639-3: wpc], a Sáliban language spoken along the Ventuari River in the Venezuelan Amazon, has been variably reported as (critically) endangered and threatened. These reports, however, are based on second-hand information and/or self-reported census data. In this article, I present a vitality assessment of Mako that relies on first-hand fieldwork data from 20 communities in the Middle Ventuari River area. The analysis of the data – collected through interviews, community censuses, and participant observation between 2012 and 2014 – shows that the situation is not as dire as previously reported and that the language is very vital in its local context. I also show that the place of Mako in the regional and national contexts put it in a vulnerable position and that steps should be taken to ensure its presence in new domains of use. Methodologically, I show the importance – and argue in favor – of including data from long-term participant observation in analyses and reports of linguistic vitality because of the access this methodology provides to tacit knowledge about language use and attitudes. This work thus contributes both to our understanding of language vitality among the Mako communities and to discussions of best practices in language vitality assessments.

1. Introduction¹ This vitality assessment stems from the need to clarify the reported ‘seriously endangered’ status of Mako: My impression during my first visit to several Mako communities in August 2011 was that the language was still being acquired by all the children as their first language; however, all the different reports of language endangerment that mention Mako (see §2) – except for Lewis et al. (2014), which was published after my first visit – agree that the situation of the language is dire. In order to understand the mismatch between previous reports and the observed situation ‘on the ground,’ I decided to do as comprehensive a vitality study as possible. My assessment is presented in this article and is based on data gathered during my different field trips (August 2011, June–August 2012, October–December 2012, and November–December 2013) to the Mako region. The article is organized as follows: §2 summarizes previous reports of language endangerment for Mako and §3 offers

¹This article is a revised version of Chapter 3 of Rosés Labrada (2015). Preliminary findings and analyses were presented at different venues (Rosés Labrada 2013a; 2013b; Rosés Labrada & Granadillo 2012); this work has thus benefited from the comments and insights of many people. Especially, I would like to thank Tania Granadillo, Colette Grinevald, David Heap and Françoise Rose for their comments on previous drafts of the present article as well as two anonymous *LD&C* reviewers. All errors remain my own.

a brief summary of the different metrics developed to assess language vitality, a rationale for picking the UNESCO tool, and a description of the methodology used for this study. §4 consists of the vitality assessment itself, and §5 reviews the issues encountered during the assessment and argues for the importance of including long-term participant observation in our assessments of language vitality. §6 concludes.

2. Previous Reports of Mako Language Vitality Table 1 below summarizes previous Mako language vitality reports. The reports are divided into three different categories depending on their scope; i.e., whether they report on the vitality of a) the world's languages, b) a specific continent/region or c) a country. The distinction is important here because the larger the scope of the report, the more prone to inaccuracies said report is – due to, as will be shown in §5, the second (and sometimes third or fourth) hand nature of the information on which they rely and because of the sheer magnitude of the task of trying to report on the status of all the languages of the world, all the languages of South America, or all the languages of countries as multi-ethnic as Venezuela and Colombia.

Table 1. Previous reports of Mako language endangerment

	Degree of Endangerment Reported
Global Scope Reports	
Wurm (1996: Central America map)	<i>moribund</i>
Wurm (2001:78–79)	<i>moribund</i>
Moseley (2010: Attached global map)	<i>critically endangered</i>
ELCat (2012)	<i>threatened</i>
Lewis, Simons & Fennig (2014)	<i>vigorous 6a</i>
Continental-Regional Scope Reports	
Moore (2007:44)	<i>critically endangered</i>
Crevels (2007:146)	<i>endangered</i>
Crevels (2012:221)	<i>endangered</i>
Country-wide Scope Reports	
González Nández (2000:393)	<i>“en peligro de extinción”</i>
Mosonyi (2003:122)	<i>“lengua expuesta a un desplazamiento total”</i>
Villalón (2004:174)	<i>“severamente amenazada”</i>
Mattéi-Müller (2006:295)	<i>“lengua severamente amenazada”</i>
Villalón (2011:164)	<i>“lengua severamente amenazada”</i>

As the table above shows, there seems to be a consensus in the literature regarding the endangerment status of Mako: according to these reports, the situation of the language is dire. The only report that does not agree with this assessment is the one in Ethnologue (Lewis et al. 2014), which places Mako in the *vigorous* (6a) category. Given that this category was used as a default in many cases (Simons & Lewis 2013:8), it is unclear whether the assessment given is based on an analysis of previous reports and/or first-hand data or just given as a default. All these reports are based

on non-first-hand information: reports with global, continental, or regional scope are based on smaller reports with country-wide scope; the latter are generally based on self-reported census information rather than on fieldwork. As suggested in the introduction to this article, the assessment of Mako as a critically endangered language does not match my observations in the Mako communities I have visited over the course of the last five years. This is why I undertook this study of language vitality, the methodology of which is discussed in the next section.

3. Methodology This section starts with a discussion of three different language vitality assessment tools that are currently in use in the language vitality literature (§3.1.1 through §3.1.3) and, based on this discussion, I also provide a rationale for picking the UNESCO nine-factors scale for this study (§3.1.4). The second part of the section briefly discusses the methodology and tools employed for this study (§3.2) as well as its shortcomings (§3.2.1). The discussion of shortcomings in §3.2.1 will be elaborated on in §5 below.

3.1 Tools for Language Vitality Assessment Assessing language vitality and reporting the degree of endangerment of a language or group of languages has been a priority of linguists since awareness of the threat to language diversity increased in the early 1990s. A number of assessment tools have been developed; three of the most influential ones are Fishman's (1991) Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (GIDS), UNESCO's (2003) 'nine factors,' and Simons and Lewis's (2010) Extended Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (EGIDS) (see discussion in Dwyer (2011)). Each of these is discussed in turn below.

3.1.1 GIDS In his 1990 article *What Is Reversing Language Shift (RLS) and How Can It Succeed?*, Fishman proposes an alternative planning theory, namely the Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale, that addresses the intergenerational transmission of threatened languages. Although this theory has been further revised (cf. Fishman (1991) and Fishman (2001)), its focus on intergenerational transmission and domains of language use has remained the same. Table 2 shows Fishman's model as summarized by Malone (2004:14).

The principles and rationale behind GIDS constitute a useful tool for those researchers who want to assess the threat to a particular language in a given community (see, for example, Malone (2004), also Hornberger & King (2001)). However, as other researchers have pointed out (e.g., Dwyer (2011)), GIDS overlooks the importance of other factors that are key for language maintenance such as community attitudes and amount and quantity of documentation. These two factors, however, are included in UNESCO's document on language vitality assessments discussed in the next section.

3.1.2 UNESCO Factors UNESCO's 'nine factors' language vitality assessment stems from the work of a group of experts on endangered languages and proposes that

Table 2. GIDS stages

Weak side			
Stage 8	Stage 7	Stage 6	Stage 5
So few fluent speakers that the community needs to re-establish language norms; requires outside experts (e.g., linguists).	Older generation uses the language enthusiastically but children are not learning it.	Language and identity socialization of children takes place in home, community.	Language socialization involves extensive literacy, usually including L1 schooling.
Strong side			
Stage 4	Stage 3	Stage 2	Stage 1
L1 used in children's formal education in conjunction with national or official language.	L1 is used in workplaces of larger society, beyond normal L1 boundaries.	Lower governmental services and local mass media are open to L1.	"cultural autonomy is recognized and implemented" (Fishman 1990:18); L1 used at upper government level.

nine different factors be taken into account when assessing the vitality of a particular language (UNESCO 2003:7). These factors are summarized in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Summary of UNESCO nine factors

Factor	Focus
1	Intergenerational Language Transmission
2	Absolute number of speakers
3	Proportion of Speakers within the Total Population
4	Trends in Existing Language Domains
5	Response to New Domains and Media
6	Materials for Language Education and Literacy
7	Governmental & Institutional Languages and Policies including Official Status and Use
8	Community Members' Attitudes toward their Own Language
9	Amount and Quality of Documentation

Except for 'Absolute Number of Speakers,' all the other factors are graded on a 0 to 5 scale and a definition is given for each of the levels in each particular factor. The grades are then correlated with a level of endangerment: Safe (5), Unsafe (4), Definitely Endangered (3), Severely Endangered (2), Critically Endangered (1) and

Extinct (o). For some factors, however, the levels of endangerment are different as illustrated in Table 4 for Factor 5 ‘Response to New Domains and Media.’

Table 4. Degrees of endangerment and grades for Factor #5 (UNESCO 2003:11)

Degree of endangerment	Grade	New Domains and Media Accepted by the Endangered Language
<i>dynamic</i>	5	The language is used in all domains.
<i>robust/active</i>	4	The language is used in most new domains.
<i>receptive</i>	3	The language is used in many domains.
<i>coping</i>	2	The language is used in some new domains.
<i>minimal</i>	1	The language is used only in a few new domains.
<i>inactive</i>	0	The language is not used in any new domains.

This system, however, is not fine-grained enough at both ends of the scale, i.e., the safe and extinct categories, as pointed out by Simons & Lewis (2010), since these two grades would include too many languages in starkly different situations. This is why these authors developed a new scale based on Fishman’s GIDS, the UNESCO ‘nine factors,’ and the scale that had been in use by the Ethnologue language catalogue (Simons & Lewis 2010:103). This new scale is discussed in the next section.

3.1.3 EGIDS The Simons & Lewis (2010) scale builds on the two scales previously discussed in this chapter and it is shown in Table 5 below. The Expanded Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (EGIDS), like its predecessor the GIDS, focuses on intergenerational transmission and domains of language use. Its main contribution is that it expands the ‘Safe’ and ‘Extinct’ categories of UNESCO’s (2003) proposal. The ‘Safe’ category is expanded to six levels (levels 0 to 6) and it takes into account the scope of use of the language deemed safe while the ‘Extinct’ category is divided into two to allow for a distinction between extinct languages that still have an ethnic population that still identifies with it and those for which there is no ethnic population.

Although a useful tool, EGIDS overlooks two factors of the utmost importance to language maintenance, namely ‘Number of Speakers’ and ‘Institutional Support,’ and, as Dwyer (2011) shows, it can be misleading for languages classified in the *Vigorous (6a)* level; that is, languages that are being transmitted (which is the case of Mako as will be shown below), because it does not take into account factors that point to an imminent level of endangerment.

3.1.4 Summary This section provided a summary of three different scales for assessing a language’s vitality that are currently in use in the language vitality literature: Fishman’s GIDS, the UNESCO ‘nine factors,’ and Lewis & Simons’ EGIDS. While GIDS has been used successfully in different studies (e.g., Malone 2004, Hornberger & King 2001) and EGIDS has been argued to be an improvement on GIDS and a refinement of the ‘safe’ and ‘extinct’ grades of the UNESCO ‘nine factors’ scale, the

Table 5. EGIDS (from Simons & Lewis (2010))

Level	Label	Description	UNESCO
0	International	The language is used internationally for a broad range of functions.	Safe
1	National	The language is used in education, work, mass media, government at the nationwide level.	Safe
2	Regional	The language is used for local and regional mass media and government services.	Safe
3	Trade	The language is used for local and regional work by both insiders and outsiders.	Safe
4	Educational	Literacy in the language is being transmitted through a system of public education.	Safe
5	Written	The language is used orally by all generations and is effectively used in written form in parts of the community.	Safe
6a	Vigorous	The language is used orally by all generations and is being learned by children as their first language.	Safe
6b	Threatened	The language is used orally by all generations but only some of the child-bearing generation are transmitting it to their children.	Vulnerable
7	Shifting	The child-bearing generation knows the language well enough to use it among themselves but none are transmitting it to their children.	Definitely Endangered
8a	Moribund	The only remaining speakers of the language are members of the grandparent generation.	Severely Endangered
8b	Nearly Extinct	The only remaining speakers of the language are members of the grandparent generation or older who have little opportunity to use the language.	Critically Endangered
9	Dormant	The language serves as a reminder of heritage identity for an ethnic community. No one has more than symbolic proficiency.	Extinct
10	Extinct	No one retains a sense of ethnic identity associated with the language, even for symbolic purposes.	Extinct

assessment of Mako language vitality that I attempt in this article will make use of the UNESCO ‘nine factors.’ This choice is motivated by the granularity that this scale affords the researcher and the attention it pays to a group of factors that has repeatedly been shown to impact language vitality, such as community attitudes and amount and quality of existing documentation.

3.2 Methodology and tools The methodology of this study of language vitality in the Mako communities of the Middle Ventuari region is best described as both qualitative and quantitative because of the different tools employed. The study draws on general field observations and unstructured interviews in the Mako communities of the Ventuari, Guapuchí and Yureba rivers. This represents a total of 20 communities as shown in Table 6. Of these 20 communities, I have personally visited 18; the two communities included in the study but not visited are Pijiguao and Escondido in the Guapuchí River. The information for these two communities was reported by members of these communities when they visited Arena Blanca. This study does not include the communities in the Yaquivapo River, the Piña community in the headwaters of the Guapuchí River, or the one in the Parú River, as I have not been able to visit those communities, nor have I been able to obtain information from members of these communities. Figure 1 shows the location of the majority of the communities included in the study.

Structured group and individual interviews as part of a local census were also carried out in Arena Blanca and Isla Bomba following the questionnaire in Appendix 1. These structured interviews sought to gather biographical data on all the residents of a given community; e.g., age, gender, relation to other members of the household, etc.; and linguistic data; e.g., languages spoken, frequency with which they are spoken, domains of language use, and age of acquisition. Long-term observations of language use complemented the structured interviews in Arena Blanca. In addition to the local census data, I employ data from the national Venezuelan censuses of 1985, 1992, 2001, and 2011. Although less reliable (see discussion below), the national census data offers valuable information on the number of Mako people and speakers.

3.2.1 Shortcomings The first shortcoming of this study is that structured interviews were only carried out in two communities. In addition, the first interviews carried out in Arena Blanca in August 2011 did not follow a specific questionnaire (see 4.4.4.1) and it was not until August and November of 2012 that interviews carried out in the community followed the questionnaire in Appendix 1. The one-year time lapse between the two rounds of interviews in Arena Blanca (August 2011 vs. August 2012) might also be considered a shortcoming since it was impossible to obtain a complete picture of the community at one point in time.²

Secondly, there was no formal testing of Spanish proficiency and, as will be shown below, proficiency in Spanish and other indigenous languages relies on self-reports and not everyone agrees on what it means to ‘speak a language.’

²However, this revealed interesting contrasts between explicit and implicit knowledge reporting (see §5.2 below).

Table 6. Mako communities in the Middle Ventuari River area

Municipality	River	Comunnity	Included in the Assessment	
Atabapo	Caño Yaquivapo	Some family units	No	
		Caño Guapuchí	Yes	
	Río Ventuari	Santa Inés	Yes	
		Escondido	Yes	
		Pijiguao	Yes	
		Piña	No	
		Canaripó	Yes	
		Isla Bomba	Yes	
		Fundo Chicho	Yes	
		Fundo Caimán	Yes	
		Porvenir II	Yes	
		Caño Yureba	San José de Yureba	Yes
		Barranco Rojo	Yes	
		X (unknown name)	Yes	
Manapiare	Caño Negro	Caño Negro	Yes	
	Río Ventuari	Puerto Limón	Yes	
		Cerro Mosquito	Yes	
		Marueta	Yes	
		Yopal	Yes	
		Tavi Tavi	Yes	
		Morocoto	Yes	
		Moriche	Yes	
		Caño Parú	Parú	No

Thirdly, my lack of knowledge of Piaroa and my initial lack of knowledge of Mako may have prevented me from observing more Piaroa language use. Piaroa and Mako are structurally close, both phonologically and morphosyntactically, and also share large portions of their lexica. This renders the two languages mutually intelligible (see below) to their speakers and therefore made it difficult for me to identify instances where Mako speakers might have been using Piaroa. In addition, having carried out participant observation in an almost entirely homogenously Mako community means that possible situations of diglossia and code-switching between Mako and Piaroa might exist in other communities with larger Piaroa populations but were not observed.

Lastly, the scope and reach of the survey could have been improved by using local/indigenous researchers. Local/indigenous researchers would have not only made it possible to carry out censuses based in structured interviews in a larger number of communities, but they would also have been able to identify instances of Piaroa use as well as assess knowledge of this language by Mako speakers. However, given that this study was but a small part of a larger documentation doctoral project with limited time and money, it was not feasible to train local/indigenous researchers in survey methodologies.

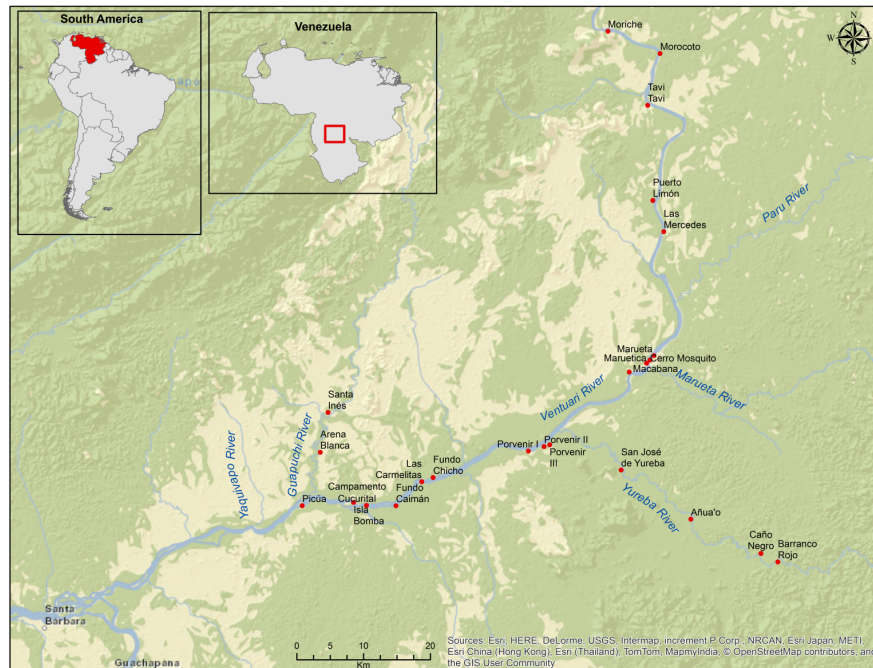


Figure 1. Communities visited in the Middle Ventuari River area

4. Assessment of Language Vitality Using the UNESCO ‘nine factors,’ I attempt in this section to assess the degree of language vitality for Mako. A caveat is in order: an assessment of language vitality for the Mako language as a whole overlooks the issue of inter-community differences. In other words, each community being different with respect to some of the factors like languages spoken or access to educational materials, a language vitality assessment would very likely result in different results for each community. To counteract this issue, I offer here in Table 7³ a summary of each community attending to the factors that I deem relevant for the discussion that follows, and in the next few sections, I make reference to specific communities when illustrating specific points.

4.1 Intergenerational language transmission As can be gleaned from Table 7, intergenerational transmission has not been interrupted in any of the Mako communities

³An LD&C reviewer suggests that perhaps older accounts of language endangerment among the Mako people at the country level were based on communities that were larger or had more political importance. As Table 7 suggests, the communities are relatively homogenous but it is clear that Marueta is not only the largest community but also the one that has become a religious and educational center (New Tribes established a mission there and now the government has built a high school). However, this is unlikely to have been the reason for previous reports of endangerment, since it does not seem to be the case that the language in this community is less vital than in others. Furthermore, as far as I know, the authors of older accounts of endangerment did not visit Marueta or any other Mako community.

of the Middle Ventuari River region. In fact, all children grow up speaking Mako and it is not until they enter the school system at ages 4 to 5 that they start learning Spanish. However, even during the first few years of schooling, the children are still not speaking Spanish. This is clearly evidenced by inspection of the census data for Arena Blanca reported in Table 10 below where only one child in the 5 to 9 age category is reported as having some (passive) knowledge of Spanish. This particular child, however, is the child of a Mako woman with a *criollo* man and she lived outside of her community for a number of years before moving back to the community. This reaffirms the little influence that formal schooling has on children during their first few years learning Spanish. The only Mako child in this region who can be said to not speak Mako is the son of a *criollo* man and a Mako woman who was sent to town for a few years and upon his return continues to speak Spanish with his father and only shows some passive knowledge of Mako (he understands his mother and I have heard him speak Mako on occasion). However, as will be shown below, there is census data showing that a small number of ethnically Mako people do not speak their language: 1 in the 1992 census (OCEI, 1992), 13 in the 2001 census (Mattéi-Müller 2006), and 9 in the 2011 census (Mattéi-Müller, pers. comm.).

For this factor, I would classify Mako as being in the *Stable yet Threatened* (5-) category: Mako is spoken by all generations, yet – as will be shown below – there is bilingualism in Spanish and Piaroa, both larger languages than Mako, and Spanish is the language of government and the ‘unofficial’ goal of the educational system, and, therefore, is likely to usurp certain communication contexts.

4.2 Absolute number of speakers Although this section focuses on the number of speakers, I first discuss population numbers for two reasons: 1) number of speaker figures are not available for some national censuses and 2) population numbers will serve as a point of reference in my calculations of percentage of speakers out of the total population (see §4.3).

Reports regarding the size of the Mako population only go back to 1985 when the Mako people were considered in the national census as a separate group for the first time. Before that, they had been considered as part of the Piaroa and their numbers reported as part of the latter. The census data regarding the Mako population is summarized in Table 8.

As the data show, the first two reports have the group as being below 400 people, while the last two have it as being over 1,000 people. This apparent rapid growth between 1992 and 2001 could be explained as perhaps the result of a more thorough census that attempted to include all of the indigenous communities in the country or a newfound interest among indigenous populations in self-identifying as indigenous due to the changes brought about by the 1999 Constitution (see below). A comparison of the data from the 2001 census with that from the 2011 one shows that the size of the group has remained relatively stable. My personal estimate, however, puts the Mako community around over 1,500 people.⁴ This discrepancy could be

⁴The sum of the population numbers of the villages included in Table 7 is 2,133 people but the Piaroa speakers living with the Mako need to be discounted from this figure. However, to this number we need

Table 7. Summary of characteristics for each Mako community included in the assessment

	Atabapo Municipality										Manapiare Municipality									
	Caño Guapachí					Río Ventuari					Caño Yureba					Río Ventuari				
	AB	SI	Es	Pi	Ca	IB	FC	FCa	Po	SJY	BR	NN	CN	PL	CM	Ma	Yo	TT	Mo	Mor
Population	110	≈ 150	≈ 15	?	≈ 12	?	?	≈ 12	≈ 200	≈ 124	≈ 6	?	11	≈ 150	≈ 11	≈ 800	≈ 70	≈ 150	≈ 80	≈ 149
Houses	14	Yes	3	?	3	2	?	3	≈ 22	16	2	2	1	?	6	≈ 120	?	?	9	?
Monolingual children	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes?	Yes	Yes	Yes?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes?	Yes?	Yes	Yes?	Yes?	Yes	Yes?	Yes?	Yes	Yes
Church	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	?	?	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	?	Yes	No	Yes
Number of Paroia Families	0	1	0	?	0	0	?	?	?	3	?	?	0	?	?	?	?	1?	0	?
Leadership	Mako	Paroia	Mako	?	Mako	Mako	?	?	?	Paroia	?	?	Mako	?	Mako	Mako	?	Mako	Mako	?
Available schooling	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	?	Yes	No	?
Primary School	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Literacy materials	No	Yes	?	?	?	?	?	?	No	No	?	?	?	?	?	Yes	?	?	?	?
Teacher	Mako	Karri-pako	-	-	-	-	Paroia-Mako	-	Mako	Paroia	-	-	-	-	-	Mako?	?	6 teachers	-	Mako
Access	River	River	River	River	River	River	River	River	Air/River	River	River	River	River	River	River	Air/River	River	River	River	River

Abbreviations: AB=Arena Blanca, SI= Santa Inés, Es=Escondido, Pi=Pijigano, Ca=Canaripó, IB= Isla Bomba, FC=Fundo Chicho, FCa=Fundo Caimán, Po=Porvenir II, SJY=San José de Yureba, BR=Barranco Rojo, NN = No name (Yureba river), CN = Caño Negro, PL = Puerto Limón, CM= Cerro Mosquito, Ma= Marueta, Yo = Yopal, TT = Tavi Tavi, Mo = Morocoto, Mor = Moriche.

Dark gray shadowing indicates communities where a local census was carried out; light gray shadowing, where long-term participant observation was carried out as well as a local census.

Table 8. Mako population in Venezuela

Census	Mako
1985*	130
1992**	345
2001***	1130
2011****	1211

*Migliazza (1985), **OCEI (1993), ***INE (2003), ****INE (2013)

the result of underreporting, some communities not being included in the census, or some Mako speakers reporting themselves as being Piaroa (most likely in the case of mixed communities). Whatever the real number may be, it remains true that the Mako constitute a very small group.

Data reported in the 1992 Venezuelan Indigenous Census (OCEI 1993:92) for the population age 5 and older (n = 267) is as follows:

Table 9. Number of monolingual and bilingual speakers in 1991

Age Groups	Population Total	Bilinguals	Mako Monolinguals	Spanish Monolinguals
5-9	58	2	56	0
10-14	35	14	20	1
14-19	44	19	25	0
20-29	46	27	19	0
30-39	41	24	17	0
40-54	27	10	17	0
55 +	16	1	15	0
Total	267	97	169	1

Table 9 above shows 267 Mako speakers above the age of 5 in 1991. Unfortunately, the 2003 report of the 2001 indigenous census (see INE 2003) does not include data regarding language. Mattéi-Müller (2006:290), however, gives some figures regarding the number of speakers in the 2001 census:⁵ out of 991 Mako people above the age of three years old, 974 speak their language, 13 do not speak it, and four did not declare. There is, however, no information regarding the number of Spanish-Mako bilinguals for this census. The most recent Venezuelan census counted 1,211 Mako people in 2011 (INE 2013). A special report prepared by the *Instituto Nacional de Estadística* or INE at my request (INE 2016) shows that, out of 1,090 Mako people age 3 and above, 1,078 reported speaking their language while only five reported speaking only Spanish and seven did not declare. Out of the 1,078 who

to add the speakers in the Yaquivapo and Parú rivers. 1,500 is a conservative figure. This estimate still comes short of the 2,350 inhabitants that the 2011 census growth rate of 7.6% for the Amazonas State (see INE 2013) would predict.

⁵Mattéi-Müller (pers. comm.) reports having obtained the figures from unpublished census data to which she had access as member of the census commission.

reported speaking Mako, 347 (i.e. 32.2%) reported being monolingual in Mako and 731 (i.e. 67.8%) reported being bilingual in Mako and Spanish.

4.3 Proportion of speakers within the total population Figure 2 through Figure 4 below show the percentage of Mako speakers within the total population. For the 1992 census, the percentage is only of the population age 5 and above and for the 2001 and 2011 censuses, for the population age 3 and above. Given that nearly all of the Mako population speaks Mako, I would categorize the language as *Unsafe* (4).⁶

Mako speakers

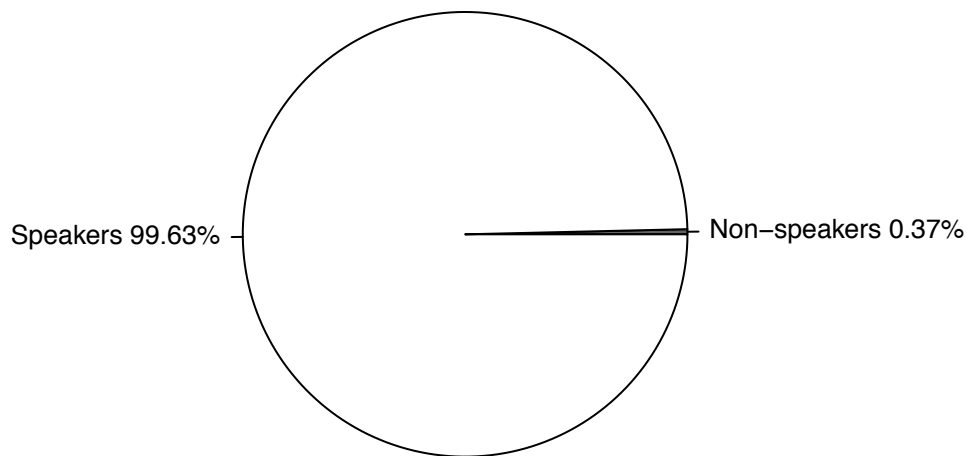


Figure 2. Percentage of Mako speakers (age 5+) in 1992

4.4 Trends in existing language domains⁷ There are three main languages that are spoken in the Mako communities of the Middle Ventuari: Mako, Piaroa and Spanish. Each of these is discussed separately below.

4.4.1 Mako Mako remains the language used for everyday interaction with other Mako people both at home and in socialization spaces. Mako is also the language of shamanism, where that practice is still active, and the language of government

⁶The UNESCO scale is unclear on this point; Grade *Safe* (5) is described as “All speak the language” and Grade *Unsafe* (4) as “Nearly all speak the language” (UNESCO 2003:9). In this case, does “all” mean 100% of the ethnic population? This is unlikely even for major world languages like English or Spanish. And what does “nearly all” mean? 95%? 90%?

⁷Further research into the language ecologies of each of the communities is needed. Such research would likely shed light on sociolinguistic scenarios (e.g., diglossia, passive bilingualism, etc.) in the communities that this vitality assessment cannot fully address.

Mako speakers

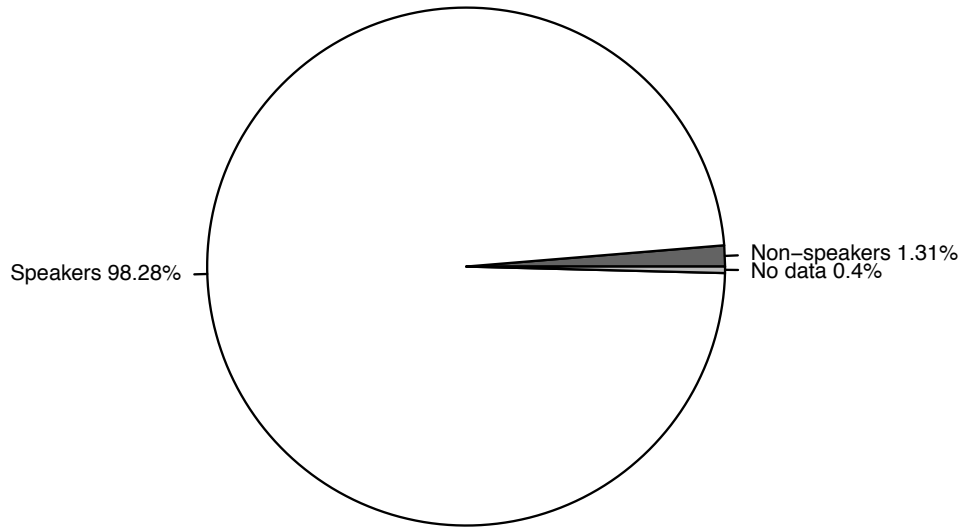


Figure 3. Percentage of Mako speakers (age 3+) in 2001

Mako speakers

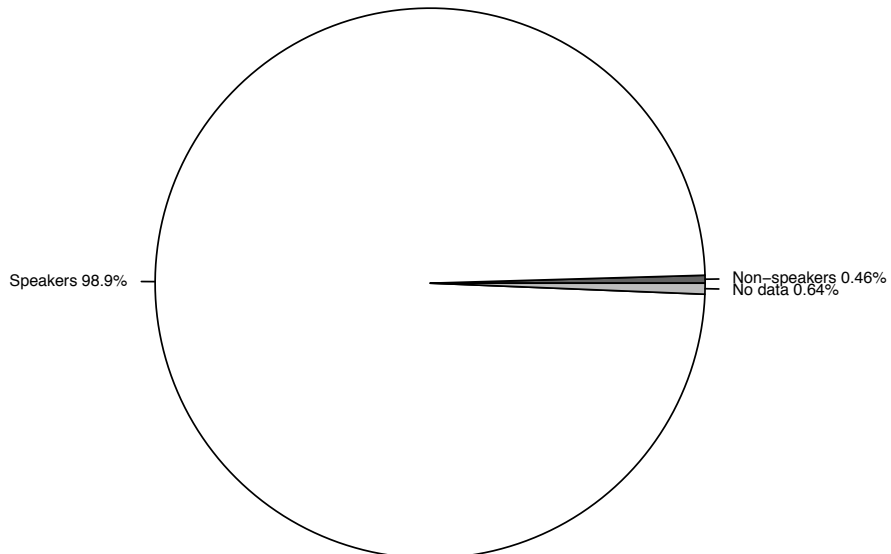


Figure 4. Percentage of Mako speakers in 2011

inside the communities. Village meetings regarding elections, for example, are fully conducted in Mako in both Arena Blanca and Porvenir II.⁸

4.4.2 Spanish Spanish is primarily used only in situations involving the presence of *criollos* (e.g., visit of the State governor to Arena Blanca in 2012 or the visit of the candidates to the municipal elections to Porvenir II at the end of 2013). However, the monolingual speakers often also use Mako in these situations. Another domain of Spanish language use is the school (see discussion in §4.5).

In Arena Blanca, all the Spanish-Mako bilinguals speak to each other in Mako, except for one young man who has been observed using Spanish with other bilinguals and some Mako monolinguals. When asked about their Spanish use within the community, most bilingual census interviewees responded that they sometimes use it with this particular young man.

Spanish is also used in communicating to outsider non-Piaroa men who have married into the community, e.g., a Jivi man in Arena Blanca.

4.4.3 Piaroa Piaroa is Mako's sister language and, as discussed above, both are structurally close. The use of Piaroa differs from community to community; it positively correlates with the number of Piaroa speakers in any given village. For example, San José de Yureba has 47 Piaroa speakers and 77 Mako speakers according to a report by the community's school teacher in October of 2013. Other villages also have a large percentage of Piaroa speakers and presumably a correspondingly high rate of Piaroa usage; these are Moriche, Morocoto, and Fundo Chicho. In these communities, the use of Piaroa is likely to be more generalized since a large percentage of the community is Piaroa first-language speakers.

There are, however, communities that are more homogeneously Mako such as Arena Blanca, Santa Inés and Porvenir II, and the use of Piaroa in these communities is likely to be more restricted than in communities with a larger number of Piaroa speakers. This seems to be confirmed by my long-term observations in Arena Blanca. In this community, there are three Mako-Piaroa couples (in all three the men are Piaroa). These Piaroa men said they speak Piaroa with each other and one of them said his wife speaks Piaroa to him but he does not speak Mako. The one Piaroa who said he could speak Mako was observed using Piaroa in a village meeting (see §5.2.3 below). A Mako grandmother from Arena Blanca was observed speaking Piaroa to her small granddaughter during a village meeting. The granddaughter has a Piaroa father and a Mako mother but lives in a Piaroa village. However, observations of Piaroa use in this community are limited to these few people and instances.⁹

⁸Other domains of use where Mako is present, e.g., schools and church services, are discussed in §4.5 below.

⁹Mako-Piaroa interactions are possible due to the fact that the Mako and Piaroa speakers in the region understand each other. This intelligibility seems to be acquired rather than inherent as Piaroa speakers from other areas (e.g., from the Cataniapo River) who are not in contact with Mako report not understanding this language. There is, however, no real bilingualism according to my observations. If there is in fact some bilingualism, it seems to be the case that the Mako speakers learn Piaroa rather than the Piaroa speakers

4.4.4 Community census results and multilingualism The census data from the Venezuelan national censuses provided above in §4.2 on Spanish-Mako bilingualism is limited (e.g., it does not reveal information about passive bilingualism) and does not include other types of bilingualism (e.g., Mako-Piaroa) or multilingualism present in the communities under discussion here. Because of the poverty of the data from the national censuses with respect to multilingualism, I present here the results of two different local censuses; one carried out in Arena Blanca; the other one, in Isla Bomba. These results also shed light on sustained language transmission.

4.4.4.1 Arena Blanca census The census in Arena Blanca was carried out in two stages. In August 2011, during a first trip to the area to establish contact with the Mako communities, I visited Arena Blanca and out of 14 existing households at that time, I carried out a census in eleven of them. The members of the other three households were not present that day, but I obtained information about two of the households from other members of the community; only one household was not surveyed. Because this census was not audio or video-recorded and because it did not follow a specific questionnaire, I carried out a complementary census in July (7 interviews) and November (2 interviews) of 2012. During this second round of interviews, I was able to interview the heads of the three households that were absent in 2011 and the head of a newly-formed household as well as re-interview five of the originally interviewed households, for a total of nine interviews using a uniform questionnaire.

The results of the Arena Blanca local census are summarized in Table 10 below. This census showed that:

- no ethnically-Mako monolingual Spanish speakers live in the community. The only monolingual Spanish speaker is a *criollo* who married into the community.
- most children under the age of 10 are monolingual in the vernacular. The only one reported as having any knowledge of Spanish, as mentioned above, is a child who was born of a *criollo* man, and who lived outside the village during the first few years of her life.
- men are more likely to have knowledge of Spanish than women and this difference is statistically significant: $\chi^2(1, N = 77) = 10.372, p = .001$. This is likely to have a positive effect on language transmission since it is mothers and older sisters who take care of young children in the community.

4.4.4.2 Isla Bomba census The Isla Bomba census consisted of one interview, given that this community is only formed by one extended family. This interview was carried out in November 2012 using the questionnaire in the Appendix. The results of the local census carried out in Isla Bomba are presented in Table 11 above. This census showed that:

learning Mako (for example, what I said in a village meeting in Moriche in Spanish had to be translated to both Mako and Piaroa so that everyone present could understand).

Table 10. Community census results: Arena Blanca

Age groups	Gender		Mako monolinguals		Mako bilinguals (L1 Spanish)		Mako bilinguals (L2 Spanish)		Mako bilinguals (L2 Jivi)		Jivi bilinguals (L2 Spanish)		Piaroa Bilinguals (L2 Spanish)		Trilinguals Mako/Piaroa/Spanish		No info available		Spanish monolinguals					
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F				
0-4	9	13																						
5-9	15	6																						
10-14	9	10																						
15-19	14	7																						
20-29	18	11																						
30-39	15	8																						
40-49	10	6																						
50-59	4	6																						
60-69	11	1																						
70-79	3	1																						
80-89	2	0																						
No info available																								
TOTALS	110	58	15	33	13	4	7	2	0	3	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	2	0	2	0	2	1	1

Table 11. Community census results: Isla Bomba

Age groups	Languages		Mako monolinguals		Mako bilinguals (L2 Spanish)		Mako bilinguals (L2 Pirara)		Trilinguals Mako/Pirara/Spanish		Spanish monolinguals	
	Gender	Level of proficiency	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
0-4	3	0	0	3	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
5-9	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
10-14	2	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	0
15-19	3	2	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	0
20-29	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
30-39	2	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
40-54	2	1	1	1	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	0
55	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
TOTALS	13	6	7	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	4	0

- there are no Spanish monolinguals in the community.
- in this community everyone speaks Piaroa and Mako. This might be the result of the couple who founded the community being composed of a Piaroa man and a Mako woman.
- men are more likely to have some knowledge of Spanish and this difference is again significant: $\chi^2(1, N = 10) = 4.444, p = .035$. As discussed above, this is highly beneficial for language transmission of Mako.

4.4.5 Summary Given that, despite Spanish being the language of government, public offices and educational institutions (see next section), Mako remains the language of everyday communication in the homogeneously Mako villages and also, alongside Piaroa, in the mixed Mako-Piaroa villages, I would classify Mako as being in the *Multilingual Parity (4)* point of the UNESCO scale.

4.5 Response to new domains and media This section discusses the use of Mako in new language domains: schools, religion, commerce and government, and new media. Introduced religion, and commerce and government are considered here as new domains because they refer to new practices in the Mako communities: Christianity, commerce with *criollos*, and government as modeled by the larger Venezuelan society are only recent introductions to the communities analyzed here.

4.5.1 Schools There are no schools in Caño Yaquivapo to the best of my knowledge, and there are no schools in nine of the communities studied: Pijiguao, Escondido, Canaripó, Isla Bomba, Fundo Caimán, Barranco Rojo, Caño Negro, the other small community on the margins of the Yureba River whose name I do not know, and Cerro Mosquito (see Table 7). However, the children of these communities go to school in neighboring communities: for example, Escondido children go to school in Arena Blanca and children from Isla Bomba attend school in Picúa (a Piaroa community). Children from Fundo Caimán go to school in Fundo Chicho; the ones from Cerro Mosquito, in Marueta.

Out of the other 11 communities included in this study, five have primary schools that go to grade 6 and include kindergarten (Porvenir II, Fundo Chicho, San José de Yureba, Marueta, and Tavi Tavi) while two only have schools that go to grade 4 and that do not include kindergarten (Santa Inés and Arena Blanca). It is unclear at this point to what grade the schools in Puerto Limón, Morocoto, Moriche and Yopal go, or whether they include kindergarten or not. Until very recently, there were no high schools in any of the Mako communities; children wanting to continue their studies would either go to La Esmeralda or to San Fernando de Atabapo. However, a high school was recently (2013–2014) built in Marueta and is now open.

Classroom observations in Arena Blanca and Porvenir II showed that Mako is used frequently in class with children of all grades, in spite of the fact that schooling is generally expected to be in Spanish (see discussion in §4.7.2). These interactions in

Mako between students and teacher, however, are only possible because the observed school teachers are Mako. However, in many other cases, the teachers are not Mako. For example, a look at Table 7 reveals that the two teachers in San José de Yureba are Piaroa, the one in Fundo Chicho is Mako-Piara, the one in Santa Inés in 2012 was Kurripako, two teachers in Puerto Limón are Piara and out of six teachers in Tavi Tavi, only two are Mako. No information is available for Marueta or Yopal.

Despite evidence of use of Mako in the classroom in some communities, acquiring Spanish is a major goal of the education system. This, however, only has partial success as the figures for Arena Blanca in Table 10 above show: children between ages 5–9 are reported as Mako monolinguals. Having taught in the Arena Blanca school for a week in 2012, I can attest to the children's very limited understanding of Spanish, even the older children (i.e., those in Grade 4).

4.5.2 Religion New Tribes Missions introduced evangelical Christianity to Marueta and this has spread to most Mako communities. Although the NTM missionaries are now no longer allowed to live in Venezuelan indigenous communities, evangelical religious practices continue. Religion can be seen as a positive factor here because it has promoted Mako literacy through the creation of an alphabet and reading primers. However, it also has led to the demise of traditional cultural practices such as shamanism. There are churches and church services in Marueta, Porvenir II, Fundo Chicho, Tavi Tavi, and Moriche (see Table 7). Some of these churches are also attended by members of other communities: for example, people from Cerro Mosquito and Puerto Limón go to church in Marueta. I have, however, not had an opportunity to observe these services. Reportedly, the service in Porvenir II is carried out in Mako. However, in Arena Blanca, Spanish is used in this domain. Observations during family meals show that prayer is said before each meal in Spanish in one family unit. The same person saying prayer has been observed reading from the bible in Spanish to other members of the community, regardless of their ability to speak Spanish.

4.5.3 Commerce and government The Mako are self-sufficient agriculturalists but contact with the Venezuelan *criollo* society has led to an increase in trading (both selling and buying), especially in the nearby town of Atabapo. During these trips, there is contact with both Colombian and Venezuelan Spanish. Selling manioc flour, cassava and game meat in San Fernando de Atabapo is mostly done by the men through the means of Spanish. Older men rely on the knowledge of younger, more proficient male Spanish-Mako bilinguals to sell their merchandise. Trips to Atabapo or Ayacucho to meet with the municipal and state authorities are also common; all interactions with outsiders are in Spanish. Women and small children often accompany the men in these trips but do not interact much with the *criollos*. Some, however, have been observed using their (mostly passive) knowledge of Spanish to communicate when the men are not around.

4.5.4 New Media There is no Mako presence in local or national TV or radio stations. CDs and DVDs of movies and TV shows in Spanish are common in the majority

of the communities that I have visited and a few households in some of the communities have access to satellite TV. No texting in Mako has been observed, but oral Mako phone conversations are frequent when the Mako travel to the city (there is no phone reception in the Middle Ventuari region). No emailing or use of Mako in computers/Internet has been observed. The last two observations might be related to the lack of Mako literacy as well as the lack of access to Internet in any language.

4.5.5 Summary As the above discussion shows, Mako use in new domains is very limited, which makes me classify the language as being in the *minimal* (1) category of the UNESCO scale.

4.6 Materials for language education and literacy The amount of literacy materials available to date is limited to four *Cartillas*¹⁰ (NTM 2005a). These start with syllables and words to introduce the orthography designed by the New Tribes missionary Phyllis Gordon (see Gordon (n.d.)). However, these reading primers are not employed in the schools as far as I know; neither are they available in all the communities. As far as I know, in the past they have only been used in Marueta and Porvenir II. However, in fall 2012 several workshops using these primers were given in Santa Inés (one week every month). These workshops were also organized by evangelical missionaries and had literacy as a goal. Apart from the reading primers, the only other reading material available is the New Testament (NTM 2005b).¹¹

Given that 1) there is a practical orthography, 2) some materials have been written but remain largely inaccessible to most communities, and 3) Mako literacy education is not part of the school curriculum, I would classify Mako as being in category 2 of the UNESCO scale.

4.7 Governmental and institutional languages and policies including official status and use This section builds on González Nández (2000) and Villalón (2012) to examine the legal framework that gives Mako official status (as of 2008) and that guarantees the Mako people's right to education in their language. It is organized around the three main aspects of language planning: status planning, acquisition planning and corpus planning.

4.7.1 Status planning: Official recognition of indigenous languages The 1947 Venezuelan Constitution included no provision regarding the official language or languages of the country. The 1961 Constitution, however, in its Article 6 declares that Spanish is the official language of the country. This would not change until 1999 when a new constitution added mention of the indigenous languages of the country in its Article 9. Although Spanish remained the official language of the country, the

¹⁰Reading primers [my translation].

¹¹As part of my documentation project, an additional reading primer with 10 short animal stories has been created. This primer, once accepted by community members and schools, would come to increase the amount of materials available to the Mako communities.

1999 Constitution declares the indigenous languages of ‘official use’ for the country’s indigenous peoples and adds that they must be respected in all of the country’s territory since they are a cultural patrimony. Additionally, in its Chapter VIII, the Constitution declares that the State must recognize the indigenous peoples’ cultures and languages.

Although the contribution of the 1999 Constitution to the status of the indigenous languages may seem minimal, it was this Constitution that provided the legal framework for the subsequent laws and decrees concerning indigenous peoples’ rights that would come over the next decade. In 2002, for example, two Presidential Decrees were passed. The first one, Decree 1.795, established the obligatory use of indigenous languages in the schools in indigenous areas or in urban areas inhabited by members of indigenous groups. The second one, Decree 1.796, declared the creation of the *Consejo Nacional de Educación, Cultura e Idiomas indígenas*,¹² which was to serve the Executive Committee in an advisory capacity regarding language planning. In 2005, the *Ley Orgánica de Pueblos y Comunidades Indígenas*¹³ (LOPCI) was passed and it included a chapter with three articles regulating the status and use of the country’s indigenous languages. The first article, Article 94, reaffirms the text of the 1999 Constitution regarding the official status of the indigenous languages for indigenous peoples. Article 95 lists the different contexts where use of indigenous languages should be guaranteed by the State: 1) main pieces of legislation, state constitutions, and any other official document that affects indigenous peoples, 2) judicial and administrative processes involving indigenous persons through bilingual interpreters, 3) official public ceremonies in states with indigenous populations, and 4) health services and programs directed to indigenous peoples. It also encourages the use and documentation of indigenous toponomy, the publication of school texts and other teaching materials, and the edition and publication of bibliographic and audiovisual materials in each of the indigenous languages. Last, Article 96 states that the State, jointly with the indigenous communities and peoples, should promote publications and broadcasting in indigenous languages.

In 2008, the *Ley de Idiomas Indígenas*¹⁴ was approved. This law built on the 1999 Constitution and the 2005 LOPCI. With the goal of regulating, promoting, and strengthening the use, preservation, defense and development of indigenous languages, the key contribution of this law was the fact that it finally made the country’s indigenous languages official, not only for the indigenous peoples but for the country (Article 4). This law also makes provisions for the revitalization and promotion of the indigenous languages and places on the State the obligation of guaranteeing the necessary resources for such a task. The law suggests that priority should be given to languages at risk of extinction (Article 36) and mentions language nests as a means of revitalizing and promoting the use of indigenous languages in those communities where they are no longer used or where their use is dwindling (Article 37). The law also reaffirms the obligatory use of indigenous languages as the main lan-

¹²National Council for Indigenous Education, Cultures and Languages [my translation]

¹³Organic Law of Indigenous Peoples and Communities [my translation]

¹⁴Indigenous Languages Law [my translation]

guage of schooling in the schools in indigenous territories (Article 31) and stipulates that indigenous communities should be given the right to participate in the elaboration of alphabets, grammars and dictionaries (Article 29). Further, it encourages research on indigenous languages under the supervision of the *Instituto Nacional de Idiomas Indígenas*¹⁵ or INII (Article 39). The INII is in fact ‘created’ in Title 3 of the *Ley de Idiomas Indígenas*, where its goal, competencies, and organizational structure are established. This institute was to be the force behind the implementation of what was stipulated in the law. However, this institute was not created until October 2014.¹⁶ This promising development will hopefully serve to promote what has been established in the 2008 *Ley de Idiomas Indígenas* but also in the laws and bills that regulate the system of intercultural bilingual education, discussed in the next section.

4.7.2 Acquisition planning: Régimen de Educación Intercultural Bilingüe According to González Nájuez (2000), Decree 283 of 1979 created a system of *Educación Intercultural Bilingüe* or EIB.¹⁷ A year later, in 1980, the Organic Education Law was passed and in 1986, the Organic Education Regulation Law. Both promoted the preservation and valorization of the country’s indigenous cultures. However, language was not part of either of them. It was in 1982 that, thanks to the Ministry of Education Resolution 83, explicit use of indigenous languages as part of the EIB system was sanctioned but this resolution only included a small number of indigenous languages: Guahibo, Guajiro, Kariña, Pemón, Warao, Yanomami, Yaruro, Ye’kwana and Yukpa. In 1992, Resolution 453 added a number of other languages to the EIB system: Kurripako, Piapoko, Baniva, Yavarana, Piaroa, and Guahibo. 1992 would also see two other resolutions (namely, Resolutions 952 and 954) that concerned the EIB: the first one created pilot centers for the training of indigenous teachers in the EIB system; the other one extended EIB to pre-school education through the establishment of language nests.

The EIB system was also further developed and regulated by the *Ley Orgánica de Pueblos y Comunidades Indígenas* (2005) and the *Ley de Idiomas Indígenas* (2008) discussed in the previous section as well as by the *Ley Orgánica de Educación*¹⁸ (2009). This law establishes that education is, among other things, “pluricultural, multiethnic, intercultural and plurilingual” (Article 3). This recognition of education as “plurilingual” is a step forward in recognizing that many indigenous communities are indeed composed of more than one indigenous people and, therefore, more than two languages (i.e., Spanish and one indigenous language) may be spoken in any one given community. However, the law continues to talk about “intercultural bilingual education” (e.g., Article 26 and 27).

Article 27 of the 2009 *Ley Orgánica de Educación* also stipulates that there should be a law specifically for the EIB system. Such a law, however, has not seen the light

¹⁵National Institute of Indigenous Languages [my translation]

¹⁶<http://www.avn.info.ve/contenido/diputado-gonzález-15-años-revolución-comunidad-indígena-goza-participación-protagónica>

¹⁷Intercultural bilingual education [my translation]

¹⁸Organic Education Law [my translation]

yet but a new bill for a *Ley de Educación de los Pueblos Indígenas*¹⁹ is currently under discussion in the country.²⁰ This new law aims at developing the EIB system. It defines EIB as a modality of the national education system “based on the cultures of each indigenous people and community, that is taught in the aboriginal languages” (Article 5). The bill also states that the State recognizes and guarantees the right of the country’s indigenous peoples to their own education as a mechanism of teaching their languages, values, etc. (Article 3) and that one of its goals is “to reaffirm the identity and the cultural and linguistic diversity of the indigenous peoples and communities” (Article 4). Unlike previous laws, this one recognizes the existence of multiethnic (and therefore multilingual) communities (Article 17); in such cases, the law guarantees the right of every ethnic group living in a multiethnic community to have “their own time, space, teachers and teaching materials for the teaching and learning of their own language and culture.” Other improvements of this new bill over preceding legal instruments to regulate the Venezuelan EIB system are that it recognizes that the indigenous languages should be the means of instruction “for cultural, psychosocial and pedagogical reasons” (Article 18). Although the law affirms that Spanish should be taught from year one, it suggests that it must be done in a balanced way with the indigenous languages without causing subordination and displacement of the latter. This bill also regulates the selection of indigenous teachers; it argues that their linguistic competence (both oral and written) in the language of the community where they will work must be taken into account. It also favors teachers that belong to the people and community where they will work and makes provisions for the inclusion of elders as teachers to teach classes on cultural heritage and ancestral and traditional knowledge.

In spite of the progress this new bill makes in the field of EIB, it overlooks a number of important points. First, it makes no provisions for communities without speakers (for example, there is no mention of revitalization initiatives like language nests) or for communities without a writing system or where many different writing systems exist. Second, the provisions for multiethnic communities seem to be overly optimistic. In many cases, there is only one school in each community with a single room; therefore a lot of resources would need to be employed if each indigenous group in a community is to have its own space and teacher. Third, there is no mention of dialectal variation and what to do for languages with multiple dialects. Lastly, and most importantly, there are no provisions for corpus planning and development, which as the next section illustrates is badly needed.

4.7.3 Corpus planning Generally speaking, we can say that there has been almost no official effort at corpus planning in Venezuela. As far as I am aware, there have been no attempts at standardizing or modernizing the indigenous languages of the country; the only efforts at corpus planning so far involve graphization, i.e., the creation of

¹⁹Law of Education for Indigenous Peoples [my translation]

²⁰At the time of the first writing of this article (October 17, 2014), the bill for this new law has been approved by the *Comisión Permanente de Pueblos Indígenas* (Permanent Commission for Indigenous Peoples [my translation]) after the first draft was approved in the National Assembly in 2013. The bill is now to be discussed a second time in the Assembly (<http://www.aporrea.org/educacion/n254158.html>).

alphabets. For example, there were official attempts at creating orthographies for 12 indigenous languages in the 1980s, using the document *Caracterización del sistema sonoro de las lenguas indígenas venezolanas*²¹ as a starting point (González Nãñez 2000:407). According to this same author (2000:407), the official orthographies, however, are imprecise and do not fully represent the phonological system of the languages that they aim to represent.

4.7.4 Summary The legal framework and instruments to promote the use of Mako in the indigenous communities where the language is spoken and in the education system exist; however, many of these policies remain unimplemented. The reasons for this may be argued to go from lack of political will to obliviousness regarding how important it is to support indigenous languages (Villalón 2012:33) or perhaps they can be seen as stemming from the flaws of the policies themselves (e.g., lack of awareness of dialect differences or of the problems with multiple orthographies to the development of materials). What seems clear is that Mako is explicitly protected by the Venezuelan government, and that language use and maintenance are encouraged in the country; this qualifies Mako to be in the *Differentiated Support* (4) category of the UNESCO scale. Should the policies in place be implemented in the near future thanks to the newly created *Instituto de Idiomas Indígenas*, Mako could be placed in the *Equal Support* (5) category.

4.8 Community members' attitudes toward their own language The Mako people whom I know and with whom I have interacted over the last few years are most definitely not ashamed of using their language – for example, they use it overtly amongst themselves while in the cities – and, in fact, seem to see it as essential to their community and their identity.²² It is impossible to guarantee that *all* the members of *all* the Mako communities value their language and wish to see it promoted, but I think it safe to affirm that *most* members of the communities with whom I have worked or those I have just visited support language maintenance. Question 8.2 of the structured interviews I carried out in Arena Blanca and Isla Bomba (see Appendix 1 below) asked if the interviewees considered it important for the children to learn how to speak, read and write in Mako and in every case, the answer was yes. However, this is reported information and, therefore, problematic (see §5 below). For all of the above considerations, I give Mako a 4 in the UNESCO scale for Factor 8.

4.9 Amount and quality of documentation Before the start of my documentation project in June 2012, the amount of accessible published Mako data was limited to three wordlists totaling 38 words: Humboldt (1824:V7:154–156), Koch-Grünberg (1913:468–469), and Loukotka (1949:56–57 [Vráz 1894]), with varying degrees of

²¹Characterization of the sound system of the Venezuelan indigenous languages [my translation]

²²Elucidating the role of language in defining ethnicity among the Mako people is beyond the scope of this paper but based on informal conversations during my fieldwork, language seems to be a badge of identity for the Mako people: *wilö* or Mako is someone who speaks this language and other groups such as the Piaroa or the Kurripako are identified based primarily on the language that they speak.

transcription accuracy. Additionally, there was one general article (i.e., Hammarström 2011) that reprinted the three available wordlists. These materials are inaccessible to community members because 1) they are written in French, German and English and 2) there is no easy access to libraries that hold these materials or their Spanish translations, were the speakers already familiar with their existence. There were also a number of other materials that had been locally published or that remained unpublished: a phonology sketch (i.e., Gordon (2000)), parts of the Bible translated into the language (i.e., NTM 2005b²³), and an MA anthropology thesis (i.e., Campoverde (2012)) with about 200 words. Apart from this, there was a CD available with several words and short phrases (i.e., NTM n.d.) and a DVD *Somos Mako* (see Szeplaki 2006) where some Mako was spoken, but these remained and still remain almost completely inaccessible to community members.

After the start of my documentation project in 2012, the amount and quality of the documentation increased. As a result of the project, 54:40:46 hours of audio and 23:05:07 hours of video of Observed Communicative Events and Staged Communicative Events (see Himmelmann 2006 for definitions) were collected. Out of the 54:40:46 hours of audio collected, 10:55:37 hours have been transcribed and translated; the text transcription and analysis of these 10+ hours produced 178:42:14 hours of audio recordings. In addition to these recordings, there are 20:01:46 hours of recorded elicitation. Only a small portion of these materials, however, have been archived and still remain inaccessible to the community. Another major contribution of the project was a grammar (Chapters 4–9 of Rosés Labrada (2015)).

Given that there is an adequate grammar (but no dictionary) and that existing audio and video recordings are only partially annotated, I place Mako in the *Fair* (3) level of the UNESCO scale.

4.10 Summary and discussion According to the factors outlined in UNESCO (2003) and following from the discussion in the preceding subsections, the scores in the different factors of the UNESCO scale for Mako are:

Contrary to what the literature on language vitality has previously reported for Mako, I have shown in the preceding sections that language transmission has not been interrupted in the Mako communities of the Middle Ventuari River region. This, paired with the uniquely favorable legal framework for protection of indigenous languages in place in Venezuela and the provisions for an EIB system, definitely places Mako on the ‘Safe’ end of the UNESCO scale. However, the small size of the population (see Whalen & Simons (2012) for a correlation between size and endangerment), the ever-growing encroaching presence of Spanish and Piaroa in some of the communities, the increased contact with mainstream Venezuelan society, the lack of any media and the scarcity of literacy materials, and the still incipient documentation of the language make Mako vulnerable for maintenance in the long-term.

Attention should be then given to those factors where Mako scores more weakly in the UNESCO scale: Factor 5 ‘Response to New Domains and Media,’ Factor 6

²³In 2012, only parts of the New Testament had been translated; however, a complete translation of the New Testament became available in 2014 (see NTM 2014).

Table 12. Summary of UNESCO factors for Mako

	Factor	Values	Label
1	Intergenerational Language Transmission	-5	Stable yet threatened
2	Absolute number of speakers	~1078 (in 2011)	
3	Proportion of Speakers within the Total Population	4	Unsafe
4	Trends in Existing Language Domains	4	Multilingual parity
5	Response to New Domains and Media	1	Minimal
6	Materials for Language Education and Literacy	2	
7	Governmental & Institutional Languages and Policies including Official Status and Use	4/5	Differentiated support
8	Community Members' Attitudes toward their Own Language	4	
9	Amount and Quality of Documentation	3	Fair

'Materials for Language Education and Literacy,' and Factor 9 'Amount and Quality of Documentation.' The documentation project of which this vitality assessment is a part has aimed to address Factors 6 and 9. I hope that it will also contribute to increased literacy rates and that said increased literacy will result in Mako gaining more domains of use in the future. The recent creation of the *Instituto de Idiomas Indígenas* in Venezuela is also likely to result in positive measures to strengthen Mako in the communities of the Middle Ventuari River region.

5. Self-critique of this assessment and the importance of long-term participant observation in assessments of language vitality The primary goal of this section is to show the benefits of using long-term participant observation as a methodology in our assessments of linguistic vitality. Participant observation is defined here as “a way to collect data in naturalistic settings by ethnographers who observe and/or take part in the common and uncommon activities of the people being studied” (DeWalt & DeWalt 2011:2). I argue that, since participant observation allows the researcher to gather information about both *explicit knowledge* – what people can articulate about themselves with relative ease – and *tacit knowledge* – what is beyond people’s awareness or consciousness – (DeWalt & DeWalt 2011:1), it is superior to traditional methods of acquiring data for language vitality assessments such as questionnaires and structured and non-structured interviews. A secondary goal of this section is to critically examine the methodology employed in my assessment of language vitality in the Mako communities of the Middle Ventuari region presented in this article.

5.1 Reporting and assessing linguistic vitality: First-, second- and third-hand reports and their sources of data Reports with a wide scope are usually not based on first-hand field data. For example, the *Atlas of the World’s Languages in Danger of*

Disappearing (Wurm 1996; 2001; Moseley 2010) is a report with global scope as is the *Catalogue of Endangered Languages* (2015); both primarily rely on medium-sized reports of language endangerment for specific areas of the world or for specific countries. These medium-sized reports may have continental/regional, e.g., Moore (2007), Crevels (2007), and Crevels (2012) for (lowland) South America; or country-wide scope, e.g., González Nájuez (2000), Mosonyi (2003), and Mattéi-Müller (2006) for Venezuela. As discussed above, these large- and medium-size reports of language endangerment are generally based on national census data and/or the research of local linguists who work with specific languages/groups. Self-reported data, especially census data where speakers are asked “what language(s) do you speak?”,²⁴ is problematic because there is no reliable way of testing or assessing that the information gathered is correct and speakers could, for example, declare that they speak the dominant language because of the associated prestige that this entails. They are thus prone to inaccuracies because of the nature of the data used and because of the sheer magnitude of the task of trying to report on the status of all the languages of the world, the languages of a whole continent (e.g., South America), or the languages of a country as multiethnic as Venezuela.

First-hand reports tend to focus on a given language or group of languages (for example, all the languages spoken in a particular community) and are usually based on first-hand assessments of linguistic vitality that are (in my personal experience) largely dependent on questionnaire data and to a smaller degree on informal interviewing and observational data. To verify what kind of methodologies are used in first-hand vitality assessments and what their distribution is, I examined a sample²⁵ of published vitality reports in the SILESR²⁶ website and confirmed that most of them rely mostly on questionnaire data, as shown in Table 13.

There is, however, some use of observational data as Table 13 reveals. A closer look at what the observations consisted of shows that 1) it is only in the newer (i.e., the 2012) reports that participant observation is used, 2) that the time spent on surveys is relatively short, the longest time spent on a survey being four to six weeks. However, said survey encompassed 16 communities; this translates as 2.62 days on average spent in each community.

²⁴See, for example, the questionnaire from the 2011 Venezuelan census – available here http://www.ine.gov.ve/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&cid=95&Itemid=9 – which asked in its §V, Question 5 “What language(s) do you speak?” giving the following options: 1) the language of his/her indigenous group, 2) Spanish, 3) Another language (notice the singular); and providing a space for which other language is spoken. This, in addition to presupposing that people will likely speak Spanish plus one or at most two other languages (e.g. their indigenous first-language plus one other), also forces people to self-identify with only one group (e.g. having to choose between saying Mako or Piaroa in the case of members of the communities under discussion here).

²⁵Sampling was done in early 2013. I focused on five years prior (2008–2012) and sampled every other year (i.e., 2008, 2010, and 2012). Out of each of the reports published in a given year, I aimed for a sample of >25% (the sample for 2012 came short of this goal at 23% but it included more papers). To select the reports to include, I chose the even-numbered reports starting from zero. So in 2008, I looked at reports 002, 004, etc. For 2012, I tried to space out my sampling more because the number of reports was larger so I sampled one out of four reports.

²⁶<http://www.sil.org/silesr/>

Table 13. Sample of language surveys from SILESR

Year	Total Surveys	Analyzed Surveys	Methods Used	
			Questionnaires	Interviews
2008	23	6	5/6	1/6
2010	27	7	6/6	3/6
2012	42	10	10/10	5/10

Table 14. Observations used in 5 surveys from 2012

Report #	Type of observations	Time spent on survey	# of villages visited
2012-002	Language use (Hindi)	3 weeks	16 communities
2012-012	Language use at a Moms & Tots	~1 month	N/A
2012-014	Not reported	4–6 weeks	16 communities
2012-018	Language use during interviews	17 days	20 villages
2012-038	Language use in the community	2 weeks	11 villages

The importance of a longer stay in the community is highlighted by one of the authors of the reports above who writes:

The findings of this survey could be further validated by a researcher staying longer in the village and spending more time for observation, informal conversations and participation in the lives of the Kachok people and their activities. This would provide more opportunities to observe language use and attitudes of the people to verify the questionnaire results. A longer ethnographic study is therefore, recommended. (Magaspag 2012: xix)

5.2 Case study: ‘Problematic’ self-reported data from Arena Blanca The language vitality assessment presented above started with a census in Arena Blanca. During this census, data was collected using semi-structured group interviews in several households. As I show in this section, however, the self-reported nature of this type of data makes it highly unreliable. The discussion centers around self-reported age, languages spoken and level of proficiency, and Piaroa language use.

5.2.1 Age group The Venezuelan national census has a number of age groups: 0–4, 5–9, 10–14, 15–19, 20–29, 30–39, 40–54, 55+. Previous reports of language endangerment for Mako and other Venezuelan languages take into account this data (see, for example, González Nández 2000), and for comparison purposes with previous reports, information from the local censuses in Arena Blanca and Isla Bomba was presented above according to this age grouping. However, the second round of interviews carried out in Arena Blanca in 2012 revealed that the age data gathered in 2011 was not accurate. This is clearly shown below in Table 15 for the members of three

different households. Each household is represented with the letter H and a number; the members of each household are represented with the letter M and a number.

Table 15. Age discrepancies between data collected in July 2011 and July 2012 in Arena Blanca

	Age reported in July 2011	Age reported in July 2012
H2.M1	36	32
H2.M2	37	34
H2.M3	17	18
H2.M4	15	16
H2.M5	11	12
H2.M6	5	6
H2.M7	5 (days)	1
H3.M1	50	39–40
H3.M2	40	40–41
H3.M3	17	19
H3.M4	10	12
H3.M5	8	8
H10.M1	48	46
H10.M2	42	42
H10.M3	12	12
H10.M4	11	15
H10.M5	10	13
H10.M6	8	11
H10.M7	5	6

As can be seen in Table 15, sometimes people's age decreased in 2012 with respect to 2011 (for example, H2.M1, H2.M2, H3.M1, and H10.M1, the most significant difference being of almost 10 years in the case of H3.M1) while other times the expected increase in age was larger than the one year that had passed between the two rounds of interviews (for example, H10.M4, H10.M5, and H10.M6) or age stayed the same (for example, H10.M2 and H10.M3). What this suggests is that age as counted in years in the Western world is only partially relevant for Mako speakers, and that a different age grouping is needed if we want to understand the intergenerational distribution of speakers. It also suggests that the data provided for the national census are (possibly) equally unreliable.

5.2.2 Multilingualism and levels of proficiency During the initial census interviews in Arena Blanca, I collected data on languages spoken in the home and on (self-assessed) proficiency. The results of this part of the interviews are summarized in the second column of Table 16. However, observations of everyday interactions – in the third column – among members of the different households and between commu-

nity members and the researcher showed that the self-reported data was not entirely accurate.

Table 16. Differences between reported and observed language proficiency

Household	Reported information	Observed information
Household #1	Everyone speaks Mako; M3 & M5 speak Spanish; M1 understands Spanish but does not speak it well; M2 & M4 speak a little Piaroa	M4 can communicate well in Piaroa in different contexts
Household #2	Everyone speaks Mako; M1, M3 & M4 speak Spanish; M2 understands Spanish but cannot speak it; M1 speaks Piaroa	The levels of proficiency of M1, M4 & M8 are very different; M1 understands Spanish but cannot speak it while M3 & M4 speak Spanish fluently
Household #4	Everyone speaks Mako; M1, M7 & M12 speak Spanish	The levels of proficiency of M1, M7 & M12 are different; M1 understands Spanish but can't speak it while M7 & M12 can speak it but not fluently (i.e., their level is different from H2's M3 & M4)
Household #8	Everyone speaks Mako; only M1 speaks Spanish	M1 speaks Spanish fluently but M3 also speaks it (although less proficiently)
Household #10	Everyone speaks Mako; M1, M4 & M8 speak Spanish	M1 can understand Spanish but doesn't speak it very well; M4 understands just a little and can't speak at all; and M8 speaks Spanish fluently

The question is then how to interpret the discrepancies between reported and observed data regarding spoken languages and proficiency. The first conclusion seems to be that 'to speak a language' can mean different things to different people (i.e., it is subjective) and should be therefore measured objectively (see for example the procedures outlined in Florey 2007). The second one is that only spending a long period of time in a given community can shed light on actual language use practices: e.g., I did not find out that H8.M3 could speak Spanish until day 20 of my second field trip when he came by my house and we had a short chat.

5.2.3 Piaroa self-reported language use domains vs. observed language use domains

Another area where self-reported data and observed data do not coincide is in the use

of Piaroa in the community of Arena Blanca. Five non-Mako men have married into the community of Arena Blanca: one Jivi, one *criollo* and three Piaroa. Two of the Piaroa men admitted not speaking Mako, but the oldest of the three said he does speak it. When asked with whom he uses Piaroa in the community, he said he spoke it with the other two Piaroa men. He, however, seems to use it with others too as the following transcript from a recording of a village meeting shows:

Mako speaker: *waedza* | *hobema okoh^winida*
‘I don’t know; everyone is there’

Piaroa speaker:²⁷ *waedzo?o* | *uk^wuoni rak^wopo pak^woko?oma* | *rak^wopi h^widzope?e* | *h^widzope?e wekoko?ot^hima*
‘no one knows; if you don’t want to be on TV, if you don’t want to be on TV, if you don’t want to be there, you can’t give your permission.’

It is unclear that the Piaroa speaker in the transcript above is speaking Piaroa. Nonetheless, inspection of the two stretches of text above, even if cursory, will show that if he is indeed speaking Mako and not Piaroa, the ‘Mako’ of this Piaroa speaker differs from the Mako spoken by the Mako speaker; compare for example the different endings on the form *waedz-* with which both speakers start their speech turn.

5.2.4 Summary Summing up, there are a number of inconsistencies between the self-reported questionnaire data and observed language use data. Were the members of the communities I work in consciously reporting information that was either false or inaccurate? The answer to this question is a plain no. Where do these inconsistencies stem from then? The answer to this second question is that the speakers were simply reporting only *explicit knowledge* (in the sense of DeWalt & DeWalt (2011:1)) while *tacit knowledge* is just not accessible to them.

5.3 Discussion and recommendations This self-critique shows that census statistics and questionnaire data can be inaccurate (and therefore unreliable) for two main reasons: 1) they are often designed based on the assumption of shared cultural practices for different groups (e.g., age), and 2) they only allow us to gather self-reported data that gets at explicit knowledge but not at tacit knowledge. The question is then what to do so as to avoid the pitfalls of relying solely on census/questionnaire data. The answer seems to be that we need to complement census and questionnaire data with information obtained by means of long-term participant observation in the communities where we work. My concrete suggestions on how to do so for linguists who are assessing language vitality are to actively participate in a wide range of activities in the community, including but not limited to fishing/hunting trips, trips to

²⁷Transcription is based on the respoken version provided by a Mako speaker during the transcription and translation of the audio recording of this meeting and might therefore not accurately represent Piaroa phonology.

the plantations, village meetings, and daily meals; and to engage people in everyday conversation and use this as an opportunity for unstructured interviewing. In other words, in order to gain a deeper understanding of language shift and language death but also of language maintenance and vitality in a given community, we should include tacit knowledge from participant observation alongside explicit knowledge in our language vitality assessments.

6. Conclusions In this article, I have provided an overview of language vitality in the Mako communities of the Ventuari River region. Using both qualitative and quantitative data, I have shown that Mako is not in as dire a situation as previously reported by other authors. Rather, the language is very vital in its local context, but its position within the regional and national contexts put it in a vulnerable position. I have suggested that, in order for the language to continue to be vital, steps should be taken to ensure its presence in new domains of use such as the schools, the government, and the media.

This article also offered a short critique of questionnaire-based language vitality assessments and emphasized the importance of using long-term participant observation to corroborate reported information, especially on language use and language proficiency. While questionnaire- and/or interview-based vitality reports are well-suited for studies with limited budgets, time, or personnel, long-term participant observation offers a richer, more nuanced assessment and should be strived for whenever possible. The nature of the data collected by these two methods is complementary and the combination of both will likely result in vitality assessments that better reflect the dynamics of language shift and maintenance in the communities under study.

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Appendix 1. Community Census Questionnaire (Adapted from Campoverde (2012))Datos para censo

1. ¿Cuántas personas viven aquí?
2. ¿Con quién vive usted aquí?
3. Edad aproximada de las personas
4. Las personas de la casa de al lado, ¿quiénes son?

Información sobre padres del entrevistado/a

5. ¿Quiénes son sus padres?

Madre _____ Etnia _____	Padre _____ Etnia _____
¿Dónde nació su madre?	¿Dónde nació su padre?
¿Dónde queda eso?	¿Dónde queda eso?
¿Aún existe ese sitio?	¿Aún existe ese sitio?
Su madre vive sí ____ no ____	Su padre vive sí ____ no ____

Información sobre el entrevistado

6. ¿Usted dónde nació?
 - (a) ¿Dónde queda eso?
 - (b) ¿Todavía existe ese lugar?
 - (c) ¿Recuerda cuentos sobre la fundación de ese lugar?
 - (d) ¿En qué otros sitios, comunidades, caños, fundos, cerros ha vivido?

Información sobre vínculos con otras comunidades

7. ¿Tiene familia en otras comunidades?

Nombre _____ Etnia _____ ¿Dónde vive?
Relación de parentesco con usted

Idiomas

- 8.1 Personas que hablan castellano en la casa
 - (a) ¿Dónde lo aprendió?
 - (b) ¿Qué grados estudió en la escuela?
 - (c) ¿Quién ha ido a estudiar en Atabapo?
- 8.2 ¿Cree que es importante que los niños aprendan
 - (a) a hablar Mako?
 - (b) a escribir en Mako?
 - (c) a leer en Mako?

- (d) a hablar Español?
- (e) a escribir en Español?
- (f) a leer en Español?

8.3 ¿Con quién usa el castellano?

Historias

- 9. ¿Recuerda historias, cuentos, mitos de los antiguos sobre piedras, caños, etc.?
- 10. ¿Conoce alguna historia sobre el origen de los Jojodö?