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# The Hidden Forces of a Contact Language in the Battle for Survival in a Peripheral Situation: Garífuna in Honduras

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## Résumé

We adopt an ecolinguistic and action-oriented approach to present the situation of the Garífuna language spoken by approximately one million people in several communities of Central America (Honduras, Nicaragua, Belize, Nicaragua, Guatemala). They declare themselves as "afrodescendientes" and their language and culture are based on complex patterns of cultural crossings and convergences (Prescod 2022) between elements from different continents: Africa, America, and Europe, the later through the contribution of the French, Spanish and English colonizers. The ancestors of this group arrived in a small number of about 2000 in the central Caribbean area in 1797, originating from Saint Vincent and the Grenadines. Garífuna is classified as a language of the Amerindian Arawak branch (stemming from South America). There are also claims to highlight the African roots of some parts of the vocabulary and other linguistic structures like phonetics and intonation. The language, dance, and music of the Garífuna are part of the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage. The intergenerational transmission of this endangered and minorized language is not inexistant, but progressively weakening (Brunot 2021) and there is urgency to think about acts in favor of its survival (Solórzano 2022). We would like to illustrate some activities of linguistic and cultural revitalization by presenting examples from the life of the community. Sabine Ehrhart will describe the potential of contact languages to create acts of identity (Le Page & Tabouret-Keller 1985), thus contributing to the social cohesion of communities with roots in diverse geographic environments and possibly opposing a contrary force to the tendency of vanishing. The different languages which contributed to the creation of Garífuna can be used as a pedagogic diving board while approaching new languages at school, they can thus be understood as familiar languages and not as foreign languages. This is an innovative orientation for the didactics of multi- and plurilingualism.

The Garífuna language has survived for more than 200 years in Honduras, but presently, it will not be able to continue without a well-thought implantation into the school system. Therefore, the work of Cesar Vargas is rooted within sociodidactics, he questions the implication of cultural elements in the teaching processes of this endangered language. Sociodidactics considers the sociocultural, sociolinguistic, and anthropological environments where a language is spoken, it empowers its use (and its users) by taking a humanist and decolonial orientation (Rispaill 2017). Hereby it changes the narratives on minority languages

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and puts forward the wealth of knowledge they contain. In decolonial didactics, there is an urgent need for this kind of posture.

Mühlhäusler (1987) has shown in the highly diverse language situation of Papua New Guinea that the emergence of contact languages can be a way to protect autochthonous languages in a colonial context.

In the case of the Garifuna language of Honduras, it would be very important to reflect on the extent to which language contact (Spanish - Garifuna - Miskito and others) can interact without one language threatening or replacing the other. The didactic innovation we propose uses teaching-learning methodologies that guarantee a more sustainable linguistic ecology. For instance, Boitel (2022) does not recommend the simple translation of words from one language to the other as it might emphasize the exotic character and accentuate the minorization of the autochthonous language. Through the introduction of the wanaragua genre of Garifuna culture (song, drum, and dance) we are embedding the whole in its cultural environment and thus empowering the community and strengthen the sense of cultural belonging.

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**Mots-Clés:** language ecology, contact linguistics, Central America, linguistic and cultural diversity in the classroom, family language policy