Sustaining Indigenous Languages in Southeastern Peru

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The paper examines Mühlhäusler's thesis that to understand the decline and loss of small languages we must examine a large range of 'ecological' factors which comprise the support system within which the language has integrity and meaningfulness. Taking the case study of the Harakmbut peoples of Southeastern Peru, it examines the Harakmbut concept of territory (*wandari*) which provides parameters for understanding the linguistic ecology and the nature and degree of change in the social, cultural and natural environments in which the Harakmbut and Spanish languages are used. It considers the role of intercultural bilingual education in a context of increasing use of Spanish language and shrinking physical, social and cultural domains of Harakmbut language use. A survey of education programmes in the Peruvian Amazon, and among other indigenous peoples, focused on language maintenance suggests critical directions for sustaining the Harakmbut language.

Introduction

This paper is concerned with understanding changes in the use of indigenous languages in the Southeastern Peruvian Amazon by investigating the contexts in which the languages are used. It focuses on the 'non-linguistic support system' (Mühlhäusler, 1996), that is, the social, cultural and natural environments in which languages are used and the impact of change in these environments on language use and language diversity. The paper examines Mühlhäusler's thesis that to understand the decline and loss of small languages we must examine a large range of 'ecological' factors which comprise the support system within which the language has integrity and meaningfulness. Taking the case study of the Harakmbut peoples of Southeastern Peru, it considers the nature and degree of change in the social, cultural and natural environments in which the Harakmbut and Spanish languages are used and, on the basis of this analysis, considers directions for indigenous language maintenance.

Elsewhere (Aikman, 1995, 1999) changes which the Harakmbut peoples are experiencing through unequal and oppressive contact with agents from the wider national, international and global society have been discussed. Here, the relationships between the Harakmbut language and Spanish will be examined primarily through a consideration of the concept of 'wandari'. *Wandari* is a term which translates loosely to mean 'territory' but which for the Harakmbut encompasses conceptualisations of land, landscape and world. I argue that changes to the Harakmbut *wandari* are circumscribing the use of the Harakmbut language while encouraging the greater use of Spanish. The Harakmbut peoples' federation, FENAMAD (Federation of Natives of Madre de Dios), a representative political organisation, is working to secure the physical integrity of Harakmbut *wandari* against waves of colonisation. It also has a mandate to develop bilingual

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education as a means of strengthening and sustaining Harakmbut languages and cultural practices among the younger generations.

The paper considers developments in intercultural bilingual education in the Amazon and asks to what extent bilingual education can help sustain the Harakmbut language, given the dynamics of change in the region which are influencing the social, cultural and spiritual dimensions of Harakmbut *wandari*. The paper is based on research and collaboration with the Harakmbut over a period of 20 years and utilises data gathered during a four week field trip to Harakmbut communities in August 1998.

The Harakmbut Peoples and their Languages

The Harakmbut are a hunting, fishing and agricultural peoples, who live in the Department of Madre de Dios, Peru, a region bounded by the Andes mountains to the west and the vast Amazon forests of Central Peru, Brazil and Bolivia to the north, east and south. The Department comprises lowland tropical rainforest and is rich in natural resources: Brazil nuts, timber, rubber, gold and oil. Cattle ranching has increased over the last two decades as witnessed by large extensions of cleared land around the growing urban and commercial centres. In addition the discovery of alluvial gold dust deposits has attracted increasing numbers of landless migrants as well as large companies. Harakmbut themselves participate in the regional gold economy using artisan production methods. The Harakmbut peoples have never existed in isolation from other peoples and other cultural influences but since the middle of the 20th century the nature of their relationships with surrounding peoples and the degree and rate of change has intensified as the wider Peruvian and international society has seen this region as a resource-rich wilderness ripe for settlement and extractive activities.

The classification of Harakmbut languages

The Harakmbut-speaking peoples comprise the Arakmbut, Wachipaeri, Arasaeri, Pukirieri, Toyeri, Sapitaeri and Kisambaeri and number approximately 1800–2000 individuals. The suffix 'eri' means 'people of' and the word Harakmbut means 'people'. Recent linguistic research indicates that Harakmbut is unrelated to neighbouring indigenous languages (Helberg, 1982, 1996) and each Harakmbut group speaks a different dialect (Lyon, 1976; Pozzi-Escot, 1998). For the purpose of this paper, Arasaeri, Wachipaeri, Arakmbut and Kisambaeri will be referred to as varieties of Harakmbut, while the dialectal differences between the five Arakmbut communities will be referred to as dialects. At a meeting of communities in May 1992, the communities agreed to reject the term by which they have been referred in the academic literature — Amarakaeri — on the basis that it means 'fighting people' and insisted that they be referred to by their own name for themselves, Arakmbut, but dropping the 'h' to distinguish them from the wider group of Harakmbut peoples (Gray, 1997b).

The Harakmbut are estimated to have numbered some 10,000 people before they experienced the worst ravages of the rubber boom at the beginning of the 20th century (Gray, 1996). Today there are fewer than 40 Kisambaeri, while the Arasaeri and Wachipaeri number less than 200 and the Toyeri only a few individuals (my census). The Arakmbut are the largest Harakmbut group and today live

in five communities, each comprising a different subgroup. The term 'community' denotes both a sociological concept and a legal and administrative unit, the 'Native Community' established by the Law of Native Communities in 1974 (revised in 1978 in Decree Law 22175) which recognises indigenous Amazon peoples' communal rights to land.

The Harakmbut language is used by Harakmbut peoples in most intra-ethnic face-to-face communication, that is between communities, within communities and within the family. The few non-Harakmbut individuals who speak Harakmbut are researchers affiliated to either the Summer Institute of Linguistics or the indigenous Federation. Harakmbut society is based on principles of egalitarianism, kinship and exchange. Until the 1950s, when they first came into sustained contact with Dominican missionaries and the wider Peruvian society, they had no formalised social institutions and used Harakmbut in all communicative contexts. With missionary contact and influence the Harakmbut were introduced to the institutions of schooling and the Catholic Church where Spanish has been the only language tolerated.

Oral traditions and writing

Harakmbut has no written tradition although there are proposals for semi-phonological orthographies (see Pozzi-Escot, 1998). Missionaries from the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL), a North American Protestant sect, produced literacy booklets for a bilingual school in the 1970s and have translated the Bible. Local comments on excerpts from the Harakmbut Bible produced between the 1960s and 1990s suggest they are hard for the Harakmbut to read because of un-idiomatic constructions and alien European concepts (e.g. a God who lives in the sky, Jesus as a shepherd).

SIL linguists worked with the Kipodneri Arakmbut and the written materials they produced reflect their dialect. Thus other Arakmbut groups, for example the Wakutangeri Arakmbut, see the materials as products from a rival community and their lack of interest in them is primarily political. In the early 1990s, Harakmbut students worked with secular linguists to produce an orthography and alphabet which would be more acceptable to all the Harakmbut peoples and not privilege one particular dialect, to the marginalisation of the dialects of the other four Arakmbut communities or other Harakmbut language groups. This work is still only tentative and there has been no debate or discussion in the communities about how to proceed towards the recognition of a standard form. Political rivalries between communities continue to highlight the complex process of developing a written expression of Harakmbut. The project was never completed but the Federation office houses a small archive of tape recordings of oral literature (for a typology of written materials produced in Harakmbut see Pozzi-Escot, 1998).

Attitudes of the users to mother-tongue schooling and biliteracy

SIL opened a bilingual school in the Arakmbut community of Puerto Alegre (now the community of Puerto Luz) in 1973 at a time when the Arakmbut felt a strong need to be able to use Spanish in order to both participate in the emergent gold economy and defend their territory from gold panners and extractive companies. Contact with a team of Shell oil workers camped on the outskirts of

the village contributed to a sense of urgency to learn to speak Spanish. The arrival of Dominican missionaries offering Spanish-language education appeared a much more desirable option than Harakmbut-medium education and the SIL school closed down before Spanish as a second language had been introduced (Moore, 1981).

Since the 1970s the Harakmbut have had increased contact with Spanish and North American missionaries, Peruvian traders, gold panners, migrant farmers and labourers and entrepreneurs from national and international companies engaged in primary resource extraction, which has further increased Harakmbut need for Spanish. By the late 1980s the younger generations of Arasaeri and Kisambaeri no longer spoke Harakmbut as their first language, though some have a rudimentary grasp of words and phrases (see Aikman, 1995). Until the early 1990s it would have been accurate to say that all Arakmbut children still learn Harakmbut as a first language though with increasing fluency in Spanish at pre-school age. My visit to the community of Barranco Chico in 1998 confirmed that many of the youngest children now speak only Spanish although they retain a passive understanding of Harakmbut. While it was not possible to carry out a comprehensive survey, I found that, in this community, parents often addressed their children in Spanish and those who addressed them in Harakmbut were answered in Spanish.

Schooling has now become an institutionalised part of Harakmbut life. Each community has a Spanish-medium school, the majority of which are part of the Dominican Diocese Educational Network (RESSOP — Red Escolar de la Selva del Sur Oriente Peruano) and staffed by lay-missionaries. Only two schools are under direct Ministry of Education control today and are staffed by Ministry-appointed Mestizo teachers. Spanish-medium schooling has been the lynch-pin of Dominican proselytisation and since the 1950s all Harakmbut children have been exposed to this schooling to some degree. RESSOP began its community school network in Harakmbut communities in the 1970s and 1980s and today runs secondary boarding schools for primary school graduates. Thus all but the oldest generation speak some Spanish, though it is often grammatically weak, and have some basic grasp of a formal schooled variety of written Spanish.

Since the first missionary activity in the early 20th century and the first permanent trade links (particularly with the Wachipaeri and Toyeri) there has been a shift in language use from predominant monolingualism in Harakmbut (but with an ability in more than one variety and with some bilingualism in a neighbouring indigenous language) to Harakmbut–Spanish bilingualism. To understand the processes underlying this shift we must, in Fishman's words, 'attempt to locate language shift in social space and societal dynamics' (Fishman, 1991). To do this we will examine social domains of language use and investigate Harakmbut social dynamics as they enter into new relationships and activities with Spanish speakers.

Mühlhäusler (1996) argues that the decline and loss of small languages is not a self-contained phenomenon but part of a process of change in the ecological environment in which a language is embedded and which it needs for its well-being. Such an environment comprises, for example, internal dialect variation, a distinct territory in which it is spoken, language-centred cultural practices, an

optimum number of speakers and a metalinguistic belief system. The next section considers these and other critical areas of Harakmbut social and cultural space.

The Linguistic Ecology of Harakmbut

Territory

The Harakmbut have a word for their territory — *wandari* — which unlike the Spanish word — *territorio* — has several connotations encompassing 'world', 'earth', 'territory', 'land' and 'landscape'. The spiritual, political, economic and geographical aspects of the environment are all blended together into this one word (Gray, 1997a). An examination of the Harakmbut use of *wandari* provides a glimpse of the cultural environment in which the Harakmbut language is meaningful.

Following Gray (1997a, 1997b) we can see that the Harakmbut 'world' has a mythological origin which underpins their spiritual attachment to their territory and their sense of responsibility and respect for the forest and rivers. *Wandari* refers to different realms of the Harakmbut world, visible and invisible. The invisible realm is the realm of the spirits: the sky, the forest, the river and under the river in Serowe where the spirits of the dead Harakmbut live. Human beings live in the visible realm of the *wandari* where living things are animated by soul-matter. The well-being of humans and of the flora and fauna of the rivers and forest is affected by relations between the visible and invisible realms. Harakmbut establish relations with spirits through hunting, fishing and gardening activities. They learn how to avoid endangering themselves and their families from dangerous spirit forces. For example, young people learn to contact benevolent spirits in their dreams and develop beneficial relations so that the spirit will tell them where to go to hunt and how best to garden.

The spirits communicate in the Harakmbut language. Thus the Harakmbut language is not only used for communication and learning in the visible realm but also for communicating with and learning about the invisible realm of the spirits. The Harakmbut say that knowing involves more than recognising words, it is to do with understanding knowledge which is encapsulated in certain names. To understand the cultural significance of these names involves being aware of the knowledge they comprise and the spiritual dimension they encompass. For example, someone wishing to cure needs to have an encyclopaedic knowledge of names of species and how they interrelate (for further details see Gray, 1997a).

Another dimension to *wandari* is that of 'landscape' (Gray, 1997b). Landscape can be seen as an ecological space that shapes local conceptions of social space (see Layton, 1997); it is local environment as lived space: the beaches where the women go to collect turtle eggs in the dry season and stands of bamboo where juicy pupae are found, the dry upland gardens where pineapples grow well, the low seasonally flooded lands suited to certain varieties of banana, and the rivers which the *waweri* spirits inhabit and the Kirazue stream where the jaguar prowled after the sudden deaths of two young girls. Landscape is also, as Bender (1993: 9) highlights, the way in which temporal 'palimpsests of past activity, incorporate political action, encompass change — both past and present'.

Harakmbut elders recount narratives about the mythical past to the young who in this way learn about the origins of the landscape as they know it today with its familiar topographical features. These myths also explain the relationships between animals and birds and the relationships of these creatures with the Harakmbut. The elders tell of the distant past when feathers were traded for stone axes with people from the high Andes, and of the arrival and departure of aggressors from different epochs. They narrate events from the more recent past about the massacres of their own grandparents by the rubber barons, of the long houses, the gardens and the rivers where they grew up, and tales of the kin and foe who lived by neighbouring rivers.

Gow (1995: 61) discussing conceptions of landscape in the Central Peruvian Amazon reminds us that history must not be reduced to the production of texts because there are 'other possible histories inside nature, of the meanings of patterns of deflection in vegetation, of making paths through the forest, of abandoning old gardens, and of telling stories in a particular place and at a particular time. And we must think of those other histories as modes of lived experience'. The Harakmbut peoples' *wandari* encompasses their history, their spirituality and their self-determination.

If we look at *wandari* as 'land' then we focus on its physical characteristics, economic potential and geographical description. The Harakmbut do not see 'land' as separate from their world and landscape. That is a non-Harakmbut concept and perspective which has its most static expression in the land title map and accompanying legal document provided by the state to confer on the Harakmbut collective title to a physically delineated area, a fraction of their traditional *wandari*. Land as a mapped entity is categorised according to its soil types and economic use. The land title designates Harakmbut *wandari* primarily in terms of its agricultural potential: the area given over to permanent settlement (the village), the surrounding area where most of the gardens are located, and the large non-agricultural forest area where the Harakmbut hunt, fish and gather. From this titled land (and its rivers) the Harakmbut acquire what they need to live: meat, fish, vegetables as well as building materials and healing plants, although most hunters go much further afield than their official land into the unmapped areas of their *wandari*. It is also a source of gold dust which some of the communities mine using labour intensive practices and which provides access to the regional money economy.

Wandari as land is a concept embedded in the Spanish language and the written text: in the map and title deeds themselves and in the nature of exchange and communication with other exploiters of the natural resources. The Harakmbut work gold according to non-Harakmbut measurements of time (kept by a watch) and social organisation (with hired non-Harakmbut labour). They speak Spanish in their negotiations with traders and in wrangles over access to beaches for working gold, on the occasional sale of garden produce or with lawyers whom they contract to draft and write formal legal letters in response to unjust accusations.

The changes which have taken place over the last 20 years signify a bounding of Harakmbut *wandari*. The titling of lands immediately surrounding the villages took place at times when large numbers of landless migrants and fortune seekers were coming to the region lured by talk of gold. The titles were to provide a

measure of control over Harakmbut territory, though the title deed did not stop it being illegally occupied: several communities in the gold-bearing areas have been outnumbered 5:1 on their titled land by migrants (Gray, 1986). In the 1998 dry season the Harakmbut worked together in teams to identify the official boundaries of their territories, locating them with a small handheld gadget (a geophysical positioning system), clearing a periphery path and planting coloured poles and signposts.

The relentless occupation and colonisation has resulted in the irreplaceable loss of forest cover, the pollution of rivers from mercury contamination, indiscriminate logging of hardwoods and destruction of animal habitats. The impact on the Harakmbut has been to undermine their self-sufficiency and disrupt relationships between and within the invisible and visible realms of their *wandari*. For the migrants and the company directors in search of land and natural resources the Harakmbut's *wandari* appears as a landscape of untouched forest punctuated by a few isolated indigenous villages. On the contrary, echoing Gow (1995), we can say that for the Harakmbut no document can define their *wandari* and no text can represent it in all its diversity and dimensions.

In 1991, the Harakmbut sought government recognition for an Harakmbut communal reserve on their ancestral lands, the Amarakaeri Communal Reserve, which would link together the different legally recognised but geographically isolated communities within their wider *wandari*. The aim of creating the reserve is to protect a large area of *wandari* from physical exploitation and destruction by preventing colonisation and permitting only sustainable subsistence activities to be carried out within it so that the flora and fauna can flourish under indigenous management. The purpose is, therefore, to re-establish the Harakmbut peoples' relationships with their *wandari*, and strengthen their spirituality, history and indigenous cultural values. However, despite the mapping exercises, the soil analyses, the land use inventory and the indigenous management plan, today, almost a decade later, the government seems no closer to approving the reserve. Quite the opposite, powerful economic interests are lobbying for access roads to the 'virgin' forest and its valuable timber, and the oil company, Mobil, has government permission to carry out oil exploration and exploitation.

The Harakmbut find themselves barred entry to areas of their *wandari* at gunpoint by illegal gold panners, while their air, forest and waterways are polluted by noisy machinery and gold camps. The accompanying decline in flora and fauna means a decrease in game and fish in the Harakmbut diet. As young men and women seek alternative means of earning an income through the sale of their labour as manual workers to the oil industry or as cooks and skivvies in the sprawling gold camps or frontier towns and settlements, the Harakmbut also have less time for hunting and fishing. It is apparently a vicious circle. The Harakmbut say that not only does their lack of time for hunting and fishing affect their ability to be good hunters but it undermines their relations with the beneficial spirits that help them in their hunting. As noted above, the well-being of the Harakmbut peoples is linked to the relationship between the visible and invisible realms of their *wandari* and established and maintained through hunting, gardening and fishing activities. Neglect of these relations makes the Harakmbut vulnerable to sicknesses which they cannot cure without spiritual knowledge and wisdom. Then, with a poor diet further undermining their health, the only

recourse is to sell their labour for money to purchase medicines from the health posts, but few Harakmbut have faith in their efficacy.

Harakmbut *wandari* has always been a dynamic concept because their 'world' and 'landscape' change with their interaction with it and as part of it. At the beginning of this century the Harakmbut population was larger and dispersed throughout their *wandari*; today, after the wars and diseases initiated by the rubber boom and subsequent epidemics of measles, yellow fever and flu, they live in small communities separated from each other by as much as two days river travel. In the 1960s and 1970s they lived semi-mobile lives panning some gold and combining this with hunting and fishing. Today, however, beyond the village areas are the migrants, entrepreneurs and traders and the Harakmbut villages have become islands in a sea of Spanish speakers (though not necessarily mother-tongue speakers). To negotiate a safe passage in their travels through their *wandari* they need Spanish.

Harakmbut oral genre

Over the 20 years I have known the Harakmbut, many aspects of their freedom of expression in the Harakmbut language have been gradually curtailed. The isolation of the Harakmbut communities noted above can also be viewed in terms of a process of colonisation of their space. This process is clearly illustrated in the changes which have taken place with the Arakmbut people's oral literature and its celebration. The Arakmbut have three genres of oral literature: singing, narrating and curing.

The older generations of Arakmbut, both men and women, have a wide repertoire of songs which are rich in detailed knowledge of their *wandari*'s biodiversity. They became familiar with them by listening to their elders and they learned to compose and perform songs themselves as, through their hunting and gardening activities, they learned of the rich physical and spiritual diversity around them. In some songs they sing passages in the 'language' of the particular animal and use registers which they have learned through their relationships with the spirits. They also improvise songs and sometimes several voices sing in counterpoint.

Harakmbut elders are repositories of the mythological knowledge about the society. While every elder knows many myths, some individuals are acknowledged as being better story-tellers and 'performers' than others, and men are more likely to 'perform' their myths to the community as a whole than women who often tell a myth within their close kin group. The Arakmbut have three long myths about the origins of the Harakmbut physical, social and spiritual world. These are the cornerstone of their oral canon. They also have many other shorter myths and stories about times when the forest animals were Harakmbut and appeared in human form (see Aikman, 1999).

The third genre is curing chants. These are improvised chants containing lists of information about a particular animal's habitat and behaviour. These comprise the main form of curing and healing in Harakmbut society and can only be performed by senior men and women who have built up strong relations with spirits through dreaming, hunting and gardening. While this knowledge is part of the collective cultural knowledge and historical memory of the Arakmbut people, its use for curing, singing and narrating is personal and belongs to the

individual. The efficacy of a curing chant is not only in the words but in the physical strength and knowledge of the individual who is chanting and their ability to summon the spirits and have them effect the cure.

The Arakmbut were forced to stop their ritual ceremonies in the 1950s when they were living in the Dominican mission of Shintuya. In the 1960s when the Arakmbut groups left the mission and moved to the present-day villages, the *fiestas* continued but not the ceremonies — such as those marking the coming to adulthood of young men, and the spiritual visitation of the jaguar to create a child who will later become a leader. Today only the oldest Arakmbut remember them. When I first lived with the Arakmbut of the community of San Jose in the early 1980s groups of men would sing improvised songs from dusk till dawn. On starry, moonlit nights, nights when potentially harmful spirits keep well away, all members of the community, from the youngest to the oldest, would sit or lie on reed mats in the village clearing and listen to a myth or story, participating with commentaries and animal, bird or spirit noises and jokes and asides which together constituted the atmosphere of the 'performance' of the myth and the shared experience (see Finnegan, 1992).

Since the Arakmbut have become more involved with gold panning, and since non-Harakmbut gold labourers and traders began to live in the villages the evening performances of myths and songs have almost ceased. The Arakmbut have been made to feel ashamed of their myths and songs in the presence of colonists, traders and school teachers, and story-telling is confined to the secrecy of the houses, out of sight and earshot. The community-wide collective story-telling was a time when children and young people learned about their society, history and culture and took part in the creative re-creation of their oral traditions. As Howard-Malverde (1997: 11) notes 'In each performance the particular shape of production echoes [...] some previous performance in the past; at the same time, it contains the seeds of future performances to come'. But these performances very rarely take place today and when they do the seeds may not be planted because, as Lipka and Ilustik (1997) note with the Ciulistet of Alaska, young people's understanding of the traditional knowledge is becoming fragmented. For many young Arakmbut — but by no means all — their understanding is being fragmented by formal education, by the prejudice they encounter and by the lack of opportunity to develop their knowledge and understanding of the forest and the river which would make the oral literature meaningful for them.

Before the 1960s young Harakmbut would spend their time in the forest with their parents, but with the introduction of schooling we find that the non-Harakmbut teachers ignored Harakmbut practices and focused their energies on teaching them 'modern' values. In the 1990s, however, teachers began focusing on selected areas of Harakmbut- centred cultural practices; in 1992 children attending the Dominican mission-run school in the Arakmbut community of San Jose gave a concert for parents in which the children sang a Spanish language 'rainforest' song of unknown provenance and danced in Andean fashion, waving handkerchiefs while dressed in banana leaves. This amounted to a creation of a homogenised notion of Amazon culture along the crudest of folkloric lines. Pressured by educational policy change to make the primary school curriculum more 'locally relevant', the Mestizo lay-missionary teachers

have begun a new attack on indigenous knowledge and language (see Aikman, 1994).

The colonisation of Harakmbut land and space is undermining their world and their landscape and, as a corollary, the use of the Harakmbut language and its meaningfulness. The destruction of the rainforest is the tangible manifestation of the radical change which the Harakmbut peoples are experiencing in all aspects of their way of life.

Sustaining the Use of the Harakmbut Languages

A role for formal education?

The Harakmbut need to use Spanish for an expanding range of purposes fostered by almost daily contact and sometimes continual ongoing social relations with Spanish-speakers settled in close proximity to their villages. The older generations are concerned about the diminished use of Harakmbut among the young, while many of the young Harakmbut consider Spanish to have higher status than Harakmbut because of the latter's association with the failing activities of hunting, gathering and fishing, with story-telling and singing, which — they are lectured by missionaries, traders and government officials alike — are signs of a lack of 'development' and even with a lack of 'civilisation' (Aikman, 1999). On the contrary, Spanish is the language of communication in the market-place, the school, the mass media, the towns and the discos of Puerto Maldonado. New opportunities for speaking Spanish are continually developing while the opposite seems the case for Harakmbut. The Harakmbut languages are, of course, changing and accommodating new words, meanings and idioms, though often by means of code-switching rather than the generation of new Harakmbut words. The change is a unidirectional displacement by Spanish.

Over the 1990s the indigenous Federation has been lobbying the authorities and encouraging community-level support for bilingual education (*Avance Indígena*, 1993). Insisting on the importance of breaking the control which the Dominican Diocese has over primary schooling and the monolingual, monocultural curriculum it imposes through its RESSOP schools, the Federation believes that the indigenous peoples of Madre de Dios have a right to an education which is relevant and qualitative. They base their demands in their rights as indigenous peoples to be 'equal partners in the design and delivery of education for our own peoples' (Committee on Indigenous Education, 1998) as laid down in the UN draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and other international declarations. This includes the 'right to establish our own institutions and systems' (ibid.) For its part, the Peruvian Constitution outlines a commitment to promote intercultural bilingual education according to the characteristics of each zone (Article 17).

The 1998 FENAMAD Congress passed a resolution in favour of replacing non-Harakmbut teachers with indigenous teachers in all community primary schools — a first step towards bilingual education. But in the short term it proved impossible to raise support and funding for a crash training course to get Harakmbut teachers into the schools. At the beginning of the 1998 academic year the lay-missionary teachers returned determined to maintain the status quo. In the Arakmbut communities many parents voiced concern about replacing the

missionaries. They had no confidence in the abilities of an indigenous teacher because it challenged their concept of what a teacher is and does: to them teachers were from the 'outside' and came to teach the Harakmbut outside knowledge and skills (Aikman, 1999). This 'outside knowledge' and the symbolic practices of the school are important because they confirm their inclusion in the national society as Peruvian citizens: singing the national anthem each morning, saluting the flag, reciting in class the details of the national coat of arms and drawing pictures of the nation's military heroes (see Harvey, 1997). These symbols and activities reaffirm their 'oneness' while a bilingual indigenous school would confirm their 'otherness'. For their part, the lay-missionary teachers were loath to relinquish their mission, dedicated as they are to their Arakmbut pupils' development (as 'modern' Peruvian Spanish-speaking citizens) and spiritual welfare (their conversion to Catholicism).

The Dominican Diocese has been training several Harakmbut teachers at the Teacher Training College of Puerto Maldonado (ISP-M Instituto Superior Pedagógico de Puerto Maldonado) to teach in the RESSOP community schools in the near future. However, research suggests that indigenous teachers do not in themselves guarantee a qualitatively better or more relevant education for indigenous children. As Arratía (1997) demonstrates in the case of Aymaran teachers in Northern Chile, indigenous teachers who have been through mainstream training which is fundamentally oriented to imparting an urban programme do not necessarily teach any differently from non-indigenous teachers.

In Madre de Dios, just as throughout Peru and much of Latin America, bilingual education means biliteracy. For most indigenous peoples this means developing written forms of their hitherto oral languages or, in some cases, reassessing the value of orthographies produced by missionaries, such as the Summer Institute of Linguistics. Given the size of speech community, the degree of internal dialect variation, and its current social and economic uses, developing a written form of Harakmbut presents an enormous linguistic challenge. But decisions concerning biliteracy should be by no means restricted to a linguistic realm. They should include decision-making concerning what kind of literacy is to be developed and with what aims in terms of not only schooling but indigenous self-development.

As a means of promoting language maintenance or improving the sustainability of indigenous languages bilingual education does not have a very impressive record. Harakmbut literacy and use in school as a medium-of-instruction may raise its linguistic status vis-à-vis Spanish, demonstrating that it is not linguistically inferior, but this does not address the serious issues of its social and political status within the wider society. Moreover, mother-tongue schooling does not necessary challenge the content of the schooling — that is, the intercultural dimension — and texts in the vernacular may be translations of the Spanish language texts which promote the replication of Spanish language oracy and literacy practices of the school. Schooled literacy practices in the Madre de Dios are dominated by an 'autonomous' model of literacy (Street, 1984) and based in a methodology which rewards discipline and obedience, and particular forms of interaction governed by recitation, question–answer language rituals and essay-type prose (see Palacios & Cossíos, 1997; Tovar, 1997).

SIL bilingual schools of the 1970s and 1980s have been criticised for reproducing a schooled literate form of the indigenous language and simply translating national texts and curriculum into the mother tongue (see Aikman, 1994).

As is often pointed out, bilingual education is almost everywhere inimical to language preservation (Russell Bernard, 1997) and indigenous bilingual education policy is usually transitional (Mühlhäusler, 1996). Verhoeven (1996) notes that most educational programmes for ethnic groups are not determined by psychological arguments or evaluation studies but by political factors, and often according to one-sided policy aimed at assimilation and acting as a 'bridge' towards the dominant language. The SIL's policy for its bilingual schooling is no exception to this (Larson & Davies, 1981).

Nevertheless, while the outlook for bilingual education as a support for language maintenance is not rosy, there are some examples which allow for cautious optimism. Sells Dick and McCarty (1997) working with the Navaho, who have a long experience of using the school as a means of language revival and renewal, consider that the Navaho Rough Rock school provides some evidence for the possibilities of school becoming the primary catalyst for the management and cultivation of the local language and cultural resources. Hornberger (1997), considering indigenous approaches to language planning, stresses that experiences initiated and carried out by the indigenous peoples themselves to combat low prestige of the language have been shown to have more impact than those designed on behalf of indigenous peoples or minority language speakers for reasons of empowerment or cultural enrichment.

What are the possibilities of schooling becoming a catalyst for strengthening the Harakmbut languages given the particular characteristics of the 'non-linguistic support system' in which the Harakmbut languages are used by the Harakmbut peoples today? While the response in the communities is contradictory, but by no means all negative, there have been developments at the national and international levels which appear to open the way for radical educational change along the lines advocated by the Federation with a mandate from the Harakmbut peoples.

At the beginning of 1998 a Ministry of Education and European Union project, FORTE-PE (PROEBI), was initiated in Madre de Dios to set up the infrastructure and organisational conditions for implementing a teacher-training programme for indigenous teachers. The aim of the project is to adapt and implement a model for intercultural education developed in the northern Amazon — PFMB (Programa de Formación de Maestros Bilingües). In the northern Amazon the programme was based on indigenous philosophical principles and oriented towards the reappropriation of indigenous cultural heritages. At the same time it recognised that indigenous peoples' lives today are characterised by radical social change and complex intercultural relations and that schooling for indigenous children must help them reaffirm their identity and their cultural values while also selectively acquiring useful knowledge from the wider society to facilitate their participation on their own terms (see Gasché *et al.*, 1987; Trapnell, 1991). Thus the PFMB model of intercultural education (ISPL/AIDESEP, 1997) is constructed around characteristics that are vital for strengthening indigenous languages and cultural practices: indigenous decision-making, collaboration with professionals committed to indigenous aims and objectives and space

within the teacher training college for the development of a new kind of teacher and learner based on the teaching and learning practices of the indigenous society.

We have argued that for bilingual or intercultural education to contribute towards the maintenance of indigenous languages it needs to address the 'ecological' factors and processes of the non-linguistic support system. The PFMB teacher training curriculum takes a holistic view of indigenous society and culture in which language-centred cultural practices are integral dimensions of a belief system which has a profound respect and understanding of the natural environment. In short it sees the indigenous Amazon languages as inseparable from the cultural and physical environment in which they are used and recognises the pressures which they are undergoing.

For the Harakmbut in Madre de Dios, the FORTE-PE project is being developed under very different political conditions. The indigenous Federation has entered into an uneasy alliance with the Ministry of Education and the teacher training college (ISP-M). Many of the college teacher-trainers have had long careers as RESSOP lay-missionary teachers working towards the 'the incorporation of the indigenous peoples of the Diocese of Puerto Maldonado into the national society' (RESSOP, 1996). There is also a dearth of professionals, such as linguists, anthropologists and educators, with experience of intercultural bilingual education and committed to indigenous self-determination. In 1998 the tripartite discussions — Federation, Ministry officials and training college directors — centred around the need for new infrastructure and organisational arrangements. The real challenge still lies ahead in terms of decision-making with regard to knowledge, pedagogy and evaluation, and what the different parties mean by intercultural education.

Conclusion

Over recent decades the Harakmbut peoples have been incorporating Spanish into their communicative repertoire to the extent that today only a few elders are monolingual Harakmbut speakers and in several communities children are growing up speaking Spanish with only a passive understanding of Harakmbut. By looking at the ecological environment in which the Harakmbut language is embedded we have found an increase in the uses of Spanish paralleled by a shrinking of the domains — physical, social and cultural — of Harakmbut language use. Mühlhäusler (1996) argues that languages are lost because of changes in their non-linguistic support system and that the survival of a language is related not to the language *per se* but to the survival of a structured diversity. Here we have considered the Harakmbut peoples' concept of territory (*wandari*) which has allowed us an insight into their world and its landscape which provide the parameters of the ecological environment and non-linguistic support system for the Harakmbut language. We have also looked at the way in which their Harakmbut linguistic cultural practices are embedded in their *wandari* and at the nature of the changes in both *wandari* and language use.

The physical encroachment of the Harakmbut's *wandari* by Spanish-speakers with very different social, cultural and economic practices not only obliges the Harakmbut to use more Spanish, but is destroying their *wandari* and their

Harakmbut social, cultural, spiritual and economic practices. Language-centred cultural practices such as ceremonies, story-telling and singing have become rare or have disappeared from use and Spanish language school-engendered folkloric performances may take their place. The pressures on the Harakmbut are illustrated in their attitudes towards the Harakmbut language and its status.

The indigenous Federation of the region, FENAMAD, is concerned with the loss of indigenous languages and language-based cultural practices and is involved as a partner in a Ministry of Education/ European Union project for the training of indigenous teachers to work with intercultural primary education. But bilingual intercultural education is not a panacea. The model developed in the northern Peruvian Amazon suggests that, at best, it can help challenge hegemonic models of formal education and build a new concept of schooling based in an analysis of indigenous and non-indigenous knowledge, processes and practices. At worst it can be little more than a transitional strategy for mother tongue-to-Spanish language learning where the decision-making power of the status quo remains unchallenged.

Evidence from other indigenous peoples suggests that where language maintenance is considered important by members of the speech community itself new uses and forms of the language can be developed (Hornberger, 1997). The Harakmbut need to ensure creative and dynamic language practices which do not compete with Spanish but complement it by fulfilling valued and uniquely Harakmbut purposes. Intercultural education can support this process but cannot solve it alone. The challenge is to develop an education which looks beyond the spatial and temporal conventions of the formal school and which is part of a supportive cultural, social and linguistic environment conducive to such developments. In Madre de Dios today that environment will only be sustained through coordinated strategies to recognise the Harakmbut peoples' rights to their languages and way of life and the implementation of legislation which curbs the unfettered destruction of the natural environment through natural resource extraction and colonisation.

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