

# VITALITY OF DAMANA: THE LANGUAGE OF THE WIWA INDIGENOUS PEOPLE OF SIERRA NEVADA DE SANTA MARTA IN COLOMBIA

*Tatiana Fernandez Fernandez*  
*Western University*

The Wiwa are Indigenous<sup>1</sup> people who live in Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta (SNSM) in Colombia. This project examines the vitality of Damana [ISO 693-3: mbp], their language, in two communities that offer high school education in Damana and Spanish. The aim of this study is to measure the level of endangerment of Damana according to the factors used in the UNESCO Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected through a questionnaire that gathered demographic and background language information, self-reported proficiency and use of Spanish and Damana [n=56]. Besides the questionnaire, interviews with teachers and parents [n=27], and students [n=29] elicit attitudes towards the languages in question and describe the condition of Damana. Finally, the project includes detailed field notes. Results indicate a difference in language use and competence between older and younger generations, suggesting a pattern of language shift that results in rating the language as definitely endangered. The most urgent linguistic needs for these communities include Native Damana-speaking teachers, language documentation and pedagogical material.

## 1. Introduction

There are studies that claim that at least half of the 7,000 languages currently spoken will be endangered and continue to disappear at a high rate if revitalizing measurements are not taken. In Colombia, besides Spanish, there are 65 Amerindian, two Creole and one Romani languages. All these languages are a very important part of Colombian culture and a number of communities in the country are interested in preserving, maintaining and creating permanent records of them. The aim of this document is to examine the vitality

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<sup>1</sup> In his style guide, *Practical English Usage*, Swan (as cited by the Department of Justice of Canada, 2015) states that initial capitals are used for “nouns and adjectives referring to... ethnic groups.” And despite the fact that the Canadian *Constitution Act*, 1982 does not capitalize the term *aboriginal peoples*, the words Aboriginal, Indigenous and Natives are capitalized in the Canadian context. This does not only show proper grammar but demonstrates respect.

In the Colombian context Aboriginal is a synonym of *primitive* and the term was used by the conquerors and colonists to undervalue Indigenous peoples and justify their extermination. Therefore, the term is considered pejorative and it is avoided. Politically, the Indigenous groups are Peoples that integrate the Colombian Nation. That is why we decided to avoid the term Aboriginal in this text.

of one of these languages, Damana<sup>2</sup> in two school settings that offer high school education to the Wiwa community in Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta (SNSM) in Colombia to answer the following questions:

1. In which stage of language endangerment according to the UNESCO Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger is the Damana language spoken in two different Wiwa school communities located in the north slope of Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta (SNSM) in Colombia?
2. Based on these findings, what would be the necessary steps to follow in order to revitalize the Damana language?

The present document begins establishing who the Wiwa people are and describing their language, Damana. After this, it discusses some of the tools used to measure language vitality. It then, introduces the methodology and instruments used to gather the information and the scenario and participants of the study. Finally, it presents the results and after a discussion, concludes answering the two research questions.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1 Wiwa people

The Wiwa are an Indigenous people located in SNSM in the north of Colombia. They share their territory with the Kogui, the Ika, and the Kankuamo. These four groups belong to the Tairona family. According to Reichel Dolmatoff (1953) the Tairona culture was one of the most advanced indigenous group communities in Colombia.

The Wiwas are spread among three departments of Colombia with communities in Magdalena, Cesar and Guajira. They have strong cultural expressions and a vast oral tradition of ancient myths. The Wiwa had their first contact with Spanish colonists in 1525 when the city of Santa Marta was founded. With the implementation of *encomiendas*, the Spanish initiated attempts to impose their language, Spanish, their religion, Catholicism and their culture. The *encomiendas* assigned a group of Indigenous individuals to a Spanish *encomendero* who provided protection in exchange of work or tribute. These attempts led to protests, sometimes violent on the part of the Native communities.

During the XVIIIth century, the order of the Capuchin Friars grouped indigenous population in urban centers called *reducciones* (Sánchez Mejía 2006). These communities facilitated the process of incorporation to civil life and spiritual conversion. These *reducciones* were very successful; however, there were always a number of Indigenous people who did not abandon their customs and preferred to isolate themselves

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<sup>2</sup> In English and Spanish documents, the language is known as Damana (among other names). The two first vowel sounds are closer to a schwa or a close central rounded vowel and the Wiwas decided to represent this sound with [ɨ] to facilitate the writing process for children. Therefore, in Wiwa texts it will be found as Dɨmɨna.

to preserve their culture. All the efforts of the colonists forced the Indigenous communities to migrate or adapt to the new institutions, culture and religion. Those that did not migrate or conform to the new life style eventually disappeared and are now extinct (Peñaranda Vera 2006).

After independence in the 1800's, official schools were established and *criollos* (descendants of the Spaniards born in Latin America) settled across the region. Most of the Catholic missions had left the country and an even bigger impact was made by the *criollo* settlers. During this time, the Kankuamo Indigenous people were almost completely absorbed and their language, Kankui, disappeared to the point that it is currently considered extinct. In 1916, the Wiwa contacted the central government of Colombia to request investment and education for the region. They wanted teachers who taught them how to read, write and do math so they could deal with the settlers around them under equal conditions. The Government sent the Order of the Capuchins who established a mission in SNSM. Although the government and Indigenous representatives agreed to have the Capuchins there for six years, they remained there for sixty six years (Duarte Muñoz 2018).

The mission established the orphanage Nuestra Señora de la Sierrita. There, Indigenous children were forced to wear civilian<sup>3</sup> clothing of the *criollos* instead of their traditional attire; the use of Indigenous languages was prohibited as a strategy to impose Spanish and the school content was based on the official curriculum and Catholic principles. These strategies did not concur with the reality of the Indigenous groups that inhabited SNSM and were strongly resisted by the Indigenous authorities. On repeated occasions, waves of Indigenous people migrated to establish their communities far from the colonists and missionaries. Finally, in 1982 the Wiwas took one of the missions and expelled the Capuchins from their territory (Duque Muñoz 2015). They let the government manage the school system until 1993 when, thanks to a new Constitution, education in this area was transferred to the Wiwa organization Yugumaiun Bunkuanarrua Tairona-OWYBT who started the implementation of a new ethno-educative program that continues to be enriched (OWYBT 2012).

The following section describes Damana, the language of the Wiwa people.

## 2.2 Damana

Damana [ISO 693-3: mbp], the language spoken by the Wiwas; Koguian [ISO 693-3: kog], Ikan [ISO 693-3: arh] and the extinct Kankui [ISO 639-3: *None* (mis)] are the four languages spoken in SNSM (Landaburu 2000). These languages belong to the Arhuacan sub-group (not to be confused with the Arawakan, that originated on the region that surrounds the Amazon) that belongs to the Chibchan language family spoken in southern Central America and northwest South America (Constenla Umaña 1981).

The language spoken by the Wiwas has been named differently in linguistic and ethnographic studies and this practice has made their investigation more difficult as researchers need to refer to a variety of terms. For instance, Damana has also been known

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<sup>3</sup>The term Wiwas use to refer to Western-style clothing

as Wamaka, Uiuá (Williams 1993), Arsario, (Hoopes and Fonseca 2003), Malayo (Constenla Umaña 1990), Sancá, Sanka (Camacho 1997), Guamaca (Celedón 1886, Pacchiarotti 2012), or Marocasero, according to the place where each variety was found or the researcher's preference. The Wiwas identify their language as Damana so this is the term we will use in the present document (Trillos Amaya 1996, OWYBT 2012).

Damana is a language of oral tradition that plays an important role in the transmission of the vision and knowledge of the Wiwas. Parents, elders in the community, the Mamo and the Saga (the most important male and female spiritual leaders), all rely on oral tradition to share their wisdom through narratives that carry important messages providing direction and guidance to the new generations of Wiwas and reinforcing their identity beyond external characteristics.

As we know, orality is inherent to the human condition and writing and reading are learned skills developed as a result of the needs of different people. Writing provided permanent records and structure to emerging economies as it allowed communities to organize information and advance in math, calculus and accounting. On the other hand, oral tradition uses mnemonic resources to preserve ancient traditions and knowledge in close relationship with the surrounding contexts (Bigot 2018).

Orality helped the groups of SNSM protect themselves against acculturation (Trillos Amaya 2001). The 1970's were a period of linguistic revival that brought with it, the realization that the cultural identity of Indigenous peoples required them to design strategies to protect their legacy. This led the communities to request spaces to implement literacy in their own mother tongue (Trillos Amaya 1995). With the help of linguists that studied Damana, an alphabet was developed with Spanish letters and IPA symbols to represent the different sounds. A writing and reading system would allow Damana to be part of the classroom and therefore, education could be based not only on the official curriculum but on the principles and teachings of the community. Currently, Damana is one of the subjects studied in the school and has started to be used in teaching the Indigenous' own knowledge and traditional crafts. The goal is to have a more significant presence of Damana in the majority of the subjects taught at school.

Now that we have described the Wiwa Indigenous people and Damana, their language, we will turn our attention to three different tools widely used to measure language vitality.

### **2.3 Language vitality**

Around 97% of the world's population uses 4% of all of the languages in the globe (Bernard 1996). All languages are a reflection of our experiences of the world and these experiences are specific to each group of individuals (Bernard 1992 as cited by UNESCO Ad Hoc group 2003). Differences among languages are infinite and unpredictable because humans have the ability to solve the same problem in many different ways (Aitchison 2000). Each group develops their language according to their habits; therefore their representation of their social reality is particular to them. This variety of ways of approaching what surrounds us enriches our knowledge of the universe and helps to understand how each group lives a different world, not just the same world with different

names. Language has immense value in the understanding of human beings and cultural diversity (Sapir 1929).

According to Ethnologue<sup>4</sup>, 7,000 languages are spoken around the world. From this total, 27% are “in trouble” and an additional 14% are dying (Eberhard et al. 2019). Once a language disappears, unique historical, cultural and ecological knowledge is lost. If languages depict different worlds and each language describes the reality of its speakers differently, languages are vital to help us complete the picture of humankind. Once a language is lost, that piece cannot be retrieved and it is lost forever (Crystal 2000). Nevertheless, languages continue to disappear at a high rate. In South America only 35% of its languages are considered “vital” (still being passed to the next generation) while the other 65% are undergoing some degree of language loss (Simons and Lewis 2013).

Different tools have been developed to analyse the degree of vitality of languages and based on these results, they help to determine the necessary steps to revitalize them. When we undertook the task of assessing the vitality of Damana, three of these different tools were considered.

In 1991, Fishman introduced the Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (GIDS). For more than 20 years, the GIDS provided a solid framework to assess the endangerment of languages. The different levels of GIDS are based on the degree of loss of a language’s functional use. That functionality is measured according to the role relations and the different domains where language is used. There are eight levels that increase as the language shift condition is more acute. A *level 1* language is used at the nationwide levels in all domains while a *level 8* language is only spoken by the grandparents and is not being transmitted to new generations.

This model was a pioneer for academics and members of different communities seeking to protect their language. It provided a framework to apply resources and strategies that were not considered before. This was an important milestone in the study of endangered languages. However, as often happens, the GIDS has been analysed and enriched at the same time it was implemented. There is a certain difficulty differentiating a language assessed in *level 6, Vigorous* that is being maintained and advancing towards a more stable situation from another language in the same level but in danger of shifting and descending to level 5 or other levels below (Simons and Lewis 2013). Secondly, it has been noted that the attitude of the community towards the language and the amount and quality of documentation are important factors that were not included in the GIDS (Dwyer 2011).

Based on the GIDS, Ethnologue developed the Expanded Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (EGIDS) that is used to assess the languages in their database (Simons and Lewis 2013). Information is provided by researchers and institutions and compiled in one place where almost all of the languages are listed. To assess the different languages, they implemented a scale of 13 evaluative levels. The addition was a sub-division of levels 6 and 8 in “a” and “b” to differentiate language development and language shift. Also, levels 9 and 10 were added to better describe languages in the lower levels of the

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<sup>4</sup>Ethnologue is a thorough data base that performs a comprehensive quantitative analysis of the vitality of the different languages around the world.

scale. Again, EGIDS does not include the attitudes of the community towards the language nor does it consider the number of speakers in the community. These two aspects are of great importance in determining the level of language loss and the steps needed to revitalize a language.

Finally, The UNESCO Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger compiles a list of languages in danger to assess if they are safe, vulnerable, definitely endangered, severely endangered, critically endangered or extinct. The Atlas describes the languages based on 9 factors. Eight of these factors are assessed in a likert-scale from 0 to 5. The other, the second factor is based on the number of speakers of the language in question. The nine UNESCO evaluative factors are listed in table 1 below. Each factor has its own descriptors to facilitate the assessment of the language. The final result of this assessment is achieved after careful examination of all nine factors according to the objective of the evaluator. A degree of endangerment is assigned based on the correlation of factors. The Atlas of Languages in Danger pays detailed attention to the description of each factor that affects the vitality of a language and provides the opportunity to interrelate these factors instead of just placing the language on a scale. Based on that, the present study analyses the vitality of Damana in two different Wiwa schools in SNSM implementing the UNESCO nine factors scale.

**Table 1.** UNESCO nine evaluative factors of language vitality

Factor 1	Intergenerational Language Transmission
Factor 2	Absolute Number of Speakers
Factor 3	Proportion of Speakers within the Total Population
Factor 4	Trends in Existing Language Domains
Factor 5	Response to New Domains and Media
Factor 6	Materials for Language Education and Literacy
Factor 7	Governmental and Institutional Language Attitudes and Policies Including Official Status and Use
Factor 8	Community Member's Attitudes toward their own Language
Factor 9	Amount and Quality of Documentation

In the following section we will introduce the methodology, instruments, scenario and participants of this study.

### 3. Methodology

It is important to highlight the fact that Indigenous languages in Colombia and Damana in particular, are currently in constant growth as a result of the hard work of Indigenous communities. Therefore, it is important to note that the results of this study describe the condition of Damana within two boarding schools in a specific time frame. Further studies could (and should) yield different results and our desire is to positively contribute to the enhancement and progress of the language.

In line with our objective, it was decided to use three different instruments to gather the data needed to assess the vitality of the language including a combination of quantitative and qualitative data.

Mathematical results would measure demographical aspects and provide a scale to study attitudes towards the language and frequency of use. This approach allows to place Damana in relation to other languages in the world, the country and the region to identify the actions done in other contexts to revitalize a language in a similar conditions.

Qualitative information presents specific facts that impact the two school settings differently to understand what has been done successfully and what could be better implemented. The final result is an integral analysis of the two types of information previously described.

### **3.1 Instruments**

The first instrument was a questionnaire that elicited information based on numerical scales. The first section asked about the demographics of the respondent including gender, age, education and occupation. Questions about language acquisition included the participants' and their parent's dominant language(s); age of acquisition of Spanish and Damana; proficiency in speaking, reading, and writing; and frequency of use of Damana and Spanish in different domains: with family, friends, work, school, authorities, physician and to talk to animals. It also asked about the perceived importance of Damana and Spanish and the efforts made by the government, the school and the community to promote the use and learning of Damana.

Initially, it was planned to distribute the questionnaire to the households in the community so each family could complete a questionnaire. However, once we were onsite we found the schools are boarding schools where the children stay for the academic year because the residences of the different families are scattered in the SNSM and it takes up to two days to get to some of the farms of the student's families. As a result, the questionnaires were completed by the teachers, parents and students who participated in the study.

The second instrument was an interview that asked the participants about their opinion regarding the school and its promotion of Damana. We asked what activities promoted the use of Damana, what classes (if any) were taught in their mother tongue and if the schools' teachings were enough for the academic needs of the children. We asked about the opportunities for children who spoke Damana and Spanish, access to post secondary education, and their attitude towards the language. We asked teachers how they try (or don't try) to incorporate Damana and Indigenous cultures in the classroom and we asked all of them to comment on the [lack of] involvement of the government in the preservation and use of Damana.

Finally, detailed field notes were completed in the fall of 2019, during the time the researcher was in the two communities doing the questionnaires and interviews. Some notes were taken in place to make sure important details were not omitted and others were taken afterwards, when the researcher was recalling the events of the day. The field notes describe conversations, comments and attitudes of individuals in the community. They also depict the different places in the community and the school. Location, material, tools and resources were included in the descriptions.

### 3.2 Scenario

The Department Ethno-educational Institutions (IED's) Zalemakú Sertuga and Zharneka are located in two different Wiwa communities. The IED Zalemakú Sertuga is located on the Northwest slope of SNSM in Gotsezhy, a community in Magdalena, close to the city of Santa Marta. We did not find information on the number of inhabitants of Gotsezhy but there are around 458 Wiwas in Magdalena (Ministerio de Cultura 2014). The first place you see when you enter the community is the educational institution. It has 18 teachers and 160 students. There are a number of classrooms, few bathrooms, a cafeteria, and rooms where the students stay; plus a revered place called "*Kangaga*" o "*La loma* [the hill]". It is one of the most important sacred places for the Wiwas. There are wood or stone seats on top of the hill and members of the Indigenous community and the school go there for confession and consultation. The Mamo who is the spiritual leader of the Indigenous peoples in SNSM, provides advice and spiritual direction there and the authorities of the community meet there to make important decisions. Behind the school, there are traditional circular houses that belong to the different families of the community. They do not live there but it is their dwelling place when they visit their children or meet for important events. The two larger constructions are the ceremonial houses, *ushui* for women and *unguma* for men (Conchacala Gil 2015).

Families in the community are spread in SNSM so most of the students stay in the institution during the academic year and go back to their farms and houses during the holidays. They usually start preschool between the ages of seven and nine but many of them desert before completing high school; especially the girls who marry at a young age and abandon the school to start a family. In fact, at the time of our visit to Gotsezhy all students in grades 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> were males.

The IED Zharneka is located in Atshintujkua, the capital of the Wiwa people. Atshintujkua is not far from San Juan del Cesar a small town in Guajira, on the Northeast of SNSM. The Mamos say the Wiwa family started in Atshintujkua and migrated to populate other places in SNSM. Due to colonization, acculturation and periods of violence, Atshintujkua was abandoned until 1996, when the lands were restored to the community and they founded the capital again.

Atshintujkua is bigger than Gotsezhy and there are permanent residents in some of the houses built around the school. There are two distinct areas in Atshintujkua, to the north, one can see traditional constructions with the two ceremonial houses and some family dwellings. On the south, there are houses built of brick walls and zinc roofs common in Colombia. In the middle of the two sectors there is a huge communal house where all members of the community can meet at important events. The health centre and the boarding school are located on the east side of the community. The IED Zharneka was founded in 2004 and became a boarding school in 2012 (Sauna 2018). The IED Zharneka has some classrooms, bathrooms, a cafeteria and dorms for the 360 girls and boys who currently study there. The *Kangaga* is on the south of the school.

Both schools have an area for cultivating vegetables. Additionally, in Zalemakú Sertuga they grow small animals like pigs and chicken.



### 3.3 Participants

Participants were parents, teachers and students from the two boarding schools. Twenty teachers, ten from each school and twenty-nine students, thirteen from the IED Zalemakú Sertuga and sixteen from the IED Zharneka participated in the research. All students were 18 years old or more. Only seven parents participated as it was difficult to approach them because they live far from the schools and go there only to visit their children or when they have meetings. The tables below summarize the profile of the participants.

**Table 2.** Summary of participants (n=56)

<b>STUDENTS GOTSEZHY</b>				
<b>Sex</b>	Male: 13		Female: 0	
<b>Indigenous</b>	YES: 12		NO: 1	
<b>AOA<sup>5</sup> Damana Mean</b>	3.5			
<b>AOA Spanish Mean</b>	9			
<b>Preferred language</b>	Damana 2	Spanish 10	Koguan 1	
<b>Language before 5yrs. Old</b>	Spanish 4	Damana 2	NR 6	Other 1
<b>STUDENTS ATSHINTUJKUA</b>				
<b>Sex</b>	Male: 9		Female: 7	
<b>Indigenous</b>	Yes 16		No 0	
<b>AOA Damana Mean</b>	3.5			
<b>AOA Spanish Mean</b>	3.5			
<b>Preferred language</b>	Damana 5	Spanish 7	NR 4	
<b>Language before 5yrs. Old</b>	Damana 7	Spanish 6	Both 3	
<b>TEACHERS GOTSEZHY</b>				
<b>Sex</b>	Male: 9		Female: 1	
<b>Indigenous</b>	YES: 5		NO: 5	
<b>Age</b>	21-30: 6	31-40: 2	41-50: 0	50+: 2
<b>Studies</b>	Normal: 3	College: 1	Bachelor: 5	Master: 1
<b>First language</b>	Damana: 4	Spanish: 5	Other: 1	
<b>TEACHERS ATSHINTUJKUA</b>				
<b>Sex</b>	Male: 5		Female: 5	
<b>Indigenous</b>	YES: 3		NO: 7	
<b>Age</b>	21-30: 3	31-40: 4	41-50: 2	50+: 1
<b>Studies</b>	Normal: 0	College: 4	Bachelor: 5	Master: 1
<b>First language</b>	Damana: 2	Spanish: 8	Other: 0	
<b>PARENTS GOTSEZHY</b>				
<b>Sex</b>	Male: 1		Female: 2	
<b>Age</b>	21-30: 0	31-40: 3	41-50: 0	50+: 0
<b>Studies</b>	No school			
<b>First language</b>	Damana: 2	Spanish: 0	Koguan: 1	
<b>AOA Damana mean</b>	1.7			

<sup>5</sup> AOA: age of acquisition: refers to the age at which the participant first started learning Spanish or Damana

<b>AOA Spanish mean</b>	10.7			
<b>PARENTS ATSHINTUJKUA</b>				
<b>Sex</b>	Male: 1		Female: 3	
<b>Age</b>	21-30: 1	31-40: 1	41-50: 1	50+: 1
<b>Studies</b>	No School: 1	Elementary: 1	Middle: 1	High: 1
<b>First language</b>	Damana: 2		Spanish: 2	Other: 0
<b>AOA Damana mean</b>	3 individuals: 7		Does not speak: 1	
<b>AOA Spanish mean</b>	2.2			

The next section presents the results of the study. Damana in the two schools is being assessed according to the nine factors used to compile the UNESCO Atlas of endangered languages.

#### 4. Results

As we mentioned, UNESCO (2003) considers nine different factors to establish the vitality of a language. The assessment of the vitality of Damana was done using these factors.

The first factor is the Intergenerational Language Transmission. There is clear evidence of intergenerational language transmission in both schools. Most of the children that attend the IED Zalemakú Sertuga come from families that speak Damana. From our sample 69% of the students considered Damana their mother tongue, 8% mentioned Koguan and 15% Ikan. Only 8% considered Spanish their mother tongue. As a result 92% of the students that attend the IED Zalemakú Sertuga speak the Indigenous language before learning Spanish.

However, in Atshintujkua the only languages mentioned as mother tongue were Spanish and Damana. According to this, 44% spoke Spanish as first language and 56% considered Damana their mother tongue. Students come to school to learn and reinforce Damana and they usually have a solid knowledge of Spanish. As a teacher mentioned, *“They need more [hourly] intensity in Damana teaching. They need to practice more.”* [Necesitan más intensidad en la enseñanza del damana. Necesitan practicar mucho más. Teacher025 Zharneka]. Based on this, Intergenerational Language Transmission of Damana is considered *unsafe, grade four (4)*. There is intergenerational transmission but a significant number of children do not know Damana when they start school.

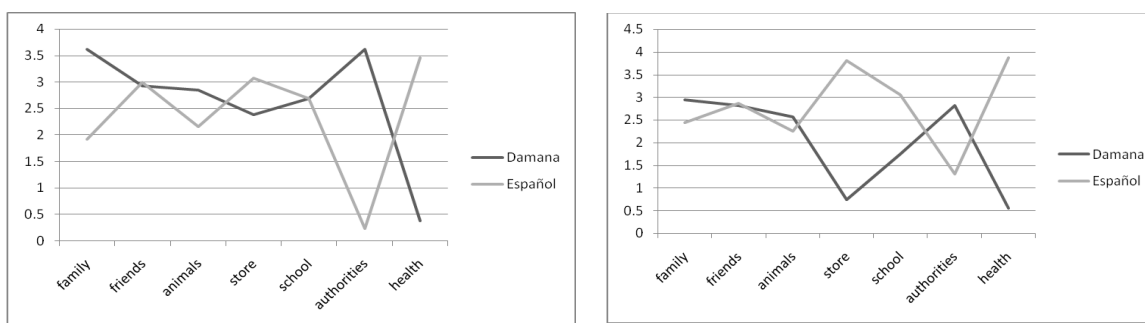
The second factor is the Absolute Number of Speakers. The most recent numbers we have come from the program to protect ethno-linguistic diversity (PPDE) that performed a sociolinguistic auto-diagnosis in 2009. According to them, there are 13,517 Wiwas and from those, only 55.29% or 7,517 individuals speak Damana fluently. The rest is divided between a 33.28% who does not understand or speak Damana, 3.72% who understand but do not speak it and 7.15% who understand and speak a little. A population of 7,517 fluent speakers of a language is considered small and at a significant risk of being reduced by diseases, violence, natural phenomenon, and other circumstances so the language is considered *severely endangered, grade (2)* in the UNESCO list.

Thirdly, we consider the Proportion of Speakers within the Total Population. This comes to 55.29% of the Wiwa population who speak Damana fluently. In the schools, the

situation is similar. From our respondents, 62% self-assessed as native speakers of Damana and 28% considered themselves Spanish native speakers. The other 10% mentioned other Indigenous languages. Moreover, 28% mentioned they are more comfortable speaking Damana against a 41% who chose Spanish. The fact that 31% considered themselves equally comfortable in both languages increases the use of Damana but the low percentage of students that prefer Damana is an indicator of language endangerment. In this case, the language is *severely endangered, grade (2)* due to the fact that the proportion of speakers within the total population in the schools stays below 70% this constituting a reduced majority.

The next factor is the Trends in Existing Language Domains. Here the situation varies between the schools. Students and parents were asked to self-assess their average use of Spanish and Damana in different domains using a scale from 0 to 4 (0=never, 1=rarely, 2=sometimes, 3=often, 4=always). A summary of the results is presented in figure 1. In Zalemakú Sertuga, students prefer to use Damana in the majority of domains. They use it with their family, friends, animals, authorities and within the school. They also prefer to go to stores whose owners speak Damana. However, they clearly mentioned the need to speak Spanish with their health practitioner. Although there is traditional medicine they prefer to go to doctors and nurses that speak Spanish because they provide regular medicine treatment. It is important to note that there is a mandate for the government to provide basic services in the Indigenous language of the region where these services are offered; a mandate that is obviously not being fulfilled. For parents, the situation is similar as they use Damana predominantly in all domains; however, they also use Damana when they access health services, as their first option when they are sick is to get traditional Indigenous medicine.

In Zharneka, students were not consistent in their responses. Contact with family, friends, animals and authorities is mostly in Damana with some use of Spanish but at the store, school and health center they prefer to use Spanish. When we asked parents, we found that some of them prefer to communicate in Damana in all domains but the majority uses Spanish all the time. This could be because they are a generation that suffered a strong process of acculturation when education was in the hands of the Catholic missions and the use of Indigenous languages and practices was forbidden. As a parent mentioned, *“Grandparents did not teach us (Damana) because we were separated from our family. When they killed (our father), he was 30 years old and our mother spoke Spanish. I would have liked to learn (Damana).”* [Los abuelos no nos enseñaron porque nos separaron de la familia. Cuando a él lo mataron, el tenía 30 años y mamá hablaba español. Me hubiera gustado aprender. Parent028 Zharneka]. For all this, Damana is a *multilingual party, degree (4)*, in the two IEDS, Zalemakú Sertuga and Zharneka. This is because the dominant language in the majority of official domains is Spanish. However, Damana continues to be used in public domains like traditional institutions, some local stores and privately among family and circles of friends.



**Figure 1.** Average use of Spanish and Damana in different domains by students of the IED's Zalemakú Sertuga (left) and Zharneka (right).

The Response to New Domains and Media, the next factor in the UNESCO scale, sees the incipient incursion of Damana in new spaces like internet and films. There are a handful of videos in youtube.com, some blogs and a documentary, Ushui, the moon and the thunder that was premiered in the Toronto Film Festival in 2019. However, these are isolated pieces of work done by academics and members of the community who work without much support. The feeble presence of Damana in new domains is *coping, degree (2)* in the UNESCO scale and contrasts with the law that declares that “*The state should guarantee the presence of Aboriginal languages in media and education and the production of audiovisual and digital material and files that account for these languages, promote their study, encourage their research and ensure their preservation*” (Law 1381 2010).

The availability of materials for language education and literacy is scarce. Besides the alphabet there is no written material that can be used in the schools to teach the language. Some mention was made of a booklet to learn to read and write but we did not have access to it. Teachers try to compile stories and help the students write their myths but all these efforts come from the individual teachers. This situation prevents the standardization of the language because each teacher creates orthographic rules according to their own knowledge. A teacher mentioned, “*Language is changing. There is no writing standard. In Magdalena, they use /r/ and they use /l/ in other places. If they do not speak Damana and say they are Wiwa, they do not show it. It cannot be that a person from the US does not speak English.*” [La lengua ha venido cambiando. No hay estándar de escritura. En Magdalena usan r y en otros lugares l. Si no habla damana y dice que es wiwa no demuestra. Un gringo no puede no hablar inglés. Teacher012 Zalemakú Sertuga]. For this factor, the assessment is *grade one (1)* as there is no material for literacy.

The seventh factor is the Governmental and Institutional Language Attitudes and Policies Including Official Status and Use. Here we find advances in the promulgation of laws that protect Indigenous languages and provide tools to revitalize and strengthen them. Unfortunately, the implementation of such laws is poor and as they say “*The government has an obligation but very little political will to fulfill that obligation.*” [Muy poco del gobierno. Es su obligación pero hay poca voluntad. Teacher003 Zalemakú

Sertuga]. Starting with the Constitution of 1991 that established the rights and dignity of Indigenous Peoples, new laws have been issued to protect Indigenous groups, their languages and cultures. Decree 804 of 1995 regulates education for ethnic groups granting autonomy to the Indigenous peoples to design their own ethno-educative processes counting on the support from the State. Law 1831 of 2010, called the Native Languages Law, establishes all the steps the government should take to ensure the preservation, promote the study and encourage the research of Indigenous languages. However, implementation of these laws is lacking, a situation that is reflected in the different needs of the schools. Based on this, Damana would be moving from *passive assimilation, grade three (3)* to *differentiated support, grade four (4)* as the legislation to protect their language exists but is being implemented very slowly.

The Community Member Attitudes towards their Language is the eighth factor. During our visit, the positive attitude from the community became clear. They consider Damana more than just a language, a mark of their identity, and one student mentioned “(Damana) is what maintains us and strengthens our culture.” [*Es lo que mantiene y fortalece nuestra cultura*. Student018 Zharneka]. From the interviews, questionnaires and observations we identified a majority of the members of the two educational institutions supporting Damana and promoting its maintenance. In this aspect, Damana is in *grade four (4)* because most individuals maintain a positive attitude towards the language.

Finally, the ninth factor in the UNESCO scale is the Amount and Quality of Documentation. Although there are a considerable number of documents, the vast majority of them have been authored by Professor Maria Trillos Amaya. For more than three decades she has conducted research among Indigenous peoples of Colombia and has worked for the protection of Indigenous languages. However, we consider research on Indigenous languages require the active participation of other individuals from the government, academia and the Indigenous communities themselves to enrich the results and strengthen the amount of documentation available. Moreover, not only written material is needed but there is also a lack of media documentation including audio and video recordings. Based on this description, the assessment for this factor is slowly moving from *fragmentary, grade (2)*, to *fair, grade (3)*.

## 5. Discussion

Table 3 summarizes the results of the assessment of Damana as per the nine factors proposed by UNESCO (2003).

Although there is a vigorous transmission of Damana in Gotsezhy, it is the opposite in Atshintujkua. Unfortunately, the population of Gotsezhy represents a minority of the Wiwa population and most of them are located around Atshintujkua and other communities in Cesar and Guajira. Damana plays an important role in the lives of the Wiwa people so it is consistently transmitted to a portion of their children. For the Wiwas, Damana is an important mark of their identity and the bridge that allows them to connect with their elders and spiritual authorities, the holders of all their wisdom and ancestral culture. The attitude of the community towards the language is positive as they are proud of their history and rich culture.

**Table 3.** UNESCO factors for Damana in the ethno-educational center Zalemakú Sertuga and Zharneka

Factor	Value	Descriptor
1 Intergenerational Language Transmission	4	Unsafe
2 Absolute Number of Speakers	2	Severely Endangered
3 Proportion of Speakers within the Total Population	2	Severely Endangered
4 Trends in Existing Language Domains	4	Multilingual Party
5 Response to New Domains and Media	2	Coping
6 Materials for Language Education and Literacy	1	
7 Governmental and Institutional Language Attitudes and Policies	3 to 4	Differentiated Support
8 Community Member Attitudes toward their own Language	4	Positive attitude
9 Amount and Quality of Documentation	3	Fair

Nevertheless, it is important to consider those factors that received a low grade in the assessment as those results will guide us in establishing the level of endangerment or vitality of Damana. It is evident that the educational institutions require trained teachers who speak the language, know the culture and have specific pedagogical education as well as training in applied linguistics, and first and second language acquisition. Most of the staff in the two schools are Spanish speaking teachers who do not belong to the Indigenous people. One of the teachers said “*Wiwas should specialize and take the reins of the institution. It would be better if they became professionals and would not let themselves be absorbed by the community.*” [...*Falta que ellos se especialicen y tomen la rienda de la institución. Sería mejor que se profesionalicen y no se dejen absorber por la comunidad.* Teacher003 Zalemakú Sertuga]. Literacy material and academic research are vital for the maintenance of the language. Didactic material, a dictionary, grammar, reading and writing books, would help to better implement the learning of Damana in the classroom. A more solid education in Damana would help increase its presence in other domains like internet and media, academic documentation, and even interaction between students and students-teachers in the school setting.

## 6. Conclusion

After a thorough analysis of all the information gathered and based on the results obtained by each factor, we would label Damana as a *definitely endangered language* in the UNESCO scale. It is a threatened language and the educational centers Zalemakú Sertuga and Zharneka are working tirelessly to maintain and strengthen it among the new generations of Wiwa individuals.

The situation in Gotsezhy could be considered *vulnerable*, where most children speak the language but it may be restricted to certain domains. However, as we have already mentioned, Gotsezhy represents a minority of the population and its case is particular. The IED Zharneka is doing an important job teaching the language to their

students but a number of children graduate without a solid knowledge of Damana. In order to reverse this situation a number of actions are needed.

We mentioned the advance achieved in the promulgation of laws that protect the language, guarantee Indigenous ethno-education, promote research and protect the Native languages. These laws need to be implemented and Indigenous peoples should receive the support promised by the government when these laws were issued. Local educators need to gain control of the school so ethno-educational principles can be implemented and all subjects support the learning of Damana and Spanish equally.

Standardization of the alphabet, design of didactic material that provides consistency in the learning of reading and writing and other subjects, a mother-tongue based curriculum that includes Wiwa culture and knowledge guaranteeing intercultural relations in the classroom would significantly improve the development of language acquisition and maintenance. Access by students to higher education should be granted so members of the Wiwa community can become researchers, teachers, doctors, lawyers and professionals that allow the Wiwa people to develop projects to enhance their quality of life while preserving their culture at the same time.

Finally, this research proved the high level of commitment of the Wiwa people to improve the educational programs and to integrate ethno-educational principles in the school, protecting their language and legacy. They see the importance of encouraging a healthy interrelation with the members of Colombian society but from their own vision of the universe. As it is recorded in the Shama Zhigui, the ethno-educational model designed by the Wiwas to revitalize their culture and identity within the school:

*"Intercultural education is seen as the need to understand [different] societies and recognize cultural diversity present in regional, state, national and international contexts so they can interact with respect and tolerance towards the construction of an inclusive society where the autonomy of Indigenous peoples is respected and valued without economic, political or cultural subordination or dominance."*

*[La educación intercultural es vista como la necesidad de entender a las sociedades y reconocer la diversidad cultural existente en los contextos regionales, estatales, nacionales e internacionales, para interactuar con respeto y tolerancia hacia la construcción de una nueva sociedad incluyente, donde se tenga en cuenta y respete la autonomía, como pueblos indígenas, sin subordinación o dominación económica, política y cultural (OWYBT 2012)].*

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