

Language and Identity: Limonese Creole and the Black Minority of Costa Rica

Anita Herzfeld
The University of Kansas

Given the general connection between the development of nationalism and linguistic uniformity, the existence of multilingualism and ethnic diversity in a country is a complex problem. Limonese Creole is the language spoken by a Black minority of approximately 30,000 people who have lived in predominantly white and Spanish-speaking Costa Rica for over 400 years. The Limón Province, where this group resides, is markedly distinguishable from the rest in terms of its geography, history, population, economy, language, and culture. This paper seeks to present the development of ethnic relations and language in that area. History shows that either harmonious bilingualism or fiercely suppressing colonialism usually prevails in a "languages-in-contact situation." In this case study, the historical relationship between ethnicity and language accounts for differences between societies, with such divergent consequences of contact as racial nationalism, cultural assimilation and fusion, and possibly even language extinction.

Introduction

In this paper the English-based Creole spoken by the Limonese Black minority of Costa Rica will be used as a case study to explore the salience of language as a dimension of ethnic identity in the history of that Caribbean population. While many scholars¹ consider that the possession of a given language is of particular relevance—almost essential—to the maintenance of group identity, others² claim that it is important not to lose sight of its non-unique status as a marker.³ I will argue that while social identity and ethnicity are in large part established and maintained through language, it is because of the sociohistorical character of the process through which a group's language is evaluated

that a subordinate people's language will either survive or become extinct as a symbol of identity.⁴

Members of a linguistic community may derive feelings of pride or shame from their perception of the degree of standardization their language has undergone; thus the prestige value attached to their language's history may facilitate or inhibit the vitality of a given ethnolinguistic group.⁵ It is my contention that currently, given the climate of socioeconomic distress that the region is undergoing,⁶ Limonese Creole speakers feel more self-conscious than ever about their "broken English." While at other times in history, their creole could well have acted as a symbol of linguistic rebellion conducive to feelings of group solidarity, at present it is clearly considered a liability.

Dimensions of Language and Ethnicity

Attempts to analyze the relationship between language and identity have focused foremost on the relationship between language and ethnicity. Language is a highly structured and sophisticated system which, with subtlety and flexibility, is crucially related to a human being's most significant capacities, thought and cognition, including the ability to categorize, classify, and symbolize. Ethnicity, on the other hand, comprises a number of concepts because of the many interrelated factors that it subsumes. At a simple level, ethnicity can be thought of as a "sense of group identity deriving from real or perceived common bonds such as language, race or religion."⁷

In those general terms, ethnicity is based on a collectivity's self-recognition. It differs from other kinds of group recognition signals in that it operates basically in terms of what Fishman calls "paternity"⁸ rather than in terms of "patrimony."⁹ Through ethnicity individuals not only attain social integration, but they are also linked to social norms and values, to a certain *Weltanschauung*, to inherited and acquired both stable and changing notions of society and the world. It is easy to see why language, one of the essential characteristics of human behavior, is associated with ethnic paternity. Moreover, because one can exert more control over one's linguistic behavior (more than over other dimensions of ethnic identity), language is seen (and heard) by others as "a truer reflection of one's ethnic allegiance."¹⁰ However, since the course of language is dynamic, it is also very susceptible to change as an element of identity, inextricably linked as it is to the social determinants of human life.

Indeed, in the history of humankind, nationalism records its strong link with language and identity from the moment of its modern inception. Largely a product of German romanticism of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, both Herder and Fichte, and a little later Wilhelm von Humboldt, felt that nothing was more important for national culture and continuity than possession of the ancestral tongue.¹¹

On many occasions language became a tool for achieving nationalistic goals. The idea of linguistic nationalism was a dangerous one, however, when it equated language and race. Although the power of language is undoubtedly a factor in nationalism, Smith¹² has made the useful point that emphasis upon language **follows** the growth of nationalist fervor; it does not create it.

Languages in Contact

Multilingual societies are found in all parts of the world; they existed in the past and they occur today; they are found in older nations as well as in the newly-created states. Currently, for instance, there is more than one viable language in each Latin American country. The political and social situation created by this linguistic diversity ranges from the quasi-perfect harmony of Spanish and Guaraní in Paraguay to Guatemala or Perú,¹³ where the entire political fabric is torn into factions which often coincide with linguistic boundaries. Even in those societies, where equality between linguistic groups would seem to have been achieved in official political terms, it is rare to accomplish it either in the social or economic sphere. To complicate matters further, linguistic differences often become associated with racial or ethnic differences, thus making the language contact situation a hopelessly entangled one.¹⁴ Generally speaking, speakers of diverse languages do not come into contact under neutral emotional conditions; more often than not the contact situation involves some kind of dominance of one group over the other, thus always producing significant attitudinal reactions.

In studying the relationship of language and identity within a bilingual/multilingual nation, it is important to examine the history and nature of the contact situation between the peoples who speak diverse codes, whether dialects or languages. One fundamental step is to distinguish groups which are politically and economically **superordinate** from those that are **subordinate** in these institutional domains,¹⁵ and how such a differential power relationship was created. Likewise, one should also distinguish between migrant and indigenous populations at the time of their contact, "indigenous" referring to groups with established social institutions—not necessarily the earliest groups known to have inhabited a given area.¹⁶ From these distinctions, one can develop a rudimentary theory which suggests that the course of language and identity will be different in settings where the indigenous group is subordinate as opposed to those where the migrant populations are subordinate.¹⁷

Migrant subordinate groups seem to show a relatively rapid rate of linguistic and identity shift.¹⁸ This is the case of the Limonese Creole speakers of Costa Rica, the subject of the remainder of the paper. As we shall see, Jamaican Creole speakers, migrating from their own established

social order to a setting of subordination in Costa Rica, brought about their need to assimilate or adapt to the new order. In a non-symmetrical culture contact situation such as this one, varying degrees of socio-structural and socio-psychological acculturation took place under the considerable pressure exercised by the superordinate group. Language played an important role as the vehicle for acquiring the new culture; it was, in fact, the most important element acquired in the quest for new identity. As a result of the geographic displacement of the speakers and the broken ties with their sociocultural identity and their original language, their sociolinguistic history, and not just the structure of their language, is an important determinant of the linguistic outcome in this type of language contact situation.

Limonese Creole

Even though our social identity is established by the parameters and boundaries of our ethnicity, gender, and class, once we study language as the interactional discourse of that social identity, we find that these parameters are not constants that can be taken for granted, but are communicatively produced.¹⁹ Therefore, to understand issues of identity and how they affect and are affected by social, political, and ethnic divisions, we need to gain insight into the communicative processes by which they arise. However, communication cannot be studied in isolation; it must be analyzed in terms of its effect on people's lives. Thus in what follows, I will take up the ethnohistory of its speakers, analyzing situated talk in the perspective of sociolinguistics.

Peoples of African origin have constituted a segment of Costa Rican society for over four hundred years. Those who arrived in colonial times (probably not many at any time) assimilated to Costa Rican society and culture. Those who migrated to the country during the nineteenth century and their descendants constitute the Afro-Costarican minority of mostly Jamaican origin who speak Limonese Creole (hereafter LC), known by its speakers as */mekaytelyuw/*.²⁰ They number approximately 30,000. They have lived mostly in the Province of Limón, on the Atlantic lowlands of Costa Rica (See Figure 1), while Costa Rican society—white, Catholic, and Spanish-speaking—tends to be considered as existing only in the highlands of the Central Valley (formerly called *Meseta Central*, Central Plateau). This dichotomy between the Limonese Black and the Highlanders has been very significant throughout the Republican history of the country, as can be seen in Melendez's outline of the basic structures of both cultures (see Table 1).

Figure 1

Spread of English Creoles in Central America

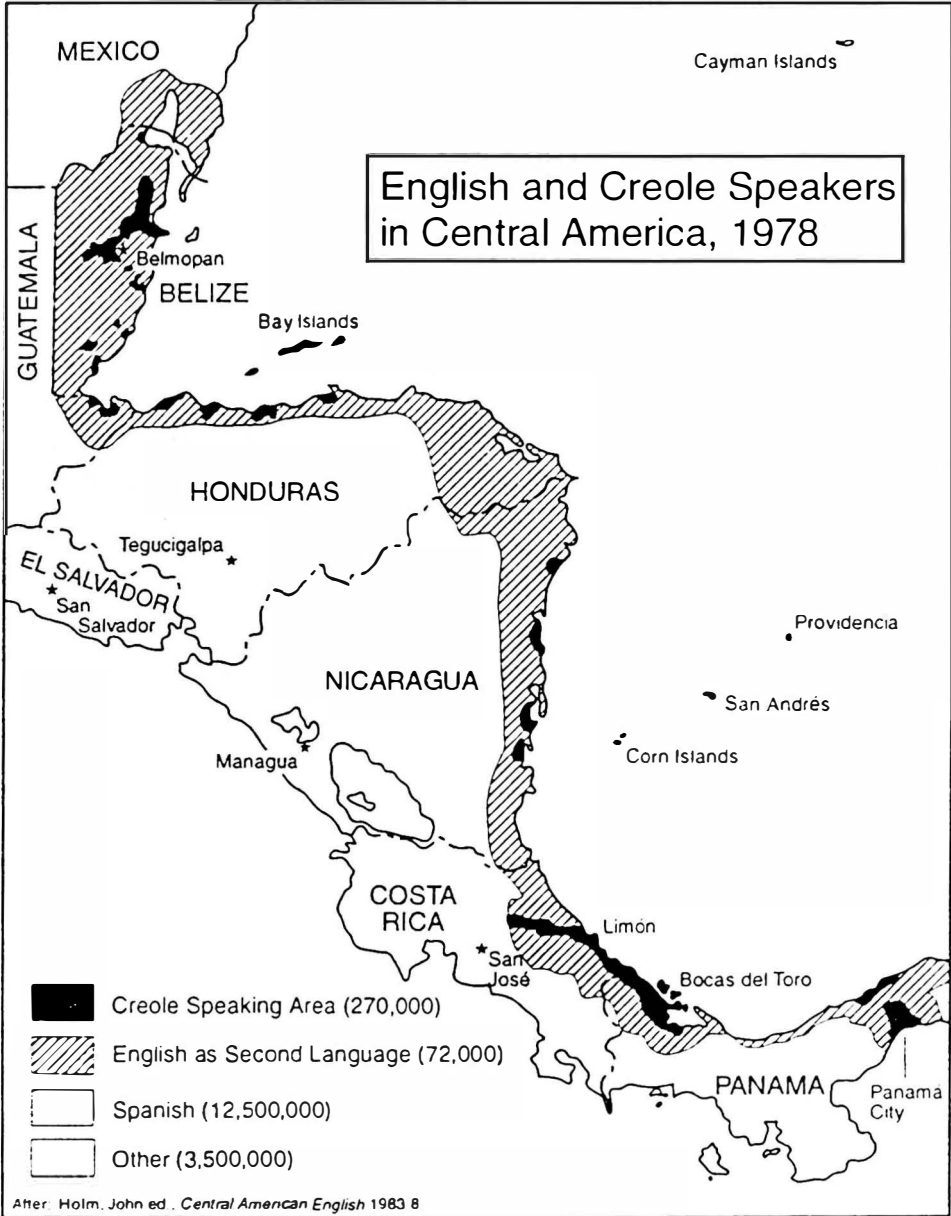


Table 1
Comparative Cultural Structures

Institutionalized Activity	Structure valid for the Black Antillean group	Structure valid for the Costa Rican group of the Central Valley
Language	English	Spanish
Family and Kinship	Matrilineal, common law marriage	Patrilineal Formal marriage
Local economy	Subsistence agriculture	Commercial agriculture
Employment	Laborer	Proprietor
Diet	Tubers, breadfruit, coconut	Rice, beans tortillas
Religion	Protestantism Magic	Catholicism Non-orthodox beliefs
Socialization and Education	Elaborated Church Schools	Simple public School
Recreation	Baseball Dominoes	Soccer
Associations	United Negro Improvement Assn. Lodges	Sport clubs Church
Community	Musical events	Fairs (<i>turnos</i>) Carnivals

Source: Meléndez, Carlos. "Introducción a la Cultura Negra," 1974:48 (my translation).

The ethnohistory of Limonese Blacks can only be understood vis-a-vis the history of Costa Rican society itself. For that purpose, Michael D. Olien, in his study "The Negro in Costa Rica: an [sic] Historical Perspective," pointed out three major structural changes in Costa Rican society which resulted in important alterations in the position of the Blacks:

- 1.) the polarization of power which took place during and after the colonial period (1570-1870); 2.) the *de facto* control of the lowlands exercised by the United Fruit Company (1879-1948); and 3.) the legal and social reforms brought about by the 1948 Revolution (1948 to the present).²¹

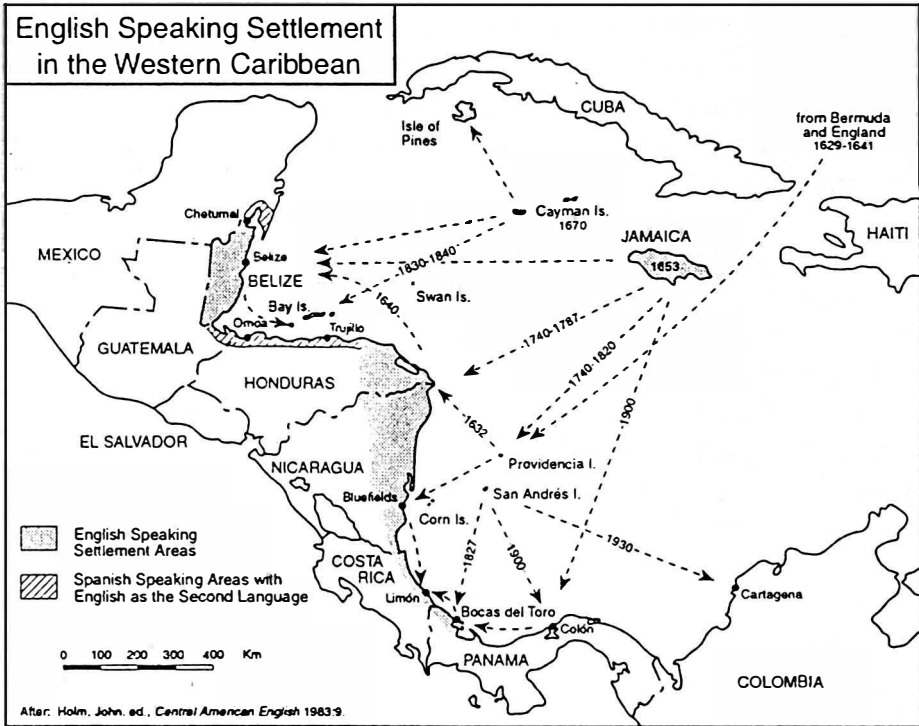
Correspondingly, Olien distinguished the existence of three "types" of Blacks, each type to be assigned to one of the above-mentioned time periods, respectively: 1) the African Black, 2) the West Indian Black, and 3) the Costa Rican Black. His thesis being that these "types" represent different adaptation patterns to Costa Rican society at different points of time, he concluded that there is no evolutionary sequence or continuity from the first to the second period—miscegenation (as was mentioned above) was important during the colonial period, and separatism during the United Fruit Company period. The opposite is true about Blacks living at the end of the second period into the third, acculturation and assimilation have become important to them. Linguistically, a West Indian heritage can still be traced back for Blacks of the third period (Figure 2).

Early in the nineteenth century, Costa Rica gained independence. There was no longer a Spanish government that considered trading with the British illegal, and the highlands produced coffee, a bulky product that needed to travel to England. However, the good road for exporting it went in the opposite direction—west, to Puntarenas. Freight rates were twice as high for shipping coffee to England from Puntarenas as they would have been had it been exported from an Atlantic port. Costa Rican coffee growers decided to invest in a railroad to the Atlantic.

Minor C. Keith, an enterprising North American, was commissioned in 1872 to build a railway from San José, the capital, to the Atlantic coast, so as to permit coffee shipments to Europe. The construction of the railroad attracted intermittent waves of workers, especially from Jamaica. The rural Jamaican subculture, which the original migrants carried with them to Costa Rica, constituted a part of the end result of a complex process of integration of the African and British cultures into a new creole culture.

Figure 2

English-Speaking Settlement in Western Caribbean



Most sources that deal with this topic attribute to Minor C. Keith a further feat: in order to struggle against some of the discouraging financial factors, he decided to introduce the commercial planting of bananas. The presence of Jamaicans—a banana eating people who had previous experience in the cultivation of the fruit—certainly contributed to the success of the enterprise that was soon to replace the railroad in importance. Keith formed the United Fruit Company in 1899. Many Jamaicans who had originally emigrated to work temporarily on the construction of the railroad decided to stay on and work for the Company on the plantation or at the port, which was Company-owned as well. The plantation system was to permeate all aspects of their lives. All needs of the workers were from then on fulfilled by *Mamita Yunai*.²² It was a self-contained system, with the train as the backbone of communication in the region. Since the *de facto* government of the lowland was exercised by the Company, peoples' lives depended on it; consequently, their process of acculturation and assimilation to Costa Rican culture and society was slowed.

The workers as well as the managers introduced their languages—Jamaican Creole and American English, respectively—as the everyday languages of their community. The Blacks, who had been acculturated to British West Indian culture and were "English"-speaking Protestants, found it very easy to comply with their managers' pressure to maintain both their language and their religion. Obviously, they were encouraged to do so.

At the end of this period, when the United Fruit Company folded on the Atlantic coast in 1942, the pervading picture of unity among the West Indian Blacks in Limón started to break down to give way to a rise of native Costa Rican prestige and power groups. Once outside the plantation system, Blacks began to adopt Costa Rican customs, and gradually the West Indian Black was transformed into a new cultural type: the Afro-Costarican of the third period.

Although racially distinct, Limonese Blacks became citizens of the country, started sending their children to public schools, learned how to speak Spanish, and some even became Catholics. The Revolution of 1948 was seen by people in Limón as the lever that would help Blacks rise in social status, due to sweeping constitutional reforms. Such was supposedly the law that granted Blacks rights equal to those of all other Costa Rican citizens, so that they could consider Limón their real home.

It is true that some socioeconomic changes ensued as Blacks went through the strongest immersion in "Costaricanization" ever; a redistribution of wealth allowed many to become landowners, some were appointed to important public and private positions, and their voice and vote assured them some steady continuity of federal representation in the National Assembly.²³

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However, at present four main socio-economic events have altered the composition and racial profile of Puerto Limón: 1) the construction in 1975 of the first highway to join the port with San José and a second highway built in 1988; 2) the great influx in the 1980s of white (and some Blacks from Bluefields as well) refugees from the wars in Nicaragua and El Salvador; 3) the Costa Rican government's newly-adopted economic policy of neoliberalism in compliance with directions issued by the International Monetary Fund for Latin America; and, consequently, 4) due to rising unemployment, the increasing search for labor opportunities on the Atlantic coast. (See Figure 3).

Additionally, the 1991 earthquake not only demolished part of the city and the entire coastal settlement of the Valle de la Estrella, but it also brought about a defeatist attitude. Puerto Limón's shabby houses, propped-up cracked cement buildings, and piles of unremoved rubble stand witness to the subhuman living conditions and the ongoing frustration and hopelessness within which the Limonese people survive, as well as to the rapid deterioration that their social fabric has suffered. How has this briefly sketched economic picture affected the Blacks? Originally farmers, railroad workers, and plantation laborers, the members of the Black minority have not been able to enter the competitive market effectively as a people, save for a few successful professionals. Consequently, emigration has been one solution to the lack of challenging opportunities and lack of permanent employment.²⁴ More jobs are now taken by the Whites from the highlands and the refugees in the banana plantations; the Black families are completely torn apart, and therefore they are experiencing a serious weakening of links with their roots.²⁵

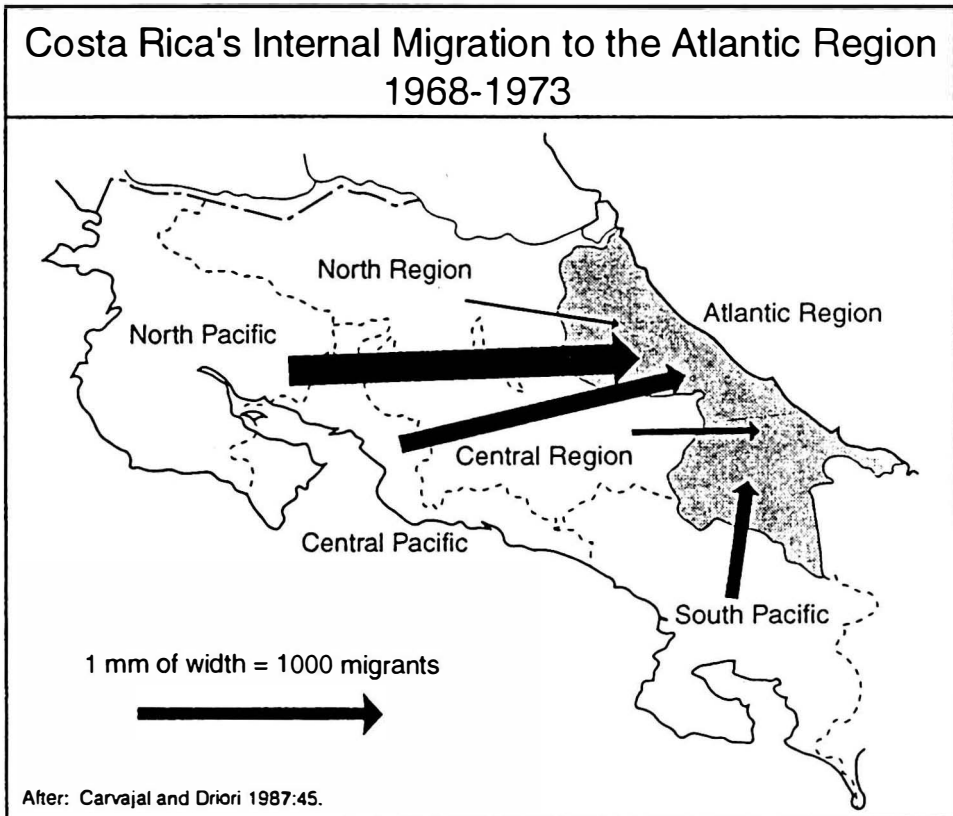
Language and Identity: Maintenance or Shift?

Linguistic diversity constitutes a threat to the broader political order of a nation. Usually, a commonly shared tongue is seen as a vehicle for the maintenance of the perceived unity of purposes and needs shared by the country's inhabitants. Thus, it is hardly surprising that in order to develop and keep the political loyalties in place, the state will run programs for the national language to be used by the entire population.

In Costa Rica, if the degree of success of the national literacy campaigns is to be measured by the increasing number of people who can speak, read, and write Spanish in the Province of Limón, then the efforts of the Ministry of Education have proved effective.²⁶ If linguistic differences form a major obstacle to assimilation—even though ethnic and racial groups can perpetuate themselves without distinctive language—by reducing linguistic differences the nation fosters ethnic merger. Although no official figures are available, it appears that there have been great increases in the proportion of ethnically- and linguistically-mixed marriages between ingroup and outgroup. This gives the high

Figure 3

**Costa Rica's Internal Migration to the Atlantic Region
1968-1973**



status linguistic variety (Spanish) a better chance of being used as the language of the home, and hence of caretaker-child interactions. Moreover, a group that does not maintain its identity will be more likely to give up its language as well.

As people acquire a language, they also acquire attitudes and beliefs toward that language and toward other people's languages. These are shared by the members of the linguistic community and form an integral part of the culture. As with most creoles, LC speakers have fallen prey to the widespread belief that */mekaytelyuw/* is "broken or flat English," a "patois," a "dialect" not "a real language." Proof of this, they claim, is that it is not a written language and that "it has no grammar."

With a writing tradition, languages acquire standardization, norms are set by recognized authorities and they are printed in books and taught in schools. Thus, languages which are transmitted exclusively through the speech of individuals, without the formal frame which education gives to language variants, make their speakers focus on the reality of variation. In the Limonese situation, certain feelings of it being a second-class language (and consequently, of their being second-class citizens) are attributed to LC by its speakers, and their very deeply-seated prejudices against it are apparent. It is associated with what they believe is their own negative self-portrayal: lack of education, primitive ways, superstitious beliefs, poverty, slavery, and a general inadequacy for acquiring a high social status.

Contrary to their deprecatory self-image, the Limonese have a highly verbal culture. And although Jamaican-educated grandparents abhor the creole spoken by their "grands"—and blame their children for not having insisted on their grandchildren attending English schools to acquire "proper" English and to learn to respect it as had their parents and ancestors—it is obvious that fluent LC speakers enjoy */mekaytelyuw/*. Through decades of white colonization and domination, they have come to keep to themselves the love they feel for their language and their culture.

As to the actual use of LC, the chart in Table 2 next exemplifies the most common linguistic exchanges which call for either LC, Spanish, or Standard (Limonese),²⁷ but bearing in mind that there are a number of factors which intervene in language choices (such as ethnic composition of the group, topic, age, and gender of the interlocutors).

Table 2

Intragroup LC - S - SE Usage

MEDIA DOMAINS SUMMARY		ROLE RELATIONS	
		Prior	After 1948
Speaking		Code: LC:Limonese Creole S: Spanish SE:Standard English	
Family			
	Husband-wife	LC	LC/S
	Parent-child	LC	LC/S
	Grandparent-grandchild	LC	LC/S
	Other (= generation)	LC	LC/S
Neighbors			
	Friends	LC	LC/S
	Acquaintances	LC	LC/S
Work			
	Employer-employer	SE	S
	Employer-employee	SE	S
	Employee-employer	LC	S
Religion			
	Priest/Minister-congregation	LC	SE/LC/S
	Congregation-Minister	LC	LC/S
Reading			
Home			
	Father	SE	S
	Mother	SE	S
	Grandparents	SE	S
	Child	SE	S
School			
	Father	SE	S
	Mother	SE	S
	Grandparents	SE	SE/S
	Child		S
Writing			
School			
	Father	SE	S
	Mother	SE	S
	Grandparents	SE	S
	Child		S

Conclusions

As mentioned above, it appears that even the most fervent desire on the part of grandparents to retain LC-SLE may eventually be overcome by the promise of social and economic advancement, in both the public and private sectors, offered by the mastery of Spanish. Moreover, the number of social contacts in which speakers use LC seems to be steadily declining. The evidence gathered so far shows that domains specific to the minority language variety have often been encroached upon by Spanish, the prestige language; actually, only if those domains were identified as stable would a condition of bilingualism possibly prevail. Without continued representation of the language and group members in a variety of institutional settings such as educational systems, media, religion, and work, the ethnolinguistic vitality of the group is at great risk, since the influence of the home is not sufficient to preserve LC (particularly considering that the time children and their family spend at home has greatly diminished).²⁸

Stages in the process of language shift fall into a continuum ranging from language conservation (language life) to language loss (language death). However, I would argue that the life-death metaphor does not serve the study of language usage well. The more meaningful question is one of ethnicity, i.e., How important is it for a member of this minority to be a Black Limonese? And does LC express that ethnicity?

The point has already been made that few other elements involve the emotional attachment that oral communication has in members of an ethnic group; however, the death of a language does not inevitably mean the total disappearance of a group's identity. One of the common circumstances for language death is that of the gradual disappearance of its speakers; in that case, however, the group's identity could be kept intact until its last speaker dies. That is not what concerns us here at this time. The LC scenario is, rather, a case of language contact and conflict (one superordinate language actively threatening to supplant the other) in a racially and culturally distinct speech community which is now somewhat spread out geographically and which may succumb to "the intrinsic hostility of the technology-based infrastructure of modern civilization."²⁹

The sociolinguistic process outlined above would seem not to bode well for the survival of LC. However, as Fishman has suggested, the question to be asked is "Do they love it in their [the speakers'] hearts?"³⁰ I would venture to say that if, in light of its sociohistorical background, the group values its identity—particularly in the face of present socioeconomic pressures towards the universalization of culture—it is likely that LC will prevail against all odds, particularly if they continue "loving it in their hearts."

NOTES

I am indebted to Professor María Eugenia Bózzoli de Wille for valuable comments on an earlier version of this paper and to Professor Mervyn C. Alleyne for bibliographical information.

¹ Fishman, Joshua A., "Language, Ethnicity, and Racism," in *Georgetown University Round Table on Languages and Linguistics*, ed. Muriel Saville-Troike (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1977); Gumperz, J.J., ed., *Language and Social Identity* (Clevedon, PA: Multilingual Matters Ltd., 1988); Giles, Howard, ed., *Language, Ethnicity and Intergroup Relations* (London: Academic Press, Inc., 1977).

² Edwards, J., *Language, Society and Identity* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985).

³ Of all the powerful elements of group identity (ethnicity, nationalism, and the relationship between them), Edwards (1985, 22) claims that "the most important ingredients are the subjective sense of groupness and the continuation of group boundaries." He considers that these two are indeed related, but since certain aspects of group culture are always subject to change, the continuing identity must depend upon elements which transcend any purely objective markers. "This is not to say," he continues, "that visible markers are dispensable, but rather that the presence of any particular marker is not essential."

⁴ In this paper, it is impossible to consider the full range of complex relations which exist between the status of a language and such factors as literacy, urbanization, industrialization, political and economic power, religion, geography and demography, among many others which definitely intervene in a two-way causal relation between language and identity.

⁵ Giles, 312.

⁶ Carvajal, Guillermo, and Israel Driori, "La diversidad étnico - cultural en la región atlántica y los problemas de integración socio-espacial al contexto regional costarricense," *Revista Geográfica* 107 (1987): 19, my translation, explaining the depressed state of the local economy, claim that:

At present the Limonese region developmental model could be summarized by saying that the benefits of the local economic activities either flee the region via multinational corporations or else favor directly the public treasury via taxes.

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⁷ Edwards, J., "Ethnic Identity and Bilingual Education," in *Language and Ethnicity and Intergroup Relations*, ed.H.Giles (London: Academic Press, 1977), 254. Edwards' more complex definition (1985, 10) suggests that:

Ethnic identity is allegiance to a group - large or small, socially dominant or subordinate - with which one has ancestral links. There is no necessity for a continuation, over generations, of the same socialization or cultural patterns, but some sense of a group boundary must persist. This can be sustained by shared objective characteristics (language, religion, etc.), or by more subjective contributions to a sense of groupness, or by some combination of both. Symbolic or subjective attachments must relate at however distant a remove, to an observably real past.

Definitions of "ethnicity," of course, abound as do the criteria considered adequate for defining a collectivity as an "ethnic group," and as distinctive from a "racial group." In this paper, I will adopt the view (based on Turner, 1978) that an ethnic unit is formed by those individuals who say they belong to ethnic group A rather than B, and are willing to be treated and allow their behavior to be interpreted and judged as A's and not B's.

⁸ Fishman, 1977, 16. Fishman states that "paternity" is a central experience around which all others can be clustered, and that:

it deals with the recognition of putative biological origins and, therefore with the hereditary or descent-related "blood", "bones", "essence", "mentality", "genius", "sensitivity", "proclivity" derived from the original putative ancestors of a collectivity and passed on from generation to generation in a biokinsip sense.

In other words, heritage determines one's ethnicity. From the point of view of a person's experience, this "paternity" is probably seen as the key (referred to as "primordial" by Geertz, 1963) to that individual's ethnicity, no matter whether it is played down, or even denied to escape it.

⁹ Fishman (1977, 20) claims that although distinct from each other, "paternity" and "patrimony" may reinforce each other since they are constantly interacting in ethnicity, as poles along a continuum. The difference is that while ethnic patrimony is learned, paternity is inherited from ancestry. In other words,

The paternity dimension of ethnicity is related to questions of how ethnicity collectivities come into being and to how individuals get to be members of these collectivities. The patrimony dimension of ethnicity is related to questions of how ethnic collectivities behave and to

what their members do in order to express their membership. The former maintains that one must either be or not be of a given ethnicity [...]. The latter recognizes that one either may or may not fulfill the obligations of ethnicity.

Interestingly enough, it seems that these acquired characteristics of one's identity (Fishman's "patrimony") are the key by which outsiders perceive a group's identity (Giles, 1977, 326).

¹⁰ Giles, 326.

¹¹ Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803), the author of *Ueber den Ursprung der Sprache*, argued in favor of the human innately-endowed capacity of reason and speech, which ultimately links an individual through his/her mother tongue, to the expression of the nationality's soul and spirit.

¹² Smith, A., *Theories of Nationalism* (London: Duckworth, 1971), 149-150.

¹³ Harrison, Regina, *Signs, Songs and Memory in the Andes* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1989), 15, tells the story of Gregorio Condori Mamani, a monolingual Quechua speaker when he served in the Peruvian army some years ago:

Up until that time [entering the army] I didn't speak any Spanish and I scarcely left there speaking Spanish; I almost spoke some Spanish at the end. The lieutenants and the captains didn't want us to speak in Quechua (*runa simi*).

"Indians, dammit! Spanish!" they used to say.

With that, they make you speak Spanish in classes.

¹⁴ Lieberman, S., *Language Diversity and Language Contact*, essays selected and introduced by A.S. Dil (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1981), 1.

¹⁵ Lieberman, 2.

¹⁶ This terminology is borrowed from Lieberman (1981, 84):

By indigenous is meant not necessarily the aborigines, but rather a population sufficiently established in an area so as to possess the institutions and demographic capacity for maintaining some minimal form of social order through generations.

¹⁷ When two linguistic groups come into contact, we may find a situation in which 1) the indigenous group is superordinate, 2) the migrant group

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is superordinate, 3) the indigenous group is subordinate, 4) the migrant group is subordinate, and 5) neither group is superordinate in all domains.

¹⁸ By 'rapid,' I mean a substantial change in the course of only a few generations.

¹⁹ Gumperz, 1.

²⁰ Limonese Creole is called /mekaytelyuw/ or /mekatelyuw/ by its speakers. It comes from Jamaican Creole in which "Make I tell you [something]" is equivalent to Standard English "Let me tell you [something]." The broad transcription used here is a phonemic system accessible to a non-initiated reader.

²¹ Olien, Michael O., "The Negro in Costa Rica: An Historical Perspective," n.d. (1965). Mimeographed copy.

²² *Mamita Yunai* is the title of a book by the Costa Rican novelist Carlos Luis Fallas (San José, Costa Rica: Editorial Soley y Valverde, 1941, 246). He explains that this is the name by which the Spanish speaking workers referred to the United Fruit Co. *Mamita*, of course, is a diminutive of *mamá* ('mother') and *Yunai* stands for the way the Costa Rican pronunciation of 'United' sounded.

²³ Since 1948 (when Alex Curling was elected the first Black Federal representative of Limón), the National Liberation Party (*Partido Liberación Nacional*, i.e. the "social-democratic" party) has had continuity in carrying a Black on its Limonese federal representative ticket to the National Assembly. It has obviously paid off, since the party won all but the last elections in Limón—which they lost by 16,000 votes or 73%. For the first time since then, the present presidential candidate (ironically enough, Figueres' son) decided not to have a Black representative in the Limón ticket, while the other major party, Christian Social Unity Party (*Partido Unidad Social Cristiano*, i.e. the "Christian-democratic" party) does. It will be interesting to watch the forthcoming elections, in February of 1994, to see whether the Black minority has given up its loyalty to "its" party.

²⁴ Many Blacks now work in San José, and many others have taken up jobs on board ships, if they are men, and as nannies or domestic servants in the U.S., if they are women. There is practically no family in Limón that does not have some relative in the U.S. at this point.

²⁵ This situation has currently affected Limón's youth in a twofold manner: 1) those high school graduates who stay in Limón are working as stevedores, as messengers for the shipping companies, or in the box factories or local refinery; and 2) the few who continue their studies at the local university branches (of dubious quality) or in the capital, later opt for white collar jobs, but once they have succeeded in securing a degree these young people do not wish to return to Puerto Limón because of the lack of challenging opportunities. On the other hand, the number of single mothers has increased dramatically, and crack cocaine is available for the asking. A particular Limonese neighborhood popularly called "*Cieneguita*" (and officially *Barrio Cristobal Colón*) is now jokingly known as "*Piedrópolis*" (from *pedra* which means crack cocaine).

²⁶ The degree of illiteracy is relatively low in the Province of Limón as compared to the rest of the country. It was 7.5% in the Central Province and 10.9% in the Province of Limón according to the census taken by the Dirección General de Estadísticas y Censos, Censo de Población de Costa Rica (San José, Costa Rica: Ministerio de Economía y Hacienda, 1984, 165).

²⁷ Herzfeld, Anita, "Bilingual Instability as a Result of Government Induced Policies," in *ITL: Review of Applied Linguistics* 48 (1980): 11, here revised for 1995.

²⁸ During a recent interview conducted in Limón (October 2, 1993) a young Black professional shared with me that when he gets home from the office, often quite late at night, he is so tired and stressed out that he finds it hard to switch to LC after he has been talking Spanish all day long at the office—even though he has a Black Limonese wife.

²⁹ Edwards, 1985, 49.

³⁰ Quoted by Huffiness, Marion L., "Pennsylvania German: 'Do they love it in their hearts?'" in *Language and Ethnicity: Focusschrift in honor of Joshua Fishman*, ed. James R. Dow (1991), 9.