

Richard J. File-Muriel
Rafael Orozco (eds.)
Colombian Varieties of Spanish



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THE “NEW” PALENQUERO: REVITALIZATION AND RE-CREOLIZATION

JOHN M. LIPSKI

1. Introduction¹

One of the oldest surviving creole languages is spoken in the Afro-Colombian village of San Basilio de Palenque. The language, known as Palenquero by linguists and simply as *lengua* ‘(the) language’ by community residents, is a highly restructured Afro-Iberian contact language, strongly influenced by Kikongo and bearing unmistakable Portuguese elements as well as a lexicon substantially derived from Spanish. Community members adhere to a plausible but highly speculative account of the creation of the village, but accurate historical data are not easily obtainable. According to many popular accounts, in 1599 a group of African slaves in the Spanish port of Cartagena de Indias (now part of Colombia) revolted and fled to the partially forested interior some 60 km to the south. Their leader, Domingo Bioho “King Benko”, was apparently born in northwest Africa, in or near the contemporary nation of Guinea-Bissau, but judging by the characteristics of the Palenquero language, many of the founders were speakers of Central African Bantu languages, particularly Kikongo, and possibly also of the emerging Afro-Portuguese creole of São Tomé. In 1603, the Spanish government sued for peace, and in the following years Bioho continued to engage in anti-colonial resistance, until he was captured and hanged in 1621. In the intervening years Bioho and his followers founded at least one Palenque or fortified village; the residents of San Basilio de Palenque believe that their community was the one founded by Bioho and his name has been inextricably linked with the village’s centuries old history of cultural resistance. According to historians, however, the origins of the contemporary community of San Basilio de Palenque cannot be so clearly delineated. There is some evidence that Bioho’s Palenque was not the one that has survived today but rather another site some distance away (Navarrete 2008: 22-23), one of many maroon communities that dotted the

¹ An earlier version of this chapter was presented at the Hispanic Linguistics Symposium in San Juan, Puerto Rico on October 22, 2009. For comments on the oral and written versions I gratefully acknowledge Armin Schwegler, Luis Ortiz López, and several anonymous and very helpful reviewers. Any remaining rough edges are, alas, mine alone.

region from the 16th century through the 18th. Colombian historians generally converge on the second half of the 17th century as the probable period in which the Palenque de San Basilio came into existence (Morton 2005: 33), i.e. considerably after Bioho's death. The first unequivocal mention of the Palenque de San Basilio (with its original name, San Miguel Arcángel) comes in a document relating a peace agreement made in 1713 (Escalante 1954: 229; Navarrete 2008: 155-166; Schwegler 2011a), which is consistent with a founding date somewhere towards the end of the 17th century.

In 1713 the Spanish bishop Antonio María Cassiani visited the Palenque de San Miguel Arcángel to grant this village (re-named San Basilio Magno) official recognition, and was presumably able to communicate with its residents in some variety of Spanish. A document dated 1772 stated that the Palenqueros speak with one another “un particular idioma en que á sus solas instruyen á los muchachos sinembargo de que cortan con mucha expedición el castellano de que generalmente usan” [a particular language that by themselves they teach to their children, as well as Spanish which they speak fluently] (Gutiérrez Azopardo 1980: 34)². Ever since that time the community has been bilingual, with the Palenquero language deliberately maintained and taught to succeeding generations in a powerful affirmation of ethnic identity, as members of the “first free people of America” as the village has come to be known (Arrázola 1970).

Today San Basilio de Palenque (the version of the name preferred by contemporary community leaders) is a village of more than 3500 inhabitants, most of whom are descendents of the original maroon slave population. Colombians first came to regard this village with pride rather than scorn when the Palenquero boxer “Kid Pambelé” (Antonio Cervantes) won a world championship in 1974, only seven years after the first (dirt) road was extended into the previously isolated community (Salcedo Ramos/Rodríguez 2005). The village suddenly became the scene of visits from journalists and politicians, and the fame (together with the friendship between the boxer and the son of Colombia's president) resulted in the first electrical lines being extended into the village. In 2005 Palenque was declared Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO. The Colombian Ministry of Culture has declared San Basilio de Palenque part of the “spiritual patrimony” of Colombia, although the town is still without generalized running water or a sewer system. Several documentary films on Palenque have been produced and circulated in Colombia, and annual music and drum festivals draw even more media attention to the commu-

² Although Morton (2005: 36) suggests that what the writer may have heard was Spanish-Palenquero code-switching.

nity. The popular music form known as Champeta, inspired by Palenquero musicians, is very popular in coastal Colombia, which adds to the attractiveness of Palenquero culture. San Basilio de Palenque has become the site of considerable research interest, media coverage, and tourism; the village boasts a center for ethnotourism, a cultural center, and a community center, all adorned with slogans in Palenquero. Visitors from Colombia and abroad, individually and in groups, are welcomed upon arrival and are freely addressed in Palenquero as well as Spanish. The high school has Internet-equipped computers and several Palenqueros maintain web sites.

2. A profile of Palenquero language usage, past and present

The existence of the Palenquero language, and its nature as a true creole rather than a non-standard variety of Spanish, was virtually unknown outside of the immediate environs of the village until the second half of the 20th century, and even those non-Palenqueros who had heard the language implicitly assumed that this was the “broken Spanish” stereotypically associated with black populations in the Americas (Lipski 1985b, 1999b, 2005). Accurate transcriptions of Palenquero phrases appeared in print as early as the anthropological study by Escalante (1954), a lengthy article in an obscure journal (later expanded in Escalante 1979), although Palenquero was not explicitly identified as a creole language. Even earlier snippets of Palenquero speech appear in the equally obscure Ochoa Franco (1945). When the field workers of the ALEC (Atlas Lingüístico-Etnográfico de Colombia) visited Palenque in 1959 as part of a nationwide dialect survey, they encountered and described only regional varieties of popular Spanish (Montes Giraldo 1962). This is apparently due to the fact that Palenqueros preferred to not reveal their local language to outsiders, several of whom were experienced dialectologists and would have immediately recognized a creole language if they had heard it. The field workers were aware of the existence of *lengua* but refer to this speech form – which is not described or analyzed – simply as “su dialecto local” [their local dialect] which is “notablemente diversa de la variedad general” [notably different from the general variety] (Montes Giraldo 1962: 447). Moreover, Montes Giraldo (1962: 447) affirmed that the Palenquero “dialect” “se va olvidando y [...] al menos entre los varones, apenas quedan quienes lo utilicen como único medio de comunicación” [is being forgotten and at least among the men, almost no one uses it as the only means of communication]. Montes Giraldo presents a few examples of Palenquero grammar, including the plural marker *ma*, postposed possessives (e.g. *tatá mi* ‘my father’), and the 3rd person singular pronoun *ele*, but still concludes (p.

450) that Palenquero speech “es un habla esencialmente española en la que se combinan algunos rasgos arcaicos [...] con la agudización y avanzadísimo desarrollo de numerosas tendencias vulgares, [...]” [essentially Spanish speech, combining archaic traits and acutely advanced popular tendencies], accelerated by the relative isolation of the village. Less than a decade later (in 1968) the creolist Derek Bickerton obtained field data in Palenque, and in collaboration with the anthropologist Escalante published the first article explicitly acknowledging the existence of the Palenquero Creole (Bickerton/Escalante 1970). Thereafter numerous Colombian and foreign linguists visited San Basilio de Palenque, which resulted in many monographs and articles. More importantly, it resulted in Palenqueros’ taking a fresh look at a traditional language that many younger residents felt was an embarrassing throwback, and an endangered language shunned by many Palenqueros has been revitalized and adopted as a proud symbol of ethnicity. Although the fruits of the language revitalization program can be observed today, the pathway to progress was not without obstacles. Many young learners were too embarrassed to publicly speak Palenquero, some residents felt that use of *lengua* by young men to young women was inappropriate, and older community members sometimes expressed disapproval or outright rejection of the use of the Palenquero language by young people. While the ethno-education program has a few detractors even today, all of the dozens of young Palenqueros interviewed by the present writer accept the importance of learning the rudiments of the ancestral language, even if only a subset of this group actually practices the language outside of school.

The current vitality of the Palenquero ethno-education program and the enthusiasm with which many young people attempt to speak Palenquero is particularly striking in view of numerous predictions that the Palenquero language was on the verge of disappearance. Bickerton/Escalante (1970: 266), describing their impressions of a brief research trip conducted in 1968, echo Montes Giraldo’s (1962) observation of the decline of the Palenquero language, and affirm that “if there is no change in the material conditions of its speakers, or their attitude toward their environment, Palenquero may, despite all pressures on it, continue to survive.” Megenney (1986), based on fieldwork done in 1973-4, merely refers to Palenquero as a “post-creole language,” but does not describe it as an endangered language. The late Colombian anthropologist Nina Friedemann, who began her research in Palenque in 1976, indicated that “En la escuela de Palenque, los maestros no sabían que la manera como los niños hablaban en sus juegos y retozos no era un ‘mal castellano’ sino su idioma materno [...]” [In the Palenque school, the teachers did not know that the way that the children spoke during their games and other activities was not “bad Spanish” but rather their native language] (Friedemann/Patiño Rosselli 1983: 17). Friedemann’s research

collaborator in Palenque, the Colombian linguist Carlos Patiño noted that although the community was still bilingual, younger people tended to speak to one another increasingly only in Spanish (Friedemann/Patiño Rosselli 1983: 187-188). He also observed that Palenquero speakers were the object of ridicule and discrimination in the village schools and in neighboring communities, and that many Palenqueros felt that it was disadvantageous to maintain their creole language (pp. 189-190). Patiño Rosselli concludes (p. 191) that “Salvo la intervención de factores improbables aunque no imposibles –una reacción de la propia comunidad, una política oficial adecuada–, la finalización del ciclo histórico del lenguaje palenquero no parece estar muy lejos” [Barring the intervention of improbable but not impossible factors, such as a reaction from within the community, or an adequate official policy, the end of the historical cycle of the Palenquero language is not far off]. Schwegler (1996: v. 1, 42), describing the situation as of 1993, indicates that many young residents of Palenque did not even understand *lengua*, much less speak the language. An informal survey conducted among school children from 12 to 18 years of age revealed that only about half had some competence in Palenquero, and Schwegler speaks of the rapid decline of the language in San Basilio de Palenque. Moñino (2002: 228, fn. 2), based on extensive field work in Palenque conducted between 1994 and 1998, asserted that although classes in Palenquero were obligatory in elementary and secondary school, “los niños y adolescentes ya sólo tienen de ella un conocimiento pasivo y se limitan al uso de algunas oraciones que les sirven de emblema identitario más que de medio de comunicación” [children and adolescents now only have a passive knowledge of Palenquero and limit their use to some sentences that serve as identity markers rather than as a medium of communication].

A scant fifteen years after Schwegler’s and Moñino’s observations, however, the sociolinguistic profile of San Basilio de Palenque has changed considerably, as regards ethnic pride and community efforts at revitalizing the Palenquero language. The “improbable” events suggested by Patiño have in fact taken place in the village. Beginning slowly in 1992, and already producing some observable results by the time Morton (2005) collected data in 1998, the Colombian government’s *etnoeducación*, ‘ethnic education’ program, stimulated renewed interest in learning and speaking Palenquero. Morton (2005: 103f.) indicates that as of 1998 most conversations overheard in grammatically complete Palenquero (and not, e.g. just emblematic tag phrases) took place among residents over the age of 35. Pfeleiderer (1998), collecting data at the same time, determined that only about 10% of school children were using the Palenquero language at home. A decade later, it is not uncommon to hear school children spontaneously addressing each other in Palenquero (although not always sustaining long conversa-

tions), and some young couples who themselves are Spanish-dominant make noteworthy efforts to speak Palenquero to their small children. The local elementary school and high school offer daily classes in Palenquero language and culture, beginning at the pre-school level, and students learn to read and write as well as speak the traditional community language. A small first reader (currently out of print) was developed, and a Palenquero dictionary, now in a second edition, was also produced. Since Palenquero language classes are obligatory, the number of young community members who have acquired at least a working knowledge of the Palenquero language has grown considerably, albeit not necessarily through the fully fluent acquisition of all nuances of Palenquero grammar. After all, some of the “children” referred to by Moñino now have children of their own, and at least some emblematic use of Palenquero in the home has become a *de rigueur* manifestation of ethnic pride for many community residents³.

Since the revitalization of the Palenquero language is part of a community-wide effort, the language-planning introduced by teachers and other leaders appears to be producing tangible results, as witnessed by the fact that all school children now receive several years’ instruction in the Palenquero language. Although there is considerable optimism among the language teachers and community cultural activists, the implications for long-term language maintenance have yet to be determined. What can be objectively studied is Palenquero usage by young people whose knowledge of the language comes primarily from school classes and by traditional speakers who acquired the Palenquero language within the family. Data to be presented in the following sections reveal differences in usage patterns between these two groups of speakers, perhaps due to a partial gap in transmission represented by the generation in which the Palenquero language began a sharp decline. The rapidity with which attitudes towards the Palenquero language underwent a near total reversal (in little more than a decade) has resulted in a sociolinguistic profile in which Palenquero is spoken fluently and frequently by the village’s oldest residents, and is also used – with varying degrees of fluency but with considerable enthusiasm – by many children and young adults. In between is a partially “lost generation” of individuals who possess full passive competence in Palenquero and usually nearly complete active fluency, but who for much of their lives preferred to speak only Spanish. As a result, many children are receiving the majority of their linguistic input in Palenquero from teachers and peers, to a lesser degree from elderly residents

³ Frequently overheard phrases used by young parents to small children include *miní aquí* ‘come here,’ *¿bo a cuchá?* ‘did you hear?’ and *¿onde bo tando?* ‘where are you going?’ These phrases are known to nearly all Palenquero residents, and their use by young adults does not necessarily presuppose a more profound knowledge of the Palenquero language.

(who may not always speak extensively in Palenquero to children, but whose speech can be easily overheard throughout the village), and only sporadically from their parents. Such an environment, which represents a departure from the more usual vectors of cross-generational language transmission, offers the potential for the rapid emergence of linguistic innovation: the youngest speakers in effect re-create the grammar of Palenquero based on input that, while more robust than what is usually postulated for creole language formation, is relatively depleted in comparison with normal native language transmission.

While not resulting in improved infrastructure for the town (there is still no indoor plumbing, stable water supply or paved streets, and dirt-floored thatched-roof huts still represent nearly half of the dwellings), the reaffirmation of Palenquero identity has produced dramatic results in the unabashed use of local linguistic patterns. Fieldwork conducted by the present researcher in 2008-2010 suggests that a major attitude reversal as regards the Palenquero language and Palenquero identity is resulting in a resurgence of local vernacular features in Spanish (e.g. the previously stigmatized intonational patterns or *tono*, cf. Hualde and Schwieger 2008), as well as in the increased instances in which at least some Palenquero language is employed. The following sections will present some of the characteristics of the “new” Palenquero as acquired and used by the community’s youngest residents. Included in the discussion are attempts to restore a more “pure” form of the Palenquero language, as well as innovations in young people’s Palenquero usage, innovations affecting the Palenquero article system, possessive system, copular verbs, and some prepositions. The emergence of partial gender concord is discussed in Lipski (2011), while the possible emergence of phonological tones in young speakers’ Palenquero is dealt with in Lipski (2010).

3. Back to the future: the move to “purify” Palenquero

Not only are students and other young Palenquero residents enthusiastic about studying and using Palenquero, but under the tutelage of a handful of activist teachers, they strive to restore a “pure” traditional form of the language, stripping Palenquero of Spanish language accretions that had become incorporated into the speech of older generations. Already at the end of the 20th century Morton (2005: 58) observed that the traditional second-person plural pronoun *enú* (of Central African origin) was replacing the Spanish-derived *utere* (< Sp. *ustedes*), and the African-derived *lungá* ‘to die’ was displacing *morí* (< Sp. *morir*). Other “restored” forms are *posá* ‘house’ replacing *casa*, *mai* ‘mother’ replacing *mamá*, *chitiá* ‘to speak’ replacing *jablá* and *conbesá*, *canatulé* ‘hunger’ replacing *jam-bre*, *ngubá* ‘peanut’ replacing *maní*, *burú* replacing *plata* or *dinero* ‘money,’

bumbilo replacing *basura* ‘garbage,’ *combilesa* replacing *amigo* ‘friend,’ *chepa* replacing *ropa/trapo* ‘clothing,’ *piangulí* replacing *ceddo* or *puecco* ‘pig,’ *vegá* replacing *año* ‘year,’ and *makaniá* replacing *trabajá* ‘to work.’ This restoration of archaic and moribund forms felt to be less Spanish-like and more “authentically” Palenquero is not due to chance, but rather to the conscious efforts of a handful of activists, including the three or four main Palenquero language teachers. The general principle applied in the selection of Palenquero words to be introduced in school is to pick forms that differ as much from their Spanish counterparts as possible, even if the chosen item is infrequent or no longer in active use. Since these are the words learned and reinforced in school, children can be overheard using these same items, and not their more Spanish-like counterparts, when attempting to speak Palenquero spontaneously. Morton (2005: 58) discovered that some community residents were discussing the feasibility of officially coining new Palenquero replacements for patrimonial Spanish words, but such efforts have not moved forward in a concerted fashion. A few activists use the obviously concocted *Etao Jundo* for *Estados Unidos* ‘United States,’ but this option has not caught on among most young speakers. The recent appearance of a Palenquero dictionary (Cásseres Estrada 2005), a Palenquero grammar book (Simarra Reyes/Triviño Doval 2008) and a Palenquero commented glossary (Simarra Obeso et al. 2008), all emphasizing Palenquero words that differ substantially from their modern Spanish counterparts, reinforce the campaign to expunge as many Spanish words as possible from young speakers’ Palenquero. Older traditional Palenquero speakers generally regard these efforts with amusement, and there is no indication that these reintroduced Palenquero or African words are making any comeback among the community’s oldest speakers.

A further indication of the impact of the reintroduced Palenquero lexical items among young speakers appears in the results of an experiment conducted in March, 2011. As part of a study of the perception of Spanish-Palenquero code-switching, twenty-five Palenquero speakers (fifteen traditional speakers and ten adolescent speakers) were presented with a total of seventy recorded utterances gleaned from previous interviews conducted in the community. Some of the utterances were indisputably in Palenquero, a few were entirely in Spanish, and the majority contained at least some mixture of Palenquero grammar and Spanish grammar, and could thus be regarded as instances of intra-sentential code-switching involving more than simple lexical insertions. Respondents were asked to listen to each of the sentences and decide whether the sentence was in Spanish, in Palenquero, or combined both languages. Young Palenquero speakers nearly always judged as mixed sentences containing Spanish-derived lexical items such as *casa*, *jambre*, and *trabajo* even when the remainder of the sentence was indisputably in Palenquero. Older traditional speakers judged such sen-

tences to be entirely in Palenquero. At the same time, young speakers’ hypersensitivity to targeted lexical items frequently resulted in a complete failure to notice patently Spanish grammatical constructions embedded in the sentences, including conjugated verbs, preverbal object clitics, definite articles, and feminine gender concord.

{SENTENCES IN PALENQUERO; YOUNG SPEAKERS REJECT CASA INSTEAD OF POSÁ}

ese casa poleba vendé nu poque ese casa era ri ma cuatro moná lo que i teneba cuné
‘that house couldn’t be sold because that house belonged to the four children I had with her’

antonce casa suto teneba Barranquilla casa quelá jue pa majaná
‘so the house we had in Barranquilla was left for the kids’

aquí teneba casa ri material nu
‘there were no cement block houses here’

{YOUNG SPEAKERS REJECT CASA INSTEAD OF POSÁ BUT FAIL TO NOTICE THE ENTIRE NOUN PHRASE LA PRIMERA CASA IN SPANISH}

la primera casa de material lo que hacé aque fue casa ma tatá mí
‘the first cement block house belonged to my parents’

{YOUNG SPEAKERS REJECT CASA INSTEAD OF POSÁ BUT FAIL TO NOTICE THE ENTIRE CLAUSE TE CUENTO IN SPANISH}

i asina te cuento que i acoddá ri ma nombre de to ma lo que asé miní casa mi nu
‘and so I’m telling you that I don’t remember the names of all the people who came to my house’

{YOUNG SPEAKERS REJECT JAMBRE INSTEAD OF CANATULÉ IN PALENQUERO SENTENCE}

i taba cu mango p’i cumé poque i a tené jambre
‘I was holding some mangoes to eat because I was hungry’

{YOUNG SPEAKERS REJECT JAMBRE INSTEAD OF CANATULÉ IN PALENQUERO SENTENCE, BUT FAIL TO NOTICE SPANISH CONJUGATED VERB TENGA}

e que tenga cumina tenga que ndá a que tenga jambre
‘those who have food have to give it to those who are hungry’

{YOUNG SPEAKERS REJECT PLATA INSTEAD OF BURÚ BUT FAIL TO NOTICE THE SPANISH VERB+CLITIC TE DAMO}

si bo trae lágrima tío tigre aquí a ete vigrío lo que ta aquí suto te damo plata
‘Uncle Tiger, if you bring some tears in this glass we’ll give you money’

{YOUNG SPEAKERS REJECT TRABAJO INSTEAD OF MACANEO BUT FAIL TO NOTICE SPANISH NEGATION + VERB NO TIENE}

pero si ané no tiene trabajo suto pasa trabajo aquí
‘But if they don’t have a job we have a hard time here’

{YOUNG SPEAKERS REJECT TRABAJO INSTEAD OF MACANEO BUT FAIL TO NOTICE SPANISH CLITIC + CONJUGATED VERB ME ABURRO AND SPANISH OTRA VEZ;}

de ahi me aburro trabajo ahi i ase mini camino pa Palengue otra vez
 ‘So there when I get bored with my job I come back to Palenque again’

{SENTENCE IN PALENQUERO; YOUNG SPEAKERS REJECT MORÍ INSTEAD OF LUNGÁ;}

i a teneba tre pero a murí ndo, a quelá mi ese
 ‘I had three [children], two died, I have that one left’

{SENTENCE IN PALENQUERO; YOUNG SPEAKERS REJECT TRAPO INSTEAD OF CHEPA;}

pa’o bucá trapo bo l’echá pelé cu hermano si
 ‘To get some clothes you fight with your brother’

4. Innovative morphology: the extension of *ma*

In Palenquero, unlike in Spanish, nouns and adjectives are invariable for number. Plural marking in noun phrases, when it occurs at all, is effected by the preposed plural marker *ma*: *ma jende* ‘the people,’ *ma ngombe* ‘the cows.’ The marker *ma* presumably derives from one of the most frequent Bantu pluralizing prefixes, attested for Kikongo and other Central African languages known to have been present in the linguistic mix in which Palenquero was originally formed. Palenquero *ma* is more frequently used with definite reference, but can also be used with generic plurals, as in the potentially *ma pelo asé ndrúmi mucho* ‘(the) dogs sleep a lot.’ The basic pattern of usage is shown in Table 1, taken from Schwieger (2007a: 62):

TABLE 1
 The basic Palenquero article system

	Definite or generic and mass nouns	Indefinite nouns
Singular	Ø	un
Plural	ma	un ma

Moñino (2007) offers the claim that *ma* and other African items were deliberately introduced by maroons “para despistar a los no miembros de su comunidad y no ser entendidos de ellos” [to sidetrack non community members so as to not

be understood by them]. Moñino asserts that combinations of *ma* and other determiners such as the indefinite *ún* and the demonstrative *ése* (e.g. *ún ma óha bédde* ‘some green leaves,’ *ése ma tabáko* ‘those cigarettes’) confirm that *ma* was originally inserted in order to create an “exotic” speech that could not be easily understood by non-initiates⁴. While agreeing with Moñino that Palenquero *ma* largely serves to disambiguate plural NPs and that superfluous *ma* may also occur in configurations in which plural is already indicated through other means, Schwegler (2007a: 69-70; 2007b: 216-217) argues that plural *ma* provides such a transparent and easily learned mechanism that it would not be effective as a means of disguising speech.

Regardless of whether *ma* was once introduced into Palenquero in a deliberate attempt to make the language sound more exotic or to impede comprehension by outsiders, contemporary young learners of Palenquero have hit upon *ma* as a quintessential Palenquero element; they employ it not only for plural reference more frequently than fluent native speakers, but – in striking contrast to all previous generations of speakers – also as an unambiguously SINGULAR article. This is shown in Figure 1, extracted from a student homework assignment, which contains both the Palenquero text and the Spanish translation, in which *ma* is unmistakably shown to have singular reference⁵.

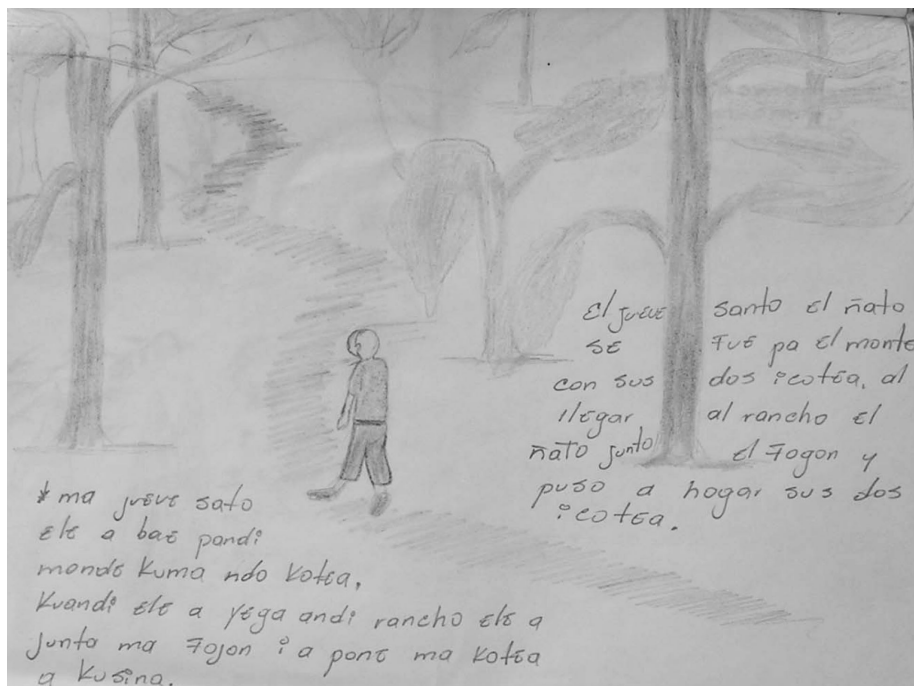
In order to provide a more systematic view of young speakers’ usage in Palenquero, interviews were conducted with 25 young Palenquero speakers (15 male, 10 female), all of whom had learned Palenquero in school; some also had learned the rudiments of the language at home by listening to older relatives, but none spoke Palenquero routinely before attending school⁶. The ages of the interview-

⁴ At the same time it can be noted that analytical combinations of determiners originally represented by a single inflected determiner are frequent in other creoles and semi-creoles, and do not necessarily suggest deliberate obfuscation by earlier generations. In traditional Afro-Bolivian Spanish, for example, the invariant demonstrative *eje* and invariant possessives such as *mi* ‘mine,’ *nostu* ‘our’ combine analytically with the plural definite article *lu*: *eje lu mujé* (<Sp. *esas mujeres*) ‘these/those women,’ *nostu lu huahua* (<Sp. *nuestros huahuas*) ‘our children’ (Lipski 2008). Papiamentu similarly combines the definite article *e* and the post-posed plural marker *nan*: *e casnan* ‘the houses.’

⁵ A reviewer points out that singular *ma* may result from momentary hyper-correction, motivated by a desire to please teachers and to show off one’s precariously acquired knowledge of Palenquero. Hyper-correction can almost certainly account for some instances of non-plural *ma*; the fact that this usage was observed in the speech of so many young Palenqueros as well as in written assignments produced over a period of several days suggests that this usage is stabilizing among young Palenqueros.

⁶ All Palenquero speakers were recorded in San Basilio de Palenque in 2008-2009, with the able assistance of Bernardino Pérez Miranda, who teaches classes in Palenquero at the Instituto Educativa Técnica Agropecuaria Benkos Bioho and Víctor Simarra Reyes, who has

FIGURE 1
Example of *ma* in a Palenquero singular noun phrase



wees ranged from 18 to 22. In order to obtain a sample of traditional Palenquero usage, a second set of interviews was conducted with 25 traditional Palenquero speakers (13 men and 12 women), all considered true native speakers, with ages ranging from 45 to over 90. Each interviewee was asked to translate a number of sentences from Spanish into Palenquero, as well as to engage in free conversation (in the case of the younger speakers, with the request to use as much Palenquero as possible).

Of the 25 young Palenquero speakers formally interviewed, nine consistently used *ma* with unmistakable singular reference, both in spontaneous speech and in response to explicit requests for translation from Spanish; three explicitly

assisted previous researchers on the Palenquero language. Thanks are also due to Sebastián Salgado, another Palenquero language teacher, who generously allowed me to visit his classes and meet his students. Last, but by no means least, I owe a deep debt of gratitude to the more than one hundred Palenqueros of all ages who have welcomed me into their community and shared their language and their lives with me.

asserted (spontaneously and with no prior prompting about plural markers) that *ma* could mark singular or plural. Schwegler (2007a, 2007b) and Moñino (2007) have observed that Palenquero *ma* usually behaves more like the Spanish plural articles *los/las* than like any Bantu pluralizer. “New” Palenquero speakers appear to be extending the usage of *ma* to overlap with the Spanish singular articles *el* and *la*, which are not present in traditional Palenquero (which expresses both generic and singular definite reference by \emptyset). Some specimens of young speakers’ Palenquero usage in which *ma* is used with singular reference are given below. Some of the sentences could be construed as plural under other circumstances, but in the context of the interviews all were unquestionably singular:

- e ma posá jue di to suto* ‘that house is ours’
e ma posá é ri ele ‘that house is his’
ese ma mujé ta ngolo ‘that woman is fat’
e ma changaina ta ngolo ‘that woman is fat’
e ma flo ta amaría ‘that flower is yellow’
e ma trocha lo que ta ahí ta angota ‘that street there is narrow’
ma puetta ta celao ‘the door is closed’
celá ma puetta ‘close the door’
e ma pueta ta abieta ‘that door is open’
ma centro di reunión ri ma jende ‘the community meeting center’
ma changaina a sendá flaca ‘the girl is skinny’
ese ma música ngutá mi nu ‘I don’t like that music’
ma pueta di posá mi ta abieta ‘the door of my house is open’
ma moná mi ‘my child’
ese e ma monasita di yo ‘this is my child’ (La Bonga)
e ma posá a sendá blanco ‘that house is white’
e ma cuagro a teneba como dose monasita ‘the cuagro [neighborhood cohort] had some twelve girls’
ma bachillé mi ‘my high school diploma’
ma fisioterapia ta vivá aquí Cartagena ‘the physical therapist [sister] lives in Cartagena’
i a petenecé a ma cuagro di Casa de la Cultura ‘I belong to the cuagro from the Casa de la Cultura’
i a etá ma seto semestre ‘I am in the sixth semester’

In March 2011 another group of young Palenquero speakers responded to a picture-naming task. Respondents were shown slides presented on a computer

and asked to describe the content of the pictures using only the Palenquero language. The slides included both singular and plural objects; plural objects included bunches of flowers, groups of children, and groupings of animals. Singular items included two pictures of churches, two pictures of houses, two pictures each containing a woman, a picture of a tree, and pictures of a girl, a donkey, a mountain, a bee, a chicken, and the distinctive Palenque arroyo, the community bathing and laundry spot. Ten young Palenquero speakers age 18-21 responded to the pictures, and all identified at least some of the unmistakably singular items with the Palenquero plural marker *ma*. These same young Palenquero speakers also used *ma* with all plural items, even when numerals were also involved (in traditional Palenquero, *ma* is never combined with numbers or other quantifiers). When combined with numerals (and occasionally other quantifiers), *ma* was sometimes placed before the number, and sometimes after. Examples include:

- cinco ma monasita* ‘five girls’
sendá tre ma monasita andi apú ‘[it] is three girls in the water’
ma ndo mujere ‘two women’
ma ndo changaina ‘two girls’
ma ndo cha ngande ‘two older women’
do ma monasita ‘two girls’
un chochá di ma ngaina ‘a whole bunch of chickens’

Ma is sometimes combined with nouns derived from the Spanish plural, e.g. *ma ndo mujere* ‘two women,’ *ma animale* ‘animals,’ and *ma flore* ‘flowers;’ occasionally plural-derived nouns are used with singular reference, as when a picture of a single tree provoked the responses *ma árbole* and *di árbole*. In another picture-naming task presented to the same group of young Palenquero speakers, respondents had to name a block of pictures first in Palenquero, then in Spanish, and finally in alternating format⁷. Just as in the previously described picture-naming task, and despite explicit requests to name only the noun without any prefix or other description, all respondents named at least some singular nouns with *ma*. Also of interest is the fact that several young speakers identified unmistakably singular objects with plural nouns when speaking Spanish. This may be a hypercorrection due to the loss of word-final /s/ in local varieties of Spanish, but older adults, while often inserting hypercorrect /s/ in Spanish words

⁷ This experiment was conducted by my colleague Paola Dussias.

not containing /s/, never employ plural forms with singular reference. Instead, older speakers sometimes use Spanish singular nouns with plural reference.

In addition to using *ma* as a singular definite article, many young Palenquero speakers use *e*, apparently derived from the demonstrative *eje* (< Sp. *ese*), without any demonstrative meaning. Palenquero *e* in these contexts also fulfills the function of Spanish definite articles, and sometimes combines with *ma* (Schwegler/Green 2008: 293-294). In the contexts in which the following examples were produced, there was no clear deictic reference associated with *e*:

- e ma posá jue di to suto* ‘that house is ours’
e ma pueta ta abieta ‘the door is open’
e mata a sendá amaría ‘the plant is yellow’
e caye a sendá angota ‘the street is narrow’
e changaina ta ngolo ‘the girl is fat’
e flo amarío ‘the yellow flower’

The bleaching of deictic features from demonstratives en route to being simple articles is a common process, and characterizes, e.g. the development of Latin demonstratives into Romance articles. Taken together with the use of *ma*, the tendency to use *e* as a simple definite article places younger Palenquero speakers on a trajectory towards a more Spanish-like system of definite articles, albeit not directly derived from their Spanish counterparts⁸; the emergent neo-Palenquero article system is shown in Table 2.

TABLE 2
The emergent Palenquero definite/generic article system

	Definite	Generic
Singular	ma/e ma	Ø
Plural	ma/e ma	ma

⁸ As pointed out by a reviewer, the emergence of a determiner system more similar to Spanish might suggest de-creolization rather than the re-creolization suggested in the title of this article. However the similarities are in function, not in form, as is typically the case in de-creolization, so these changes are more properly innovations, perhaps influenced by but not converging with their Spanish counterparts.

5. Other “new” Palenquero innovations

5.1. INNOVATIONS IN PALENQUERO POSSESSIVES

In traditional Palenquero, possession is normally expressed by simple juxtaposition, by postposing the possessor to the possessed noun: *casa suto* ‘our house,’ *kabesa ngombe* ‘the head of the cow.’ Alternative constructions involve the preposition *di/ri* as in *kabesa ri ngombe* ‘head of the cow,’ *casi ri suto* ‘our house.’ According to Moñino (2002: 230), with nouns denoting family relationships combined with first person and second person pronouns, only juxtaposition is possible, without *ri/di*: *tatá mi* ‘my father,’ *tatá suto* ‘our father,’ *tatá enú* ‘your (pl.) father.’ These observations hold true for traditional Palenquero speakers, but many younger Palenquero speakers insert the preposition *di/ri* even after nouns denoting family relations and body parts, essentially duplicating Spanish syntax: *tatá ri mi* ‘my father,’ *moná ri mi* ‘my child.’ In traditional Palenquero, the second person singular possessive clitic is *-si*, as in *tatá si* ‘your father,’ *casa si* ‘your house.’ This is the only possessive marker not similar or identical to the corresponding subject pronoun (which for the second person singular is *bo* (< Sp. *vos*). Younger Palenquero speakers frequently use postposed *-bo* or *ri bo* as in *tatá (ri) bo* ‘your father,’ regularizing the correspondence between possessive pronouns and subject pronouns in a fashion not found among traditional speakers⁹. Of the twenty five young Palenquero speakers formally interviewed, fourteen presented at least some cases of *di/ri* possessive constructions involving first or second person pronouns and head nouns denoting inalienable possession or family relationship. In the picture-naming task, some young Palenquero speakers also incorrectly applied the possessive *si* ‘your’ instead of the third-person singular *ele* or third-person plural *ané* when describing some of the scenes:

monasito a ta tocá tambore si ‘the child is playing [her] drum’
changaína cu ma toro si ‘a girl with [her] cow’
ma cedido si ‘[his] pigs’

Given the partial homology between the first person singular subject pronoun *i* and the oblique first person singular pronoun *mi* used in object position and in genitive constructions, many young Palenquero speakers extend *i* to oblique

⁹ There are some attestations of *di/ri* in similar contexts in Escalante (1954) and Friedemann/Patiño Rosselli (1983: 149), perhaps providing a platform upon which contemporary young Palenquero speakers have extended this usage.

contexts, as in *posá ri i* (Pal. *posá mi*) ‘my house,’ *ablá cu i* (Pal. *ablá mi/ablá cu yo*) ‘speak to me,’ *e ma posá i* (Pal. *posá mi*) ‘my house,’ *ele ta chitiá cu i* (Pal. *chitiá mi/cu yo*) ‘he is talking to me,’ *ele a teng ma ngombe que i* (Pal. *que yo*) ‘he has more cows than I have.’ Other young Palenquero speakers reject the use of *yo* in any disjunctive context, despite the fact that fluent native speakers use Palenquero *yo* in this fashion, for example:

yo de cateyano i sabé nu ‘I don’t know anything about Spanish’

yo sí se a ten miero ‘I am really afraid’

foratero que i ta aquí jundo cu yo sabé qué ju’i ta ablá nu ‘outsiders who are here with me don’t know what I am saying’

yo cu bo-ba, cuando i ‘sé bae-ba pa la Bonga ‘You and I, when I went to La Bonga...’

Instead of disjunctive *yo*, many young Palenquero speakers use the circumlocution *i lo que ta akí* ‘I the one who is here,’ in a usage encouraged by at least one of the Palenquero language teachers. Examples from young speakers’ Palenquero include:

ele a miní cu i lo que ta akí ‘He came with me’

bo ta miná i lo que ta akí ‘you are looking at me’

i lo que ta akí criá asina nu ‘I wasn’t raised that way’

An occasional alternative is *lu i*, as in the following examples:

bo a conosé lu i ta aquí ‘you know me’

lu i ten to kusa di Palenge ‘I have all things in Palenque’

lu i ten cuento ‘I have stories’

5.2. COPULAR VERB SELECTION

Palenquero has two copular verbs that combine with predicate nouns, *e/hue* and *sendá*. The form *e* is derived from Spanish *es*, the third person singular present tense form of the copular verb *ser*, and is identical to the pronunciation of this verb in the local varieties of Spanish. *Hue* is derived from Spanish *fue*, the third person singular of the preterite form of *ser* ‘to be’ (and, coincidentally, also of the verb *ir* ‘to go’). In Palenquero the verb *hue* does not always have a past-tense connotation, and in fact the imperfective form *hueba*, formed by the addition of the imperfective morpheme *-ba*, is often used for anterior reference. *Sendá* is also the verb ‘to sit,’ and there are references to this verb being used as a copula

in Afro-Hispanic language from Spain as early as the 16th century (Lipski 1999b: 150-151; 2002: 75). Early accounts of Palenquero (e.g. Friedemann/Patiño Rosselli 1983: 130-131) note no substantive differences in usage among these copulative verbs. However, young Palenquero speakers almost invariably use *sendá*, reserving *hue* for fixed expressions such as *asina hue* ‘that’s how it is’ and occasionally in questions, e.g. *como hue ma apelativo si* ‘what are your (last) names?’ Several young speakers explicitly commented that *hue* “sounds like” a past tense form (being phonetically identical to the aforementioned Spanish preterite), adducing this as a reason for preferring *sendá*. Traditional Palenquero speakers, including some younger community members who learned Palenquero at home, exhibit no reluctance in using copular *hue* with present tense reference. This is another instance of the deliberate choice of Palenquero elements furthest removed from Spanish as part of the Palenquero language revival. A few young Palenquero speakers combine *sendá* with *se* (apparently a contraction of *asé*, used to mark habituality), in a fashion apparently not previously attested¹⁰:

ele a sendá se tatá mi ‘he is my father’

e lo que ta ahí no a sendá se tatá mi ‘he over there is not my father’

This construction is not considered grammatical by fluent speakers, but it illustrates the frequent tendency found among many younger Palenquero speakers, namely the concatenation of Palenquero words felt to be most emblematic of the language (i.e. those least similar to their Spanish counterparts), at times in violation of fundamental Palenquero grammatical structures. Another indication is the mistaken use of the subject pronouns *ané* (3rd person plural) and *enú* (2nd person plural). These are the only Palenquero subject pronouns of transparently extra-Hispanic origin (although the 2nd person singular *bo* (< Sp. *vos*) may not be immediately recognized, since *vos* is not used in the surrounding Spanish dialect. Similarly the 1st person singular subject pronoun *i* is apparently derived from Spanish *mi*, which is a variant occurring in non-subject positions, although Schwegler 2002 claims a Kikongo origin for *i*. Examples of the incorrect use of plural subject pronouns are:

ané [ele] a sendá se mae mi ‘she is my mother’

ané [ele] a sendá tatá mi ‘he is my father’

enú [ele] a sendá moná mi nu ‘he is not my child’

¹⁰ Armin Schwegler (p. c.) suggests that *se* is a semantically bleached form of the deictic *ese*, essentially serving as a definite article.

ané [ele] cuando ta pequeño ‘when he was little’

pero si utere [ané] no tiene trabajo ... ‘but if they don’t have work’

5.3. EXTENSION OF *ANDI*

Another innovation in the “new” Palenquero is the semantic extension of *andi* (< Sp. *(d)onde* ‘where’), normally used as a preposition roughly meaning ‘in the house of’ as in *i tan quelá andi Ramón* ‘I will stay with Ramón.’ Many young Palenquero speakers have extended *andi* to embrace other prepositional functions, creating in effect a portmanteau preposition regarded implicitly as being “true” Palenquero as opposed to Spanish. In young speakers’ Palenquero, *andi* is used redundantly with *posá* ‘house, dwelling’ as in

ele a ta andi posá mi ‘he/she is at my house’

as opposed to the more traditional Palenquero *ele ta posá/casa mi mi* (*andi* is possible but less common among traditional speakers). Other extended uses of *andi* recorded among young Palenquero speakers are:

pueta di posá andi a ta cerá ‘the door of the house is closed’ (*andi* is pleonastic)

ma monasita ta tocá andi alegre ‘the girl is playing happily’ (*andi* is pleonastic)

la sicóloga ta viví andi Barranquilla ‘the psychologist lives in Barranquilla (*andi* = location)

i a te estudiá licenciatura andi etnoeducación cu énfasis andi ciencias sociale ‘I am studying for a college degree in ethnoeducation with emphasis in social sciences’ (*andi* = subject concentration)

persona afro andi Colombia ‘Afro people in Colombia’ (*andi* = location)

i tené un cuaterón di yuca, andi losa mi ‘I have a quarter hectare of yuca on my land’ (*andi* = location)

lo que fue chitiá andi cateyano ‘that is speaking Spanish’ (*andi* = ‘in [a language]’)

i a ten qui chitiá andi cateyano ‘I have to speak in Spanish’ (*andi* = ‘in [a language]’)

ma monasita ta agalá andi ma ngombe / ma changaina ta engalao andi vaca ‘the girl is holding on to a cow’ (*andi* is apparently acting as a transitivity marker)

The extension of Palenquero *andi* is similar to the evolution of *long* in Tok Pisin and *riba* in Papiamentu, although in Palenquero the shift is occurring within a single generation.

6. Conclusions

Due to recent language revitalization efforts and dramatic shifts in community attitudes toward the Palenquero language, young speakers who acquire or extend Palenquero through school and community instruction are engendering numerous changes in the language within a relatively short period of time – usually less than a single generation. These changes include both the extension of previously attested but apparently rare configurations and evident innovations. Although some of the phenomena described for the “new” Palenquero may not coalesce and be transmitted to successive generations of speakers, all have at least general precedents either in the evolution of Romance or in other creole languages. The principal difference lies in the speed with which the changes are occurring, which in turn can be plausibly attributed at least in part to the sudden and quite effective activism behind the language revitalization programs, as well as to the concept of revitalization itself. In a community that can be traversed in its entirety in about half an hour, and where the Palenquero language teachers and other activists are popular figures, the linguistic consequences of pedagogical intervention should not be underestimated. At the same time, the rush to speak Palenquero even by young community members who are not yet – and may never be – fully proficient in the language, increases the likelihood that some of the putative innovations described in the present study will take root. The teachers and other activists are primarily accountable for the decision to (re-)incorporate lexical items felt to be the furthest from Spanish. Responsibility for the semantic and morphological shifts described in the preceding sections lies with the young *lengua* learners themselves, who through a combination of analogy, hyper-correction, and simple over-eagerness to sally forth in a language not yet fully absorbed, are channeling the inevitable processes of language change in directions and with a rapidity that might otherwise not be expected. During the 1960’s disc jockeys on Top 40 radio stations referred to a new song predicted to quickly become popular as a “pick to click.” Within the realm of speech communities in which rapid and often unpredictable changes take place, San Basilio de Palenque is definitely a “pick to click.”

The preceding remarks have focused on the changes occurring in the Palenquero language as young community members seek to recover an ancestral language that had been scheduled for extinction. Staggering under the weight of mockery and discrimination, the community of San Basilio de Palenque came within a hair’s breadth of losing a language born in the struggle against oppression and preserved for more than three hundred years as a testimony to the triumph of the original *cimarrones*. Joni Mitchell, whose musical career began around the time of the first dire predictions about the future of Palenquero, sang

“Don’t it always seem to go, that you don’t know what you’ve got ‘til it’s gone”¹¹. Speakers of the Palenquero language have narrowly avoided having to sing the same words, and in doing so have remade their ancestral language in ways that reinforce the emblematic differences with respect to Spanish. In some instances these innovations stem from incomplete acquisition of traditional Palenquero, while at other times young Palenqueros are consciously and deliberately participating in the creation of a language suited to their new self-image. Language change in San Basilio de Palenque is the latest episode in a community that has beaten the odds of cultural extinction for more than three centuries, validating its claim to be *El Primer Pueblo Libre de América*.

¹¹ Joni Mitchell, “Big yellow taxi,” from the album *Ladies of the Canyon* (Warner Brothers/Reprise RS 6376, 1970). Lyrics ©1969 by Siquomb Publishing.

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