
The Revitalization of an Endangered 'Whistle' Language in La Gomera Schools

Eliane Rubinstein-Avila*¹

¹University of Arizona – États-Unis

Résumé

My paper presentation, for **Strand 2 (Social implications)**, will focus on addressing the following question, suggested under this particular strand:

How **can** researchers in applied linguistics contribute to the recognition of minority languages **as they** collaborate with different actors in the field (families, schools, etc.)?

My paper focuses on a school district-wide language revitalization program of an ancient and endangered *whistle* language in the island of La Gomera, in the Canary Islands Archipelago. The language, which predates the Spanish colonization, is known as *El silbo Gomero* [The whistle of Gomera]. In 2009 UNESCO added *El silbo* (for short) to its intangible cultural heritage list which brought a great deal of international attention to this otherwise little-known phenomenon—especially from the media. Scholars in the field of minority language revitalization agree that there are two essential purposes: improve the status of the language and increase the number of speakers (Elosua, 2016). While a version of this particular revitalization program started to be implemented in La Gomera about two decades ago, the program is currently compulsory from Kindergarten to middle school—in the 14 schools across the island, and a few experimental classes at the high school level. Elosua (2016) observes that investing in the revitalization of minority languages through compulsory education is an important step to reaching the two main purposes, mentioned above.

My presentation, based on ethnographic data that I collected in two primary schools in La Gomera (2015), will include issues around linguistic and cultural ideology, situational language policy, activism and planning, curriculum development, and classroom teaching strategies. In sum, my paper will include the highlights and challenges I found, from the points of view of various stakeholders: students, teachers, monitors, parents, and district administrators. The paper raises particular issues of collaboration (and/or lack thereof) between language revitalization programs and researchers in applied linguistics. As Penfield and Tucker (2011) have stated clearly: "making any revitalization activities possible takes teamwork and a lot of mutual understanding between community insiders and outsiders" (p. 294).

References

- Elosua, P. (2016). Minority language revitalization and educational assessment: Do language-related factors impact performance? *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 20(2), 2016: 212–228
- Penfield S. D. & B.V. Tucker (2011). From documenting to revitalizing an endangered language: where do applied linguists fit? *Language and Education*, 25(4), 291–305.

*Intervenant