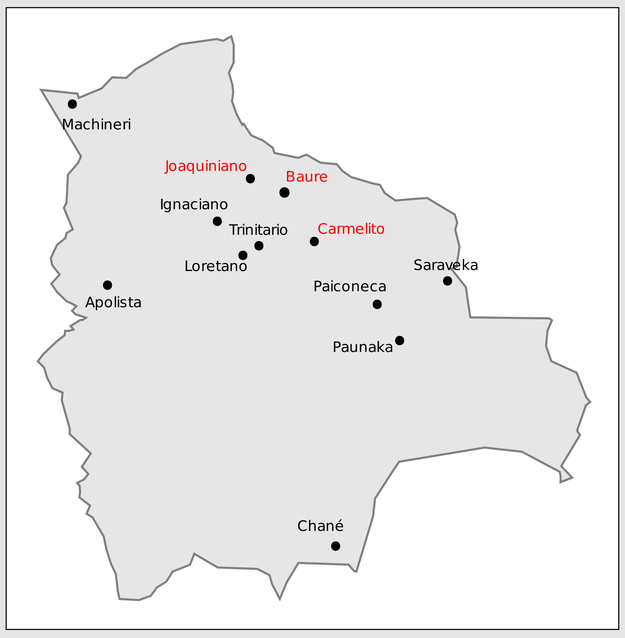
Baure

The Documentation of Baure
A language of the Bolivian Amazonia

Baure is a critically endangered language spoken in the Bolivian Amazonia. It belongs to the Southern branch of the Arawakan language family and is further subdivided into three dialects, all named after the place where they used to be spoken: Baure, Carmelito, and Joaquiniano.

Arawakan
- South- and South-Western Arawakan
  - South Arawakan
    - **Baure language group**
      - Baure (critically endangered, 56 speakers)
      - Carmelito (critically endangered, 4 speakers)
      - Joaquiniano (extinct, 4 semi-speakers)

Figure: The Baure languages



The Arawakan languages of Bolivia (Baure language group in red)

The speakers of Baure are all bilingual in Baure and Spanish, the dominant language in the region. According to the census carried out by the project team in 2009, 56 people claim to have an active knowledge of the language, of which only 17 can be considered fluent speakers. All but one of the 17 speakers are more than 70 years old. Active transmission of both the language as well as particular cultural practices have been interrupted since the 1950s and 1960s, when the political climate in Bolivia was extremely hostile to indigenous languages. Today, the Baure language is scarcely used in daily life. Although a few speakers do speak Baure to each other in conversations, there are usually Spanish monolinguals around, including their own children, and Spanish is preferred.

Baure speakers and their daily activities a. in a canoe, b. weaving a hammock, c. knitting a fishing net, d. making thread

However, in recent years, a growing attention for indigenous cultures can be noticed in Bolivia. For Baure, there have been several attempts to develop a revitalization program and the Baure documentation team supports local initiatives of revitalization with all possible means.

Baures is situated at the Río Negro, navigable only in the rainy season (for exchange with Brazil)

Main goals of the project

- collection of as much audio and video data as possible, representing male and female Baure speakers of all ages and dialects
- transcription and morphosyntactic analysis of the data, accessible in the DoBeS archive
- analysis of the existing Carmelito and Joaquiniano data and comparison with historical Baure
- PhD research on traditional concepts of illness and healing methods of the Baure
- PhD research on the expression of Baure spatial relations
- MA thesis on Baure classifier system
- MA thesis on plant taxonomy
- support of local initiatives for language revitalization and assistance in elaborating materials for the community

The Machetero dance at the annual festival

Baure teaching materials

In collaboration with the local schools, several revitalization projects have been undertaken, such as the translation of the official school report into Baure and a poster presentation on Baure at the annual school fair. One of the most significant contributions to the possible revitalization of the Baure language is the publication of the course book *Shi vikarow to vekori - Libro de enseñanza del idioma baure* (funded by the Foundation for Endangered Languages, the Alice Cozzi Heritage Language Foundation and the Gobierno Municipal Autónomo de Concepción de Baures).

In Bolivia, indigenous language teaching in schools is promoted, but unfortunately none of the Baure teachers is a native speaker, and no teaching materials were available. In the elaboration of the course book, it has been taken into account that the teachers are actually learners themselves and apart from an exercise book, a teacher's manual was produced. The latter contains the answers to the exercises, homework suggestions, an elaborate description of the Baure grammar, and an audio CD, on which the audio fragments for the exercises are recorded, along with songs and a story in Baure.

Materials produced for the language community

- Baure story book: *Chinepinev - Cuentos de los Baure*, 2010
- Baure course book with CD: *Shi vikarow to vekori - Libro de enseñanza del idioma baure*, 2012
- Baure memory game (funded by the Endangered Language Fund)
- Baure speakers' census: poster exhibited at the local cultural centre
- Baure digital vocabulary trainer: available at the project's website
- Joaquiniano digital dictionary: available at the project's website
- Carmelito book on culture and language: *El Carmen del Iténez - Monografía de un Pueblo Beniano*, 2011

Core research team

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Chicha (fermented maize drink) is made for special occasions and an important cultural element in Baures

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