

An isolated language of lowland Bolivia

Movima is one of the so-called “isolated” languages of southern Amazonia: it does not seem to be genetically related to any other language.



Herlan Rojas (right), a major contributor to our archive, speaking Movima with a friend at his kitchen table. (Photo S. Beuse, 2010)

A language of a former Jesuit mission

Movima is spoken in and around Santa Ana del Yacuma, a former Jesuit mission, in lowland Bolivia (Beni department). Movima is in permanent contact with Spanish, the dominant language of the region, and this has put the language in serious danger of disappearing. There are still a few hundred Movima speakers, most over 60 years old. They all speak Spanish, and the younger generations speak Spanish only.



Movima “Machetero” dancers during the procession for Santa Ana on the 26th of July. (Photo K. Haude, 2006)



The statues of Santa Ana, her husband San Joaquín and her daughter Santa María entering the church at the patronal fiesta on the 26th of July. (Photo K. Haude, 2007)

Cultural identity

A major goal of the project is to collect material that reflects the Movima feeling for identity. What is the cultural identity based on, if the documented history starts with the arrival of the Jesuits and nothing is known about the precolonial culture?

The Movimas are faithful Catholics and strongly believe in the powers of their patron saint, Santa Ana. Every year on Saint Anne's day (26th of July), the village fiesta takes place, where the Movimas show the essentials of what represents their identity: they dress up in their traditional costumes and proudly speak their language – even those who do not do so in daily life.



Cándida Chonore making a water jug. Like the language, also traditional handicraft is getting lost. (Photo S. Beuse, 2010)

Revitalization efforts

During the last ten years, the younger generations have become acutely aware of the loss of their linguistic inheritance. Many initiatives have started since to learn and teach the language, e.g. by creating Movima texts for schoolbooks. Our project has provided grammatical material that helps teachers to prepare their classes.

Team

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Griselda Cáumol, a Movima speaker who contributed a lot to our archive. (Photo S. Beuse, 2006)

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Movima speakers, from left to right: Jovina Amblo, Modesta Gualusna (her daughter), Etelvina Gualusna (her niece), Elias Ovaes (a visitor). (Photo S. Beuse, 2006)