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# In between *loss* and *rescue*: challenges of the Pemón in the border Venezuela-Brasil

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## Frontera Venezuela - Brasil

### Legenda

- Pais
- Ciudades fronterizas
- Asentamiento indigena
- Línea fronteriza
- Carretera Troncal 10
- Carretera BR-174

Proyección: UTM – Mercator  
Coordenadas geográficas:  
Latitud: 4°36'8.14"N  
Longitud: 61°6'36.9"O



PhD project: “Linguistic ideologies and multilingual practices in the border...”

Focus: Santa Elena de Uairén-Manak-Krü.

Local discourse about the Taurepán in the border context (perspective from the *criollos* and the *pemón*).



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## **Pemón Town**

Community Manak-Krü

Subgroup: Taurepán.

Population: 4.200 habitants.



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## Pemón Town

- Indigenous town of caribbean linguistic filiation. It has 3 regional subgroups: arekuna, kamarakoto y taurepán.
- They mainly inhabit the Gran Sabana region, in the southeast of Venezuela. According to the last census, there are 30.148 pemón (INE 2011).
- 1930-: protestant missionaries, and then, catholic missionaries (capuchinos).
- **Tándem Estado-Iglesia** (s. XX): bordering (VE-BR), nationalization, christianización and hispanization.
- 1970-: higher terrestrial conectivity, higher “domestic migration”. Mining activities. Border networking. Tourism.



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## Pemón language

- Dialectal varieties: arekuna, kamarakoto y taurepán.
- Identity negotiation element against the non-indigenous, with a chance of community cohesion (Angosto 2013, Romero 2003).
- (relative) functional displacement of the language
- **Revitalization:** In recent years people have been working in the unification of the ortography for the Pemón language and the development of tools for intercultural teaching (p.ej. Guía Pedagógica... 2001)



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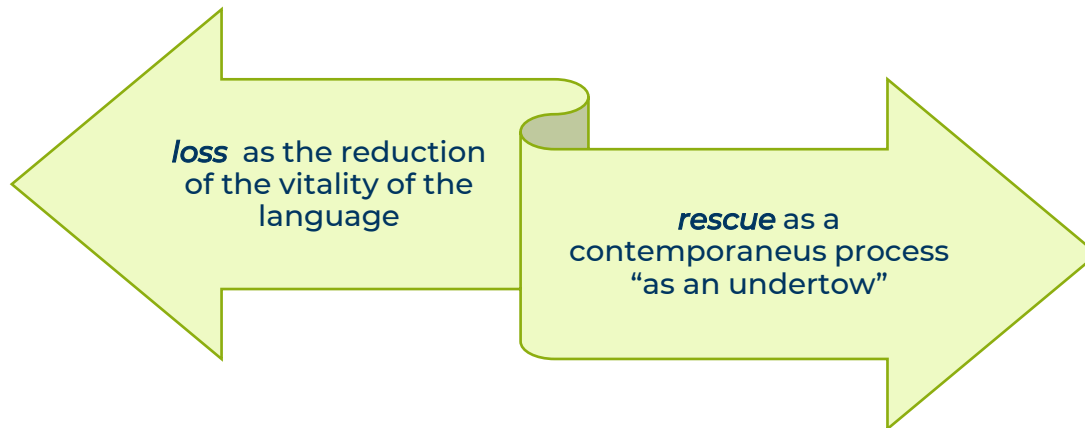
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# The pemón-taurepán on the border VE-BR

Dichotomy *loss-rescue* as an explicative notion, per se.





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## **Dichotomy loss-rescue**

### **“criollas” Perspectives (Santa Elena)**

- **“Loss” as a decontextualized phenomenon (abstracted from the historic relationships of inequality with the national society and as an “election”). *E.g.*:**

“the indigenous are not speaking permón... they are losing their culture” (SE6, Pos. 224);

“they are losing their culture, you heard me? They are leaving that behind” (SE6, Pos. 234);

“here, in the town, we are losing what once was the taurepán [...] because they do not speak it” (SE3, Pos. 34)



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## **Dichotomy loss-rescue**

### **“criollas” Perspectives (Santa Elena)**

- The “Other” esencialized ethnic (unchangeable identity and language-essence) and the “rescue” as prescription. *E.g.:*

“Me in particular, I encourage them to speak their language, because when you loose your dialect... you loose the essence, you loose a part of yourself... I tell them that for them it is vital, as an indigenous community, to learn, and keep their language” (SE4, Pos. 126).

“[the language] it’s an ancestral part that cannot be lost” (SE3, Pos. 36).





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## **Dichotomy loss-rescue**

### Pemón Perspectives (Manak-Krü)

- *Loss as a lost social practice* (functional progressive displacement of the language):

“The taurepán... not a lot... The kids that are growing up do not speak it, not even their parents speak it... The parents speak it when they meet up with the elders or people from other communities... But they do not really speak it” (SE8, Pos. 50)



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## Dichotomy loss-rescue

### Pemón Perspectives (Manak-Krü)

- *Loss as a rupture in the transmission against the linguistic marginalization* (familiar linguistic policy):

“*[My dad]* saw that the non-indigenous would make fun of him, and even underestimated, they would say “he doesn’t know how to speak”, “I don’t know what he says”, meaning, they had the indigenous one on the bottom. And that’s it... one of the reasons for which my dad decided not to teach us the language, because he felt that if he taught us, our Spanish was going to be broken, and so we would be made fun of” (SE2, Pos. 13)



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# Dichotomy loss-rescue

## Pemón Perspectives (Manak-Krü)

- *Loss as an efecto of contact and penetration of exogenous elements :*

“Regretting it a lot, as we have been invaded from the outside stuff...even our dance that is called *parichará* we *don't dance it, because we have been invaded the different music modalities... now-a-days, men do not care*” (SE8, Pos. 52).



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# Dichotomy loss-rescue

## Pemón Perspectives (Manak-Krü)

- Maintenance of intra-community interactions (overall the elders) and intercommunity Taurepán.
- Agency of the bilingual speaker: Taurepán's visibilization in social media.
- School: *rescue* as rescuing/promoting traditional practices and how to formally teach “indigenous languages”.



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## Challenges...

1. Keep making visible and problematizing the historic inequalities and the processes that drove/ are driving the linguistic displacement.
2. Keep fighting to obtain authoritative guarantees in the fulfillment of their rights (e.g., linguistic/education) in a situation of crisis.
3. Support and dispute the essentializing and prescriptivist discourses that make an exoticized, unchangeable, and ahistorical canon of the indigenous people and the Pemón language (Autonomy upon the election of their life and their future).



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## Challenges...

4. Encourage/consolidate the multimodal approximations in learning (literacy + cooperative learning, based on activities, shapes of ancestral orality, etc.).
5. Create the conditions for Pemón's teaching to a high level (way past the "introductory" visión and the literacy of the school) Or in a predominant monolingual environment.
6. Expand the teaching of the language to the adults ("relearning" and neo-speakers) and appreciating the receptive multilingualism and the dynamic, multisituated, multilingual practices, where the indigenous language is still a part of the communicative local repertoire.



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**Thanks for your attention!**