**Language Policy and Language Rights – The Movement in Guyana**

In 2016, the "Languages of Guyana: Theory, Policy and Practice in Education and Beyond" colloquium at the University of Guyana (UG) unleashed a spate of language rights-related activities in the public and at the university.

The emergence of the Guyanese Languages Unit (GLU) at Guyana's sole national university has brought to the forefront language rights and linguistic equality within the context of Guyana’s nine Amer-indigenous languages – three of which are seriously endangered or moribund (Carib, Lokodian and Warrau) – and the relationship between these and the national lingua franca, Creolese, and the inherited European official language, English.

The GLU, standing upon the principles enshrined in the Charter for Language Policy and Language Rights in the Creole-speaking Caribbean, has positioned itself to challenge colonial deficit perspectives (Saville-Troika) and the linguicidal dangers perpetrated by notions of the appropriateness of English-only education. To this end, there has been a burst of campaigning and public-information activities with instructive responses in the media and from officialdom.

There is a small but significant effort to institutionalise the push for the indigenous languages of Guyana (inclusive of Creolese) to be used formally in public domains dominated by the state. This push continues to gain strength from a collaboration with the University of the West Indies.

A full 15-week course, "Exploring Guyanese Creole", is now offered at UG. The university, through the GLU, has also lent its support to the Lokono villages of Region 2, who through the voices of their Toshaos have indicated their desire to revitalise their heritage language, Lokodian. Consequently, a project for inclusion of Lokodian in the schools in Lokono-dominated villages in Region 2 is in the very early planning stages. Also significant is the fact that the Department of Language and Cultural Studies last semester introduced a course in Wapichan.

Quite apart from the recent activities at UG, and several years prior, was the marathon pioneering work done by the Makushi Research Unit and Makushi teachers supported by CIDA and the Guyana Book Foundation. Makushi primers, a Makushi dictionary and teaching aids were produced at Bina Hill Youth Learning Centre through a series of Makushi Language Workshops. A bilingual policy resolution drafted by teachers was subsequently presented to the then Minister of Education.

More recently, community activists in Region 9 campaigned for the rights of Wapichan children and this has led to the Quality Bilingual Education Programme in Wapichan in three schools in Region 9.

All these activities have been buttressed by the UN’s declaration of 2019 as the International Year of Indigenous Languages. It is to be expected that the complex ethno-political realities of Guyana will eventually become part of the general discourse about native Guyanese languages. Our conversations are also expected to examine the link between indigenous languages and indigenous knowledge, and how communities might seek to extend the ethical and legal rights associated with the latter to the former. Here again, the above-mentioned Charter will become of crucial importance.

In the thinking and talking about knowledge, one of the most important discussion points manifests as a kind of 'politico-epistemological conflict' for want of a better term. According to some views, indigenous languages merely transmit indigenous knowledge; in the other view, the languages themselves are forms of indigenous knowledge (Devonish). We look forward to vibrant conversations and explorations.

By Charlene Wilkinson and Vanda Radzik