Buffett Undergraduate Research Fellowship Opportunity

Revitalizing Palenquero: Current Language Initiatives in San Basilio de Palenque

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Project Synopsis: This project aims to document the current revitalization process of the Palenquero language spoken in the community of San Basilio de Palenque, Colombia. Palenquero is a Spanish-based creole with linguistic features from the Kikongo language of Africa (Granda, 1971; Schwegler & Correa, 2018). Beginning in the 20th century, the use of Palenquero declined due to discrimination, as community members stopped transmitting the language to younger generations. However, attitudes have since changed. UNESCO has declared Palenque a World Heritage Site, the Colombian government has invested in tourism and infrastructure, and many tourists and scholars now visit the community. As a result, Palenquero is currently taught from preschool through secondary school. Despite these efforts, reports indicate that pedagogical practices and frameworks have not fully met their intended goals. The language is still not frequently spoken by young people—whether at home, school, or in other community contexts. Consequently, emerging grammatical innovations by younger speakers do not entirely align with fluent adult usage and are not widely accepted by fluent adult speakers (Lipski, 2014; Cassiani Obeso, 2021, 2022).

Thus, the purpose of this research is to investigate the current initiatives undertaken by community members to revitalize the language and to share effective educational strategies for teaching Palenquero, particularly since Palenque's designation as a municipality.

Project Term: Summer and Academic Year 2026

Project Location: Hybrid**,** off campus in Columbia

Job Description: The project will have two parts:
1. Conducting interviews with community members about current initiatives to revitalize the language. For this, we will interview community leaders, directors and teachers at the local school, as well as parents. In addition, we will compile documents that provide information about the revitalization process.
2. Organizing a workshop to share educational strategies for improving the teaching of the Palenquero language.

Before the trip, the selected student will:

1. Meet with the professor for an orientation, during which they will learn about the purpose of the trip, research goals, community history, and norms.
2. Compile a collection of strategies and best practices for teaching a second language, including interactive and communicative activities for beginners to teach basic grammar.
3. Help design the questions for the sociolinguistic interviews with community members.

During the trip:

1. Spend the first two days getting introduced to the community, meeting its members, and visiting key locations in town.
2. In the first week, we will conduct sociolinguistic interviews in Spanish, each lasting approximately 30 minutes. Our goal is to interview 50 participants (25 adults and 25 young speakers).
3. Collect written documents and archives related to language revitalization.
4. Conduct school observations, teaching demonstrations, and teacher training.

After the trip, the selected student will:

1. Assist with data organization and transcription.
2. Write a report on their research goals and experiences.
3. Give a presentation at an event hosted by the Spanish Club in the Spanish and Portuguese Department.
4. Co-author a paper presenting the findings of the research.

Special skills required: Proficiency in Spanish, a background in teaching, and strong skills in technology and transcription.

Time Commitment: This project offers flexible hours for preparing before the trip and completing the initial steps. After the trip, students will also have flexibility in finishing their tasks. Students are expected to work 22 hours per week (total = 44 hours) during the Columbia trip.

Number of available positions: Two