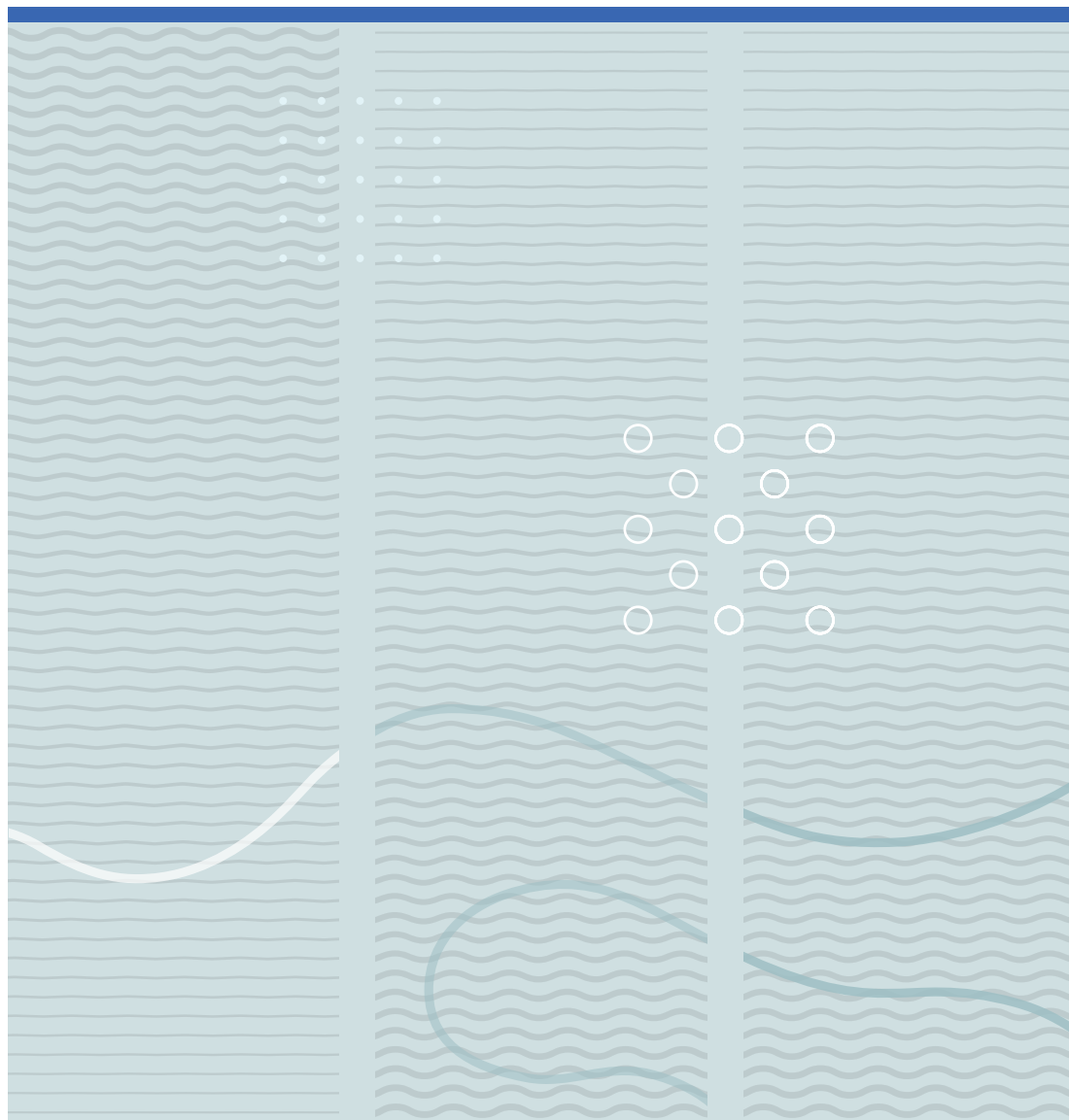


Israel Ramon Zelaya

# Using a multimodal approach to empower Nicaraguan Rama schoolchildren to learn and use their ethnic language





Israel Ramon Zelaya

**Using a multimodal approach to empower  
Nicaraguan Rama schoolchildren to learn  
and use their ethnic language**

A PhD dissertation in  
**Pedagogical resources and learning processes in  
kindergarten and school**

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Zelaya: Using a multimodal approach to empower Nicaraguan Rama schoolchildren to learn and use their ethnic language

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## **Dedication**

To Jesus of Nazareth, my role model as man and as a teacher.

To Dolores Zelaya, my great-grandmother who could neither read nor write, but inspired me to learn how to read.

To Maya Helfenstein who trusted me and encouraged me to go and study higher education and become a teacher.

To the Rama teachers who struggle for the preservation of their ethnic language.

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## **Abstract**

Historically, the Rama people, one of the three remaining indigenous groups of Nicaragua, have suffered political and cultural oppression, which has resulted in the severe endangerment of their language. So far, several studies have been carried out on the description, documentation and sociolinguistic analysis of this language. Teaching materials have been produced; however, owing to the complicated sociolinguistic situation and because the Ramas have no literary tradition, one of the problems that linguists have faced when trying to revitalize this language has been the illiteracy level in the area. This dissertation explores the implementation of a social semiotic multimodal approach to the revitalization of this language. Furthermore, this method takes into account pedagogic principles of Freire and Montessori to structure a model that allows illiterate teachers of the language or those with little or no formal training to integrate children into sessions where critical reflection through creative art can enhance the revitalization of the ethnic language. This dissertation describes the model that we call the Rama Language Workshops where art and language learning are integrated through a series of steps departing from a reflection on a theme related to children's reality, which in turn is transformed into a visual representation. Later, the teacher of the ethnic language can use this visual representation as a prompt to teach the ethnic language. With this study, I expect to contribute to the efforts of the revitalization of this language in two ways. First, I want to present a practical approach to the teachers of the Rama community, so that they can implement it regardless of their lack of formal training as teachers. Second, I want to present evidence for the academic community that a social semiotic multimodal approach combined with pedagogic principles of Freire and Montessori can be functional in the revitalization of an endangered language.

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**Keywords:**

Ethnic group, freedom, generative themes, language revitalization, multimodality, oppression, participation, pedagogy, Rama language, social semiotic, sociolinguistics

## Abbreviations

bE:	blueEnergy (Environmentalist Non-governmental Organization)
CIDCA:	Centro de Investigaciones y Documentación de la Costa Atlántica (Center for Research and Documentation of the Atlantic Coast).
FADCANIC:	Fundación para la Autonomía y el Desarrollo de la Costa Atlántica de Nicaragua (Foundation for the Autonomy and Development of the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua).
GTR-K:	Gobierno Territorial Rama y Kriol (Rama and Kriol Territorial Government).
INEC:	Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas y Censos (National Institute of Statistics and Census)
INIFOM:	Instituto Nicaragüense de Fomento Municipal (National Institute for Municipal Development)
MINED	Ministerio de Educación (Ministry of Education)
PAR:	Participant Action Research
RAAN:	North Atlantic Autonomous Region
RAAS:	South Atlantic Autonomous Region
RLP:	Rama Language Project
RLW:	Rama Language Workshops
URACCAN:	Universidad de las Regiones Autónomas de la Costa Caribe Nicaragüense (University of the Autonomous Regions of the Nicaraguan Caribbean Coast)



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## 1 Chapter: Introduction

The Rama language is one of the seven languages spoken in Nicaragua and it is one of the four living indigenous languages; all of which are located in the Caribbean Region of the country (Salamanca, 1984). All of these indigenous languages are minority languages, the ethnic groups that speak them having a population of over several thousand people, with at least several hundred speakers of their ethnic languages, except for the Ramas (See Table 2 in Chapter 2). The Rama language is in a very special situation: it has very few speakers, most them over sixty years and illiterate (except for one), no school teacher speaks the language and no child is learning it at home. Therefore the language is to be classified as severely endangered according to the UNESCO Ad Hoc Expert Group (2003). A recent sociolinguistic study of the language (Pivot, 2014) and of its revitalization dynamics has categorized this process as post-vernacular (Shandler, 2004); i.e. revitalization that does not aim at reestablishing everyday communication but rather a link between the Rama people and their ethnic and cultural heritage, through work with the last speakers.

This dissertation describes and discusses my project to test out a multimodal didactic approach to support the revitalization of this minority and severely endangered indigenous language of Nicaragua. As a departing point for this study, I considered three aspects. The first was the current situation of the on-going process to revitalize the language through the Rama Language Project active since the 80ies. The second was the teaching competence of the people who struggle to revitalize this language, focusing in my study on an illiterate native speaker who took the initiative of teaching it in her isolated community, and the third was the interest of the local population to learn this language.

It would have been difficult to implement this project without understanding the current situation of the language. A language revitalization project might be associated with language teaching programs, which in turn, seems to be related to the teaching of

mainstreams languages such as English and other European languages which have centuries of literary tradition. Contrary to that, in the case of endangered indigenous languages, we have to pay attention initially to the limited knowledge that existed about the language and the high rate of illiteracy in this population, plus the interests of the local people (Hinton, 2001; Reyhner, 1997; Schneider, 2011). In view of this situation, it was essential to consider the current sociolinguistic situation of the community and the language in question before considering implementing an approach that could be appropriate for the revitalization of this language.

I took into account from the start the teaching potential of the people who actually can speak the language to design a strategy that would work for them. Teaching mainstream languages in the school demands a level of professional competence; however, the situation becomes complicated when the native speaker who is interested in teaching her language is illiterate— therefore, without formal training as a teacher— and lives in a very isolated community with very limited resources. It was clear that such a situation required that the approach used in the implementation of the project be easy to understand and practical in its application.

Finally, the approach chosen had to be able to draw the interest of the local children population. Because, if the method could get the children engaged in a learning activity, it could provide them with real motivation to be part of the project and hence learn some Rama. That is why, to carry out this research project, I found inspiration in the work of a collective of artists from my home town of Estelí in the eastern part of Nicaragua and their practical way to implement a pedagogical approach particularly appropriate for working with children and adolescents. These artists call themselves muralists, and together with school children and adolescents, paint fresco-like paintings on public spaces that they called murals. I was interested in how these muralists planned their work through Mural Workshops during which involved the children in the planning and preparation phases for the painting of the mural. With these ideas in mind, I looked for a theme for this research project that encompassed its purpose.

## 1.1 Theme of the thesis

The consideration of the three aspects above lead me to consider that I needed an approach that could empower the local people to learn and use some of the Rama language. To this end, I aimed at integrating elements of multimodality (Kress, 2000, 2008; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006; Newfield, 2014) that I consider are part of the essence of the Mural Workshop methodology. Furthermore, because the organization of the workshops is aimed at fostering interaction with the children and at encouraging them to analyze their surrounding environment, in order to produce visual compositions expressing their interpretation of their reality, I was interested in testing the possibility of considering the pedagogical principles that underpin epistemologically the pedagogical approaches of Freire (Freire, 1967, 1970, 1979) and Montessori (Montessori, 1914, 1918, 1949). On the basis of all these considerations, I thought of the theme of this thesis as a project that would combine them all: the issue of revitalizing an ethnic language, by empowering children to learn and use it, through a particular multimodal method. Therefore the title I chose for it is **“Using a multimodal approach to empower Nicaraguan Rama children to learn and use their ethnic language”** as the theme for this thesis.

## 1.2 Problem statement

Language loss is not a new phenomenon, and its causes are manifold (Crystal, 2000; Tsunoda, 2005); It has become a central concern of linguists dedicated to the description and documentation of little to unknown endangered languages increasingly in recent years. As a response to the global awareness about language loss (Costa, 2015a), field linguists have also proposed a number of programs to respond to demands for the revitalization of endangered languages (Grenoble, 2013). Although, while language revitalization is clearly related to the teaching of these endangered languages, it is essential to understand that “teaching [a given] language is generally not enough to



revitalize it; in general, programs need to address the underlying causes of language shift” (2013, p. 792). The latter is an important consideration to be considered for the revitalization of an ethnic language like Rama.

The Rama people live in a multi-ethnic and multilingual region of Nicaragua, and in the midst of discussion for the autonomy of that region in the 80ies, the Rama language became an essential symbol of identity for the Rama people (Craig, 1992b). But Rama, the same as a multitude of minority languages around the world, is threatened with extinction (Hale et al., 1992). For years, their language was regarded as such a low-prestige language that it was even called a *‘tiger language’*, spoken by jungle people supposedly *‘tiger people’* or people with no culture (Craig, 1987c). As a result, many people abandoned it and started using Kriol<sup>1</sup> and Spanish; thus, by the early 1900s, there were only a few dozens of speakers. Today the number has been reduced to less than twenty (Grinevald, 2005b; Koskinen, 2006). Although there have been many attempts to implement a bilingual and intercultural program in the region, one of the problems related to the educational situation in the area has been the implementation of a Spanish-oriented education model, the Rama language continues to be on the verge of disappearance.

This situation has led me to ponder about a project to contribute to the efforts to revitalize the Rama language, associating myself to the efforts of the Rama Language Project which has developed valuable information about the language in terms of grammar study, dictionary production and sets of booklets produced to prove that the Rama language still existed and that it was a legitimate real language. However, it is important to consider that this formal linguistic work of documentation and description of this Rama *‘ancestral moribund language’* (Grinevald 2005) is not directly helpful for the revitalization of the language. Some educational materials to help teach Rama to

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<sup>1</sup> **Kriol** is the way Nicaraguan Caribbean Coast people write “Creole.”

school children were actually produced, independently of the work of the RLP, by a Norwegian Sami volunteer, Juliana Balto who lived on the island of Rama Cay for two years (Balto, 2004). This material has been used by some school teachers of Rama Cay to learn some Rama themselves and to teach it to children. But these materials are of little use for the last speakers who live in isolated mainland communities like Bangkukuk Taik and who want to teach their language. They never saw this material but in any case it would not be very useful to them since these last speakers are all illiterate. In addition, according to research on this language (see Chapter 2), no child is learning the language at home. So, even though officially Rama is taught in the Rama territory, the existing curriculum is only used on the island of Rama Cay occasionally and by literate school teachers, but it is of no use for the illiterate speakers who wants to teach it in the isolated mainland Rama settlement of Bangkukuk Taik. In a scenario like this, I state my research problem as follow:

*To what extent can a social-semiotic multimodal approach to language revitalization be relevant to empower teachers and youth of the Rama community to maintain and develop the symbolic value of the Rama language?*

### **1.3 Research questions**

The following research project analyzes the relevance of a multimodal approach in the context of the revitalization of the Rama language. Nevertheless, it is essential to state that since the language has no communicative use, for the Ramas the importance of the language resides in its symbolic value as a marker of identity. Therefore, this project attempts to shed light on the possible advantages that the use of a multimodal approach can offer the teachers of Rama who struggle with little resources and no pedagogic training to prevent the vanishing of their “treasure language.” For a comprehensible operationalization of the above research problem, I have set the following research questions:

1. How is the Rama language taught in the school?
2. Why coding and decoding generative themes are processes of semiosis and mobility across modes?
3. What is the contribution of a multimodal approach to the revitalization of Rama?

Once, I have introduced the problem and the corresponding research questions; I would like to turn my attention to present the Mural Workshops Method. This is an element which I have adapted for the specific conditions of a Rama community like that of Bangkukuk Taik, which will be recurrent throughout this study, since it is the basis for the method that I follow to implement what I call in this study, the Rama Language Workshops.

#### **1.4 The mural workshops: Inspiration for a multimodal approach to language revitalization**

The Mural Workshop, as presented in this dissertation, is a methodology born in Nicaragua to work with children to develop their artistic expression (Centeno Scott, 2004; García Blandón, Castilblanco García, & Bolinches, 2004; Pavone & Hopewell, 1999). The founders of this approach took their artistic inspiration from the tradition of the Mexican muralists whose greatest exponents were Diego Rivera, David Alfaro Siqueiros and Clemente Orozco, known as Los Tres Grandes (Conrad, 1995).<sup>2</sup> Since the artistic tradition of these great artists presents the influence of two artistic styles cubism and primitivism, the impact of these styles is also visible in the artistic tradition of the Nicaraguan muralism although the Nicaraguans develop their own artistic identity

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<sup>2</sup> David Conrad presents how murals functions as a form of democratic art and education.

(Kunzle, 1995<sup>3</sup>; Prendeville, 2000). Since the Mural Workshops were created to provide artistic education to children; muralist also designed a method to teach the techniques to paint murals. In this regard, the Nicaraguan muralists adopted pedagogical principles which, in my opinion, can be related to the educational principles of both Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) and Montessori's approach to work with children (1918)— two approaches that I shall present in Chapter 3.

In the mural workshops, the children painted murals. A mural in simple words is a fresco-like painting, which Nicaraguan muralists define as "a work of art painted on a public wall. The work of art must express the feeling and thinking of those who painted it" (Moreno Aguirre, 2004, p. 7). I would like to underscore that a mural is a particular genre that, besides its collective and contextualized nature, is based on the following three elements: artistic tradition, socio-political context, and educational principles. In this regard, a mural is much more than a piece of work expressing the personal inspiration of an artist in that it has a social function. It conveys a message at transmitting social values in those people who observe and appreciate the murals, as well as in those who have painted them (the participants in a Mural Workshop). A mural aims to present proposals to the community which is facing social local problems and looks for ways to solve them. In addition, a mural also beautifies the local community with a painting accessible to the general public (Moreno Aguirre, 2004, p. 7).

Within the context of this dissertation, the aim of the workshops that we implemented with the Rama children was not to actually paint murals but to create collective art following the same procedures and principles of the Mural Workshops. As it happens, the Mural Workshop as a method has been a matter of personal interest since the year

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<sup>3</sup> David Kunzle surveys and analyzes the murals of Nicaragua during the period between 1979 and 1992, a period known as the revolutionary epoch. Kunzle is, so far, the only author who has systematically documented the Nicaraguan murals and introduced them as a form of democratic and revolutionary art.

2000 and one of academic study since 2009 when I started my master studies in the former Høgskolen I Vestfold (Zelaya, 2011). In this Master's thesis, I built on different theories on semiotic and education (e.g. Halliday, 1978; Halliday & Hasan, 1985; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006; Selander, 2003) to explicate that Nicaraguan murals are multimodal educational texts. Now, in this dissertation, I focus on the implementation of the workshops by analyzing the different steps that the participants of these workshops have to follow to arrive at the production of visual compositions *in support of language revitalization activities*.

#### 1.4.1 The double purpose of the workshops dissertation

There are two different approaches to these workshops, as I conceive them, that I present and discuss in this dissertation. The first considers their practical component as encompassing five simple steps that any teacher can implement in a classroom with little resources (I shall describe these steps in Chapter 4). The other approach to the workshops methodology is the possibility to analyze and frame them from an epistemological perspective. On the basis on these two approaches, I claim two purposes for the use of the workshops in this dissertation.

The first purpose is to use a practical methodology which Rama teachers can reproduce later with their students. This methodology that I use in my work with the children of the Rama territory is, in principle, the same as the one used by muralists. We follow the same principles (see the Five Principles below) and procedures (See Chapter 4), even though in the end we do not paint any mural, but produce instead smaller collective compositions.

I shall state that my particular interest in using the Mural Workshops to work with the Rama children is because this methodology takes into account steps to work with children that are vulnerable either because of their family's economic limitations or the social exclusion they suffer, which result in a disadvantage to access the system of

education. Knowing that children who live in rural communities also face this type of problems,<sup>4</sup> I thought about the possibility of implementing this method with the Rama children. My interest in the workshops resides in the method's straightforward and practical steps to develop critical thinking. In these workshops, children analyze and discuss social problems that affect their lives and their communities. They are encouraged to examine, discuss and then paint whatever their conclusions and interpretation of their reality might be. The goal of the Mural Workshops is that children can propose themes for discussion on the basis of their individual artistic production that later become a collective composition.

The process does not stop with the actual drawing of that collective composition since these compositions are then used in the Rama language class when the teacher uses them as visual prompts to practice the language. The use of visual prompts in language teaching has been a common practice. Language teaching books contain a diversity of illustrations related to the language content to be taught. These images are mostly the product of professional artists who usually follow guidelines established by the authors of the book. Likewise, fieldwork linguists use drawings and other visual prompts to elicit language from monolingual speakers of undocumented languages.

The second purpose of the inclusion of the Mural Workshop method is an academic component whose epistemology I base on the educational theories of Montessori and Freire. These two approaches can be used to discuss and analyze the pedagogic implications of the workshops in the lives of children. Moreover, given that children interact with each other as they produce visual images, I shall complement this analysis with a social semiotic multimodal insight into the process of transforming a verbal theme into visual images. Later, these visual images shall be used as visual prompts to

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<sup>4</sup> Newspapers usually present reports about the situation of poverty of the communities in the countryside of Nicaragua.

practice the ethnic language (Halliday, 1993; Kress, 2000; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001, 2006; Newfield, 2014; Newfield & Maungedzo, 2006). Furthermore, I decided to implement workshops to produce visual art with the Rama children because of the success that I have seen in the mural workshops in Estelí. Their approach is now being implemented in school classroom as an alternative method to generate discussion and reflection (García Blandón et al., 2004). Therefore, I have seen in the workshops the potential to orchestrate debate and analyze the different processes that take place in a workshop from a multimodal perspective (Bourne & Jewitt, 2003).

These two purposes fulfill two goals that I have for this dissertation. The first is to present an academic analysis which can be of interest to the academic community. The second is to give the Rama a product that can be useful for them in their daily work in the communities as they continue to revitalize their language.

#### 1.4.2 The principles of the Mural Workshops

According to Pavone and Hopewell (1999), five principles constitute the core of the Mural Workshops. The first principle in the workshop is associated with “a relationship of mutual respect among the children and between the children and the teachers” (Pavone & Hopewell, 1999, p. 36). In a conversation with one of the muralists of Estelí, he asserted that this principle is crucial when it comes to reducing the distance between educators and children (J. Moreno, personal communication, June 2010).

The second principle is a sound premise for the accomplishment of the third principle below. It has to do with “the setting up of an ordered space which provides conditions for collective work with the materials that are conducive to self-learning” (Pavone & Hopewell, 1999, p. 36). In the workshops, the instructors place the materials on the floor, near the place where the children work. In this way, they can share or request anything they need from their partners or the educators in charge of the group (cf. García Blandón et al., 2004).

The third principle of the Mural Workshops respond to the necessity of an operational part to implement that activity itself and achieve our educational objectives satisfactorily; hence:

The third is based on the teaching technique that encourages collective work and participation. The teacher and the children do everything together, research, planning, painting, and evaluation, exploring the techniques for all aspects of the painting or the murals, which respond to the concept of learning as discovery with the guidance and encouragement of the teachers (Pavone & Hopewell, 1999, p. 36).

In the case of the workshops, the third principle points at teaching techniques, which encourages cooperation among participants. The teaching technics in the workshops vary from demonstrative methods to experimentation. Educators in the Murals Workshops encourage dialog and reflection to foster collective work and participation (cf. Centeno Scott, 2004; García Blandón et al., 2004; García Peralta, Martínez, & Centeno, 2004; Maldonado, Sarantes Marín, García Peralta, & Martínez, 2004; Triminio Colindres, 2004).

The fourth principle of the mural workshops emphasizes the importance of children's social and historical context as the content for their paintings. Pavone and Hopewell underscore the importance of the contextualization of the themes for a mural saying:

The content of the themes, which are the source of the images that the children paint. It is based on the real history of Nicaragua and its revolution, Latin American literature, art and music and children's rights, especially, on their right to who they are and their right to make art (Pavone & Hopewell, 1999, pp. 36–37).

In the mural workshops, children start their analysis by reading about history, by watching a documentary, reading a poem, a legend or by only discussing an important



issue that is relevant to the community. It is important to remark that any material, which is used as a source of inspiration, must be of interest for the country, local society or any group of interest for the muralists (cf Centeno Scott, 2004).

The fifth and final principle represents the culmination of the reflections and discussions in the mural workshops and has to do with “the collective production of murals designed and painted by the children. The murals establish a visual relationship with society, and the valorization of this art by the community is then reflected in the children” (Pavone & Hopewell, 1999, p. 37). From this last principle, we can see that the ultimate purpose of the workshops is not just to paint a final product, in this case, a mural. As the carrier of a social message, it also points at the establishment of a relationship with the public to deliver its message.

### 1.4.3 Organization of the workshops

As a methodology to work with working children, the Mural Workshops had to adopt a new form of organization to cope with the lifestyle of those children. For instance, the organizers determined to implement an “open enrollment policy” (Pavone & Hopewell, 1999, p. 22). The center of interest and the ultimate purpose of the Workshops was the artistic and critical training of children and adolescents who could not afford to pay a school of art. In the words of Pavone and Hopewell this “policy is based on the children's lives, which are very unstable, and on our desire to make the workshops as accessible as possible (1999, p. 23).

The Mural Workshops are also described as a place where the democratic participation should be emphasized. In each Mural Workshop, participation is a right of each child and teen regardless gender and social class. Each participant is encouraged to share material, ideas, and experiences in the use of the different techniques. The importance of sharing is because in the Mural Workshops learning is the result of discovery (Pavone & Hopewell, 1999).

Because of the differences of ages and gender in the attendance to the workshops, educator needed to organize the children into three different groups classified by age and experience in the use of materials and drawing techniques. These groups take their name from the three primary colors which are the colors that children use when painting: red, yellow and blue. Each color represents a level where red is for beginners and blue for the more advanced.

After having explained my interest and my purpose in adopting the Mural Workshop method in my project; then I shall now explain my interest in the Rama language of Nicaragua.

## **1.5 My interests in the Rama language and my initial contact with the language**

As a native Nicaraguan from the North Central Region of Nicaragua (see Central Region in 2.1 ), I am sensitive to the situation of language loss. The diverse languages that were spoken where I grew up disappeared because their speakers were decimated by the new diseases in the continent, and the hard work in the gold mines. Additionally, the colonial government imposed Spanish the language of the colonial power (Arellano, 1997; Guido Martínez, 2008; Kinloch Tijerino, 2008; Romero Vargas, 2003). As a result, we lost our native languages (Kühl Aráuz, 2010), although those languages remain in the substratum of the Spanish spoken in the region (Mantica, 2007) and in the place names (Incer Barquero, 1985). In this part of the country, it is no longer possible to reverse the situation, but it is possible to contribute to the preservation of the languages still spoken in the country.

Additionally, while living abroad, people who do not know me and learn about my native language, always wonder if I am from Spain, as people very often connect a language with a nation (see identity in Chapter 3), and I feel the need to explain I am from Nicaragua. So, to some extent, I understand the necessity of the Rama people who feel

the need to speak their ethnic language to identify themselves as members of the Rama ethnic group in a multicultural, multiethnic and multilingual region.

Because of the above, I thought that I could contribute to the maintenance of the smallest language in the country and started my search for information about the language. I found the RLP's website called "Turkulka"<sup>5</sup> where I found the information about the linguists and anthropologist involved in the project. I also found the publications and the first bibliographic references about previous research about the language and the language itself. With this information in my hands, moved forward to establishing the first contact with the linguists Colette Grinevald and the Rama Language Project and consequently with members of the Rama community.

## **1.6 Organization of this dissertation**

I have organized this thesis into seven chapters. Following the current chapter, Chapter 2 presents an overview of the Rama people as one of the ethnic groups of Nicaragua. This section briefly describes some historical and geographical aspects of the Caribbean Region of Nicaragua and provides an insight into how these issues have affected the Rama people negatively and subsequently, the vitality of the Rama language. The chapter also explains the sociolinguistic situation of the language and its meaning for the Rama people. In the final section, Chapter 2 describes briefly the efforts that Rama Language Project (or RLP) and other academics together with Rama speakers have done to keep the language alive.

Chapter 3 presents the multidisciplinary theoretical perspective that underpins this study. First, the chapter introduces the pedagogical method of Freire and Montessori, which constitute the educational perspective that frames the Rama Language

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<sup>5</sup> See footnote on page 3.

Workshops. This chapter also presents elements of Social Semiotic Multimodality, which provides the elements of analysis of the semiotic processes which takes place in the Rama Language Workshops.

Chapter 4 describes the method used to carry out this research. It outlines the procedures and presents the epistemological frame for the analysis, which uses elements of Participatory Action Research with inspiration in Freire's philosophy on education. It also describes the elements of social semiotic multimodality used in the analysis representation and communication.

Chapter 5 analyzes the data collected during fieldwork in the Rama Territory. It provides background information about the Rama culture and their way of life, which contextualizes the multimodal analysis of data gathered in the Rama Language Workshops. Chapter 6 discusses and interprets the findings of this research work. This chapter addresses the problem statement by answering the research questions proposed in 1.3 of the current chapter.

Finally, Chapter 7 summarizes the purposes and findings of this research project. This section also lists the limitations and describes the problems faced during the implementation of the study. Furthermore, the chapter states the contribution of this investigation and mentions possibilities for further research.

## **2 Chapter: The Rama Language Project: A contextualization of the revitalization of the Rama language**

### **2.1 Introduction**

The Rama people are one of three ethnic groups who live in the Caribbean Region of Nicaragua, specifically in the southern part of the South Atlantic Autonomous Region of Nicaragua or RAAS<sup>6</sup>. The origins of the Rama and when they arrived in the region of the Caribbean Coast of Nicaragua are still under debate. However, because of their language's genetic affiliation (as we will see later in this chapter), it is commonly believed that they arrived in Nicaragua from South America (Kühl Aráuz, 2010; Zapata Webb, 2007). Today, the Rama people have shifted from using the ethnic language, Rama, to Creole or Kriol English, although there are still some speakers of Rama who are struggling at present to revitalize their ethnic language with the help of sociolinguists, anthropologists and historians participating in the Rama Language Project.

This chapter takes a closer look at the context in which the RLP was born, and describes some of the specifics of working with speakers of a very endangered language to revitalize their language. The primary purpose of the chapter is to help the reader understand the geographic, cultural and linguistic context in which this study was carried out. Therefore, I have divided this chapter into five different sections. Section 1 offers a brief description of the complex linguistic reality in the American continent and situates the Rama language in one of the families of languages of South America. Section 2 gives a general overview of the geography and history of Nicaragua and describes the special

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<sup>6</sup> See Map 3.

geographical and historical conditions of the area where this research took place. Section 3 explains the origins and work of the RLP with the Rama people. It provides insight into the sociolinguistic situation of the Rama, their isolated conditions and their place in the social, cultural and linguistic map of the country. Section 4 situates this research project within the efforts done by the RLP to revitalize the Rama language. It offers a description of the terrain where the fieldwork took place and explains how the project contributes to efforts to revitalize a severely endangered language. Finally, Section 5 presents some reflections about the special conditions to be considered in the revitalization of a post-vernacular language or a language no longer used in daily communication.

## **2.2 Rama as one of the indigenous languages of the Americas**

### **2.2.1 The indigenous languages of the Americas**

It is estimated that approximately one thousand languages are spoken in the Americas<sup>7</sup>. It is about half the number of the languages of Africa, but what makes the situation special in the Americas is the high number of language families and language stocks, numbered at around one hundred and fifty-seven, when compared to the rest of the world with the six families of Europe, the ten of the whole of Asia and the twenty of Africa.

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<sup>7</sup> Exact figures still seem to differ from author to author. E.g., Ethnologue (Lewis, Simons, & Fennig, 2015) lists one thousand and sixty-two languages in the continent

Zelaya: Using a multimodal approach to empower Nicaraguan Rama schoolchildren to learn and use their ethnic language

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Table 1 below shows the figures where we can see how fragmented the continent is in terms of language families.

**Table 1. World distribution of languages and families<sup>8</sup> (Figures from Nettle and Romaine, 2000, p. 37)**

Continent	Languages	Families	avg. no. of language/families
Europe	209	6	34.8
South and S.E. Asia	1400	10	140
Africa	1995	20	99.7
Australia	234	15	15.6
<b>Americas</b>			
North America	230	50	4.6
Mesoamerica	300	14	21.4
South America	419	93	4.5
<b>Total Americas</b>	<b>945</b>	<b>157</b>	

This high number of language families in the Americas, which means extreme linguistic diversity, is actually due to the high number of language isolates, that is to say, families with just one isolated language with no parent language. One can find in Latin America

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<sup>8</sup> Stocks in the original.

large families, like the Oto-Manguean family of Mexico with over one hundred languages, and countries with many isolates, like Colombia with nine isolates. As many languages have not been described yet, a number remain unclassified to this date. The largest language is Quechua, in the Andes of South America, with estimates of twelve million speakers at most, but the majority are much smaller languages, like in Amazonia where most have just a few hundred speakers as a norm (L. Campbell, 1997), as in the Carib language family (Grinevald, 1998, p. 132).

The languages of the American continent have proved a formidable challenge for linguists because of their phonetic, morphological and syntactic characteristics since early linguistic work was done comparing these languages with the European ones (cf. Boas, 1911)<sup>9</sup>. In the Americas, the early study and documentation of indigenous languages during the colonial period had, in particular, an instrumental purpose (that of the transmission of the catechetical doctrines by missionaries) and the point of comparison was Latin and European colonial languages, primarily Spanish (Craig, 2000).

### 2.2.2 Rama as a language of the Intermediate Area

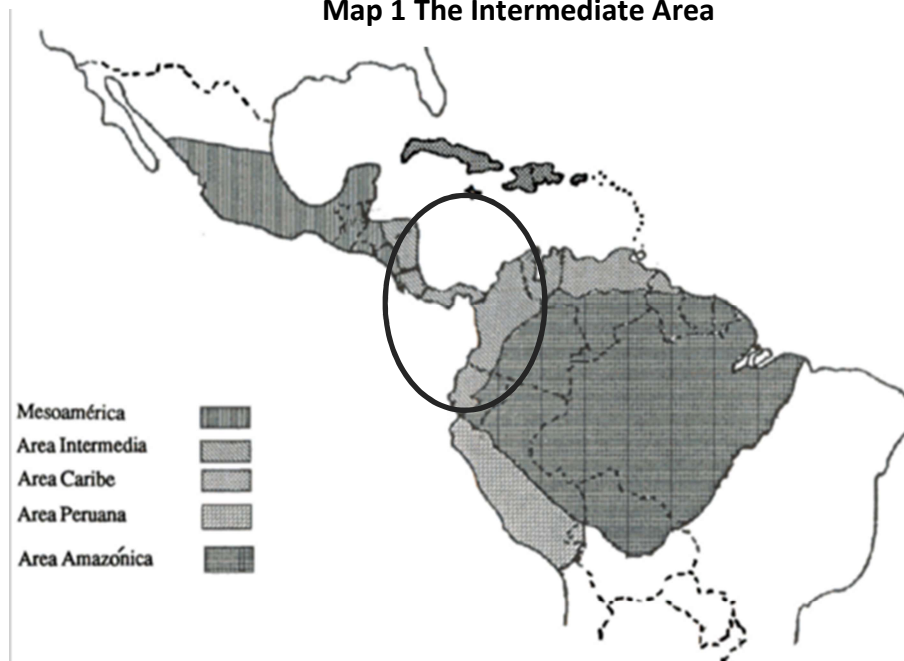
The Rama language belongs to one of the language families of the **Intermediate Area** of the Americas, a region that stretches from the Mesoamerican Area (South half of Mexico and Central America) to the Peruvian (Andean) and the Amazonia Areas to the South, and surrounded by the Carib Area (Constenla Umaña, 1991, p. 5 f.) as shown in Map 1 on the next page.

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<sup>9</sup> This book is a dated reference, which offers an account of some of the limitations linguists had when studying languages.



**Map 1 The Intermediate Area**

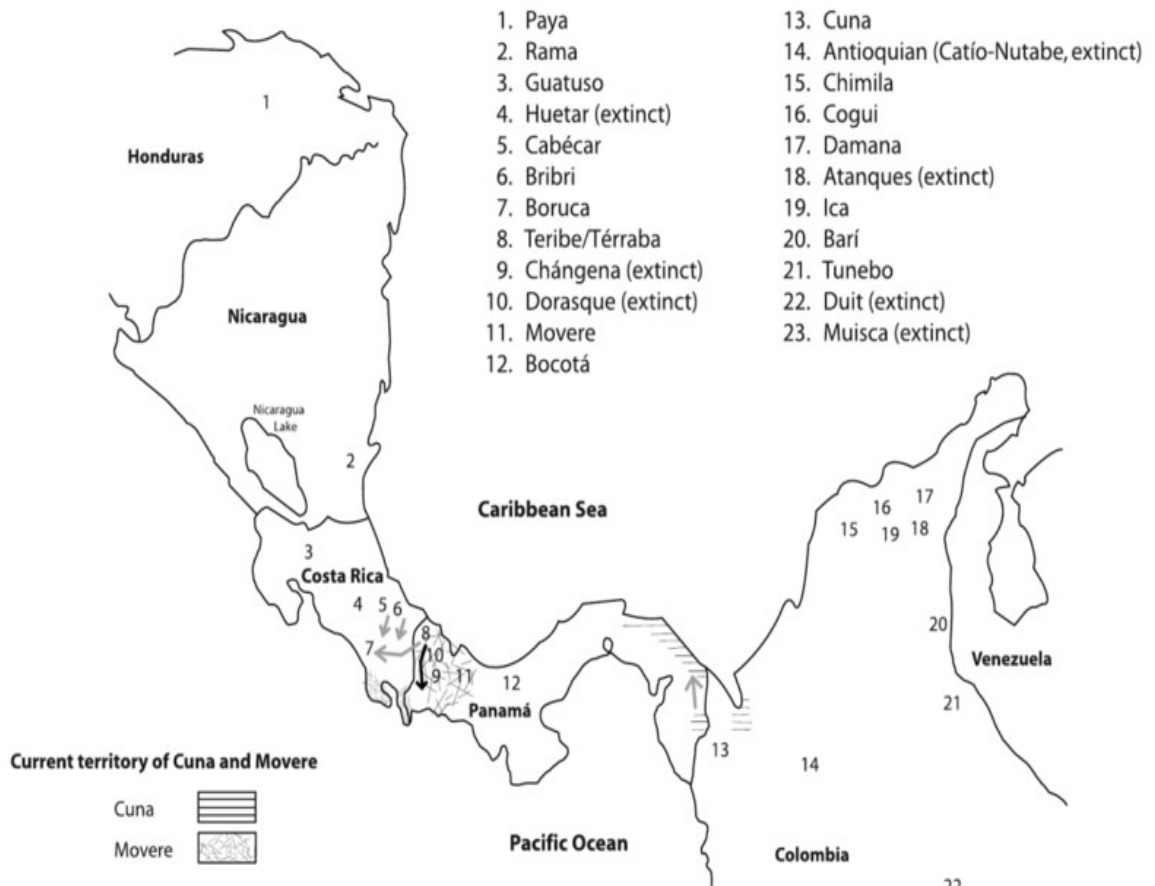


This area was only recently identified as an independent cultural, linguistic, and geographical area of the continent, the term 'Intermediate Area' being coined by Haberland (1957, p. 156). The notion of Intermediate Area, as mentioned by Constenla (1991, p. 1), specialist of this linguistic area and specifically of the Chibchan family of languages, is of special importance in the contextualization of the Rama language and establish its genetic affiliation with the languages of South America (cf. L. Campbell, 1997, p. 175).

### 2.2.3 Rama as a language of the Chibchan family

As already said, Rama belongs to the Chibchan family of languages, the major family of languages of the Intermediate Area. This family is found in territory stretching from the west coast of Honduras, to the north, through Nicaragua, Costa Rica and Panama, all the way to the northern territories of Colombia in the south (Constenla Umaña, 1991), as shown in Map 2, below.

**Map 2. Distribution of the Chibchan family (Constela Umaña 1991, p. 4)**



As seen in this map, the Rama language (2) is the only Chibchan language in Nicaragua. There is one language located further north, the only one in Honduras, called Paya (Pech). The latter is also endangered with less than 600 speakers (Holt, 1999).

Diagram 1 below shows the genetic relations of the twenty-three Chibchan languages. Once again, we can see in this diagram the language diversity common to the American continent.

**Diagram 1. The Chibchan Language Family**

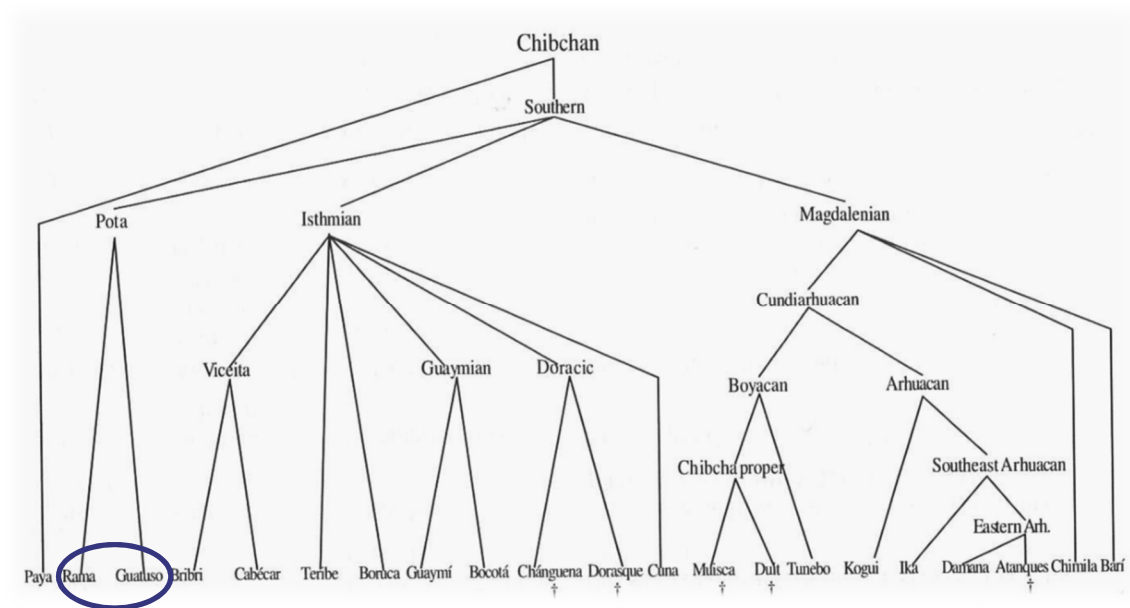


Diagram taken from (Quesada & D., 2007)

Within the Chibchan family, Rama is said to be the closest to Guatuso from Costa Rica, also known as Malécu, although recent fieldwork on both languages has not shown many similarities between the two languages (Pivot & Chevrier, 2013; Chevrier p.c.). It is interesting to note also that several languages of that family are marked as already extinct (with the cross symbol). Here we can see that language endangerment and language extinction has been common in the Americas, Rama itself being a very endangered language.

## 2.3 Nicaragua: A brief glance at its history and geo-demographic characteristics

This section briefly describes some general geographic and demographic characteristics of Nicaragua, considering first the division of the country into three main regions and outlining second the different histories of its two coasts under Spanish and British influence in order to situate Rama in the zone of British influence.

### 2.3.1 The three natural regions of Nicaragua

Geographically, Nicaragua is divided into three natural regions: 1) Pacific, 2) Central, and 3) Atlantic or the Caribbean<sup>10</sup>. Administratively, the Republic of Nicaragua is divided into fifteen departments (provinces) and two autonomous regions. The Rama people live in the Caribbean Region in the South Autonomous Region.

#### **Pacific Region**

The region designated the Pacific is the land along the Pacific coast which stretches out to the edge of the central mountainous massif. This region is known for the following geographical features: a chain of volcanoes, two large lakes (Cocibolca and Xolotlan)<sup>11</sup> and sunny beaches that are the major tourist destinations of the country. The capital of the country, Managua, and other major colonial towns like Granada and León are located in this region. Of all the regions of the country, this is the most documented in historical registers given that the first encounter between a Spanish commander and an indigenous chief took place in the Isthmus of Rivas, home to Nicarao, one of the most

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<sup>10</sup> Nicaraguan texts and people use the terms Atlantic or Caribbean as synonyms. However, the term Caribbean is more accepted given that the two designations take their names from the ocean and the sea nearby.

<sup>11</sup>The indigenous names, still in use, for lakes Nicaragua and Managua.

famous indigenous chiefs of the country and from whom the land takes its name. The territory under Nicarao's control spread across the border including today's Costa Rican province of Guanacaste. The presence of Spanish chroniclers of the Indies in the territory, such as Fernando de Oviedo, made possible the early documentation of the people who lived in the area and the events that took place during the colonial period. The region also gained importance for the Spaniards because of the founding of the two towns of León and Granada by Hernández de Córdoba in 1524.

### **The Central Region**

The Central Region occupies Nicaragua's central mountainous massif. The western part of this region was also part of the Spanish territory in colonial times. Because of the rugged geography and areas of marshland in the valleys, the road system built by Spaniards in the central area was not as extensive as in the Pacific, although there were many important settlements used to exploit rich gold and silver mines in the region.

This area has remained largely under-documented in comparison with the documentation of the Pacific Region. The most comprehensive and complete historical and geographical overview of this region is found in the relatively recent monographic series by the Nicaraguan historians Julian Guerrero and Lola Soriano (1966, 1967, 1969, 1971).

### **The Caribbean Region**

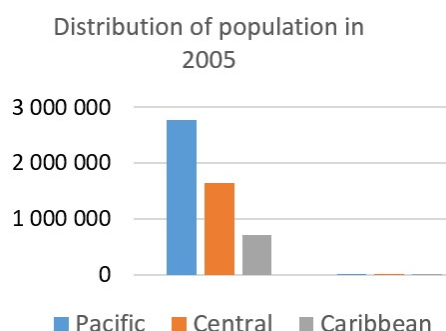
The third region of Nicaragua, where the Rama live, is known as the Caribbean or Atlantic Region of Nicaragua. It occupies the lowland plains between the eastern edge of the mountainous range and the Caribbean Sea. It is the most underdeveloped region of the country and the least populated. Because of the large extensions of rainforest and swampy terrain, the road infrastructure in the whole Caribbean Region is precarious. The region is composed of two autonomous regions known as the North Atlantic

Autonomous Region or RAAN and the South Atlantic or RAAS<sup>12</sup>. Each region has a capital and an autonomous government: Bilwi (at five hundred and thirty-six kilometers from Managua) is the capital of the northern region and Bluefields the capital of the southern. Bluefields is located in the coastal zone of the lagoon of the same name (connected with the Caribbean Sea) at three hundred and eighty kilometers from Managua (INIFOM, 2015).

Although these two autonomous regions represent 47% of the national territory, their population is approximately 716, 236 people. This makes them form the least populated area of Nicaragua, as Table 2 from INEC<sup>13</sup> indicates below, showing the proportion of the population by region from 2005, where the regions in the Caribbean represent only 14% of the population.

**Table 2 Distribution of the population of Nicaragua by regions in 2005**

Region	Inhabitants	%
Pacific	2 778 257	54,03
Central	1 647 605	32,04
Caribbean	716 236	13,93
TOTAL	5 142 098	100



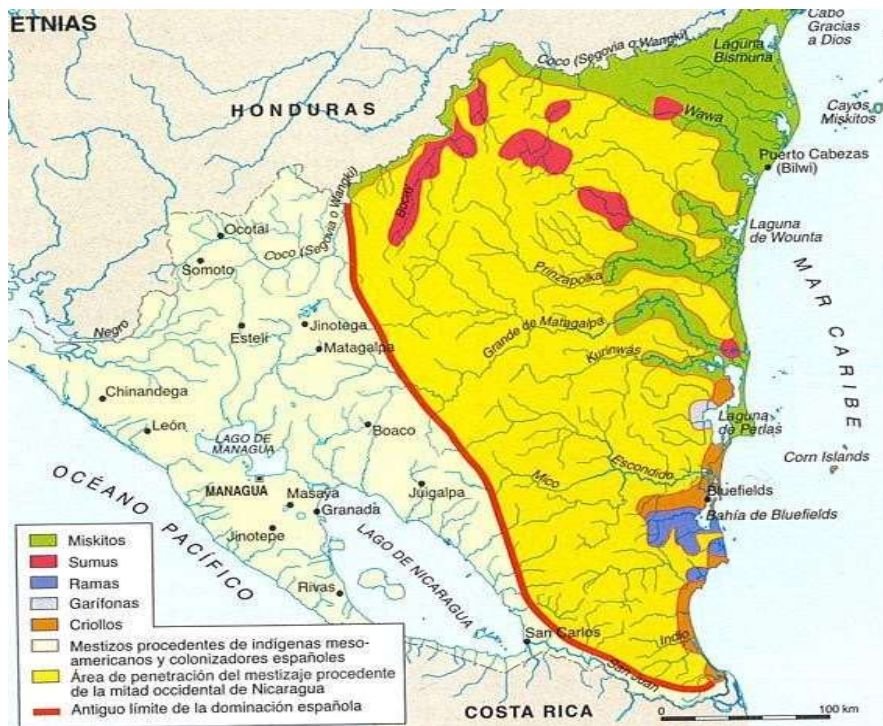
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<sup>12</sup> RAAN stands for Región Autónoma del Atlántico Norte and RAAS for Región Autónoma del Atlántico Sur.

<sup>13</sup> INEC stands for the Nicaraguan Institute of Statistics and Census, the Nicaraguan counterpart to the Norwegian Folkeregisteret. The figures shown in Table 2 are taken from INEC's national census of 2005.

The major characteristic of these autonomous regions is the coexistence of a number of indigenous peoples maintaining their cultures and languages: Miskitu<sup>14</sup>, Sumu (Mayangna and Ulwas), Garifuna (of African descent), Creole (Kriol) and Rama, as shown in Map 3 below.

**Map 3. Demographic and linguistic map of the Caribbean<sup>15</sup>**



In contrast to the situation in the Caribbean Coast, the cultural and linguistic mosaic in the Central-Pacific region of Nicaragua disappeared during the three hundred years of the colonial regime (Salamanca, 2013b). The Matagalpas were the last indigenous people of the Central Region (my birthplace) to keep their tribal language and identity.

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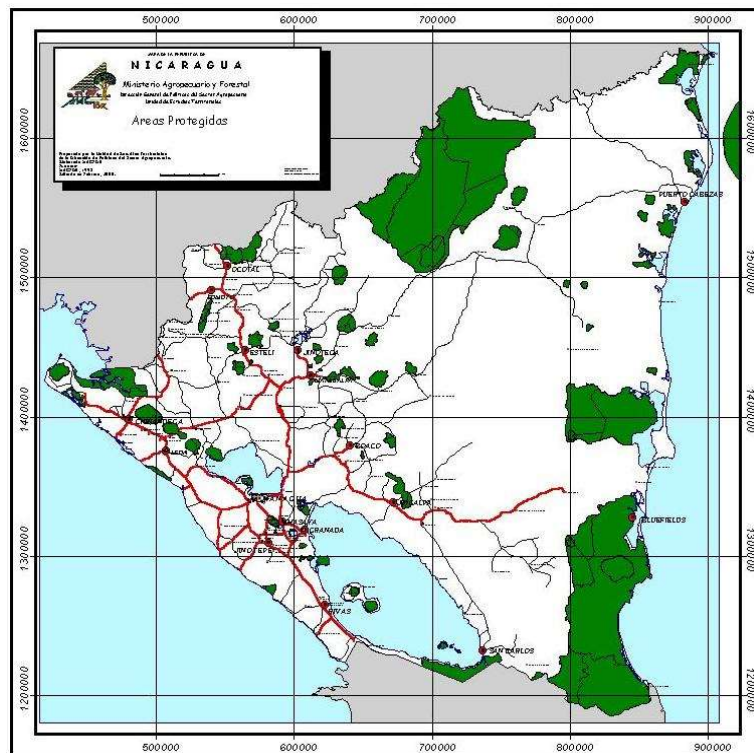
<sup>14</sup> In this chapter, I use Miskitu to refer to the language of the Miskito people. Both spellings are used in the literature. The language originally has only three vowels: a, i, u; thus, Miskito is a result of linguistic borrowing from Spanish and English.

<sup>15</sup> The red line marks the old territorial limit of the Spanish colony.

Their language survived until the 1960s among a few families who still used it as their home language. Nevertheless, the other groups, such as the Chorotegas, Nicaraos, Maribios, and Subtiavas, were decimated, and their surviving descendants lost their languages and tribal identities much earlier.

Different peoples of the Caribbean Coast share territories, productive practices, and cultural and linguistic relations, and some of them inhabit areas of the greatest biodiversity, which are recognized as such by the internationally protected status assigned to them. In Map 4, below, the green areas represent the protected areas in Nicaragua showing that the area occupied by the Rama is the largest protected natural area in the South Caribbean Region, and the second-largest protected area of the country.

**Map 4 - Protected Areas of Nicaragua<sup>16</sup>**



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<sup>16</sup> Map of public dominion, published by the Nicaraguan Agroforestry Ministry



Very little information existed about the population of the Caribbean Coast before the 1980s. One of the early studies by CIDCA<sup>17</sup>, produced in 1982, provides the numbers given in Table 3 below. Its figures are mostly interesting in terms of the proportions of the different populations, showing the Rama as the smallest community by far. Although it shows the Rama language as the ethnic language of the Rama, it is important to know that there were very few speakers of Rama left (as described in 3.2 below), the population having shifted to the English-based Creole (Kriol) of the Kriol population. The same is true of the Garifuna population which now speak Creole (Kriol).

**Table 3. Ethnic groups and associated languages with language families of the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua (CIDCA 1982)**

<b>Ethnic group</b>	<b>Population</b>	<b>Languages</b>	<b>Linguistic affiliation</b>
Mestizos	182377	Spanish	Indo-European
Creoles	25723	English/ MCC	Caribbean English Creole
Miskitu	66994	Miskitu	Misumalpan
Sumo	4851	Sumu	Misumalpan
Garifuna	8487	Garifuna	Arawakan
<b>Rama</b>	<b>649</b>	<b>Rama</b>	<b>Chibchan</b>

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<sup>17</sup> CIDCA stands for the Centro de Investigaciones y Documentación de la Costa Atlántica [Center for research and documentation of the Atlantic Coast]. CIDCA is an autonomous and public institution under the National Counsel for Higher Education (CNES in its Spanish acronym), created in 1982 (Government of Nicaragua 1982) with offices in the Caribbean Coast and a joint center at the Universidad Centro Americana [The Central American University or UCA in its Spanish acronym] in Managua. The center has organized research in the Caribbean Region since its creation.

Comparative table taken from (Grinevald, 2005c, p. 200)

Most important to note in this study is its inclusion, for the first time, of a reference to the Rama, by far the smallest and least-known community in the region. All these groups continue coexisting today, all with increasing numbers.

The new figures for the RAAN and RAAS given in Table 4 below comes from the 2005 census. They are based on a survey of the people who clearly identified themselves as belonging to one of the ethnic groups located in the RAAN and RAAS and not of the entire national territory. Note that this table does not reflect the figures for the mestizo population which has been located in the Pacific and Central regions.

**Table 4: Indigenous population and Afro-descendant of the Caribbean Coast in 2005 (Pivot-2013)**

Origen	Ethnic groups (RAAN+RAAS)	2005 <sup>18</sup>
Pre-Columbian	Miskitu	111 963
	Sumu/Mayangna/Ulwa	15 206
	<b>Rama</b>	<b>1 996</b>
Afro-descendant	Creole	38 604
	Garifuna	2 669
Total		170 428

These more recent figures confirm that the Rama group remains the smallest in comparison to the other ethnic groups in the region, while the mestizo population, not included in Table 4, now represents 72% of the population of both regions, which means an increasing dominance of the Spanish language.

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<sup>18</sup> Data taken from the Nicaraguan Institute of Statistics and Census INEC in 2005.

### 2.3.2 History: The Spanish and the British territories of Nicaragua

Spanish colonial power never took control of the Caribbean part of the country because the Central Region, especially a large area towards the Caribbean lowland plains, was defended by the Miskitus. However, the Miskitus established alliances with the Dutch and English pirates who preyed on Spanish galleons transporting gold to Europe. They also attacked Spanish settlements far away from the coast, but not far from the Coco River, a navigable river used as the primary access to the interior of Nicaragua. The alliance between the Miskitus and the British was institutionalized into a Miskito kingdom in 1687 (Minahan, 2013, pp. 245-247). Most of today's RAAN and RAAS was a British protectorate and was ruled by a self-governing Miskito monarchy until the eighteenth century. In 1860, the indigenous leaders summoned an assembly to dissolve the monarchy and created the Mosquitia Reservation. It is not until the late 1800s that this region was Appendixed to Nicaragua by the Treaty of Zelaya<sup>19</sup>.

In 1905, Great Britain recognized the sovereignty of Nicaragua and the latter accepted the territorial rights of indigenous people. That was the departing point in the demand for self-determination and autonomy, but it was not the end of alienation and political instability. The ethnic groups of the Caribbean Coast were more recently involved in armed struggles against central Nicaraguan power, first against the Somoza government in 1967-1972 and 1974-1979, and later in the civil war against the Sandinista government, known as the Contra war, from 1980 to 1990.

It is important to mention that in the context of the British presence in the Caribbean of Nicaragua, a new group of people, apart from the already mentioned indigenous groups, were established in the region. These were African slaves who escaped from a shipwreck; another group of African-Caribbean people were freed slaves who arrived

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<sup>19</sup> José Santos Zelaya was the president of Nicaragua from 1894 through 1909 (Guido Martínez, 2008; Romero Vargas, 1996)

from Jamaica between the 1600s and 1700s. The relationships formed between this African-Caribbean community and the native population resulted in the group known today as Creole or Kriol (as the Nicaraguan members of this group prefer). Because of their contact with English-speaking slave owners, the African-Caribbean community developed a variant of English commonly known as Kriol English spoken today in the Caribbean region of Central America, including the Kriol of the Caribbean region of Nicaragua (Monge, 2011; Zapata Webb, 2007). This is the language adopted by the Rama at present.

The known history of the Rama was poorly documented before 1980 because of what is known as the double isolation of the Caribbean coast. This isolation results from two factors. 1) History: as a British protectorate until 1984, the events and population of the region were not of interests for Spanish Nicaragua historians, thus, the history of the Caribbean Coast was limited to the discovery of Cape Gracias a Dios and a few historical events of relevance for the national government. 2) A geographical barrier: the high mountain ranges in the central region, mighty rivers, marshy land, and dense rainforest has prevented fluid communication between the inhabitants of both sides of the country. Since the Rama were located outside the area of the Spanish dominion's influence, their history has been somewhat absent from Nicaraguan history books<sup>20</sup>; consequently, their origins, geographical distribution, and language have remained unknown in the rest of the country.

### 2.3.3 Autonomy for the Caribbean Coast

While the region has been officially part of the country since 1894, its integration was merely geographic, as it remained isolated and had almost no representation in the

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<sup>20</sup> In my days in elementary and secondary school, there was little discussion of the indigenous groups in the North and Caribbean regions of the country.

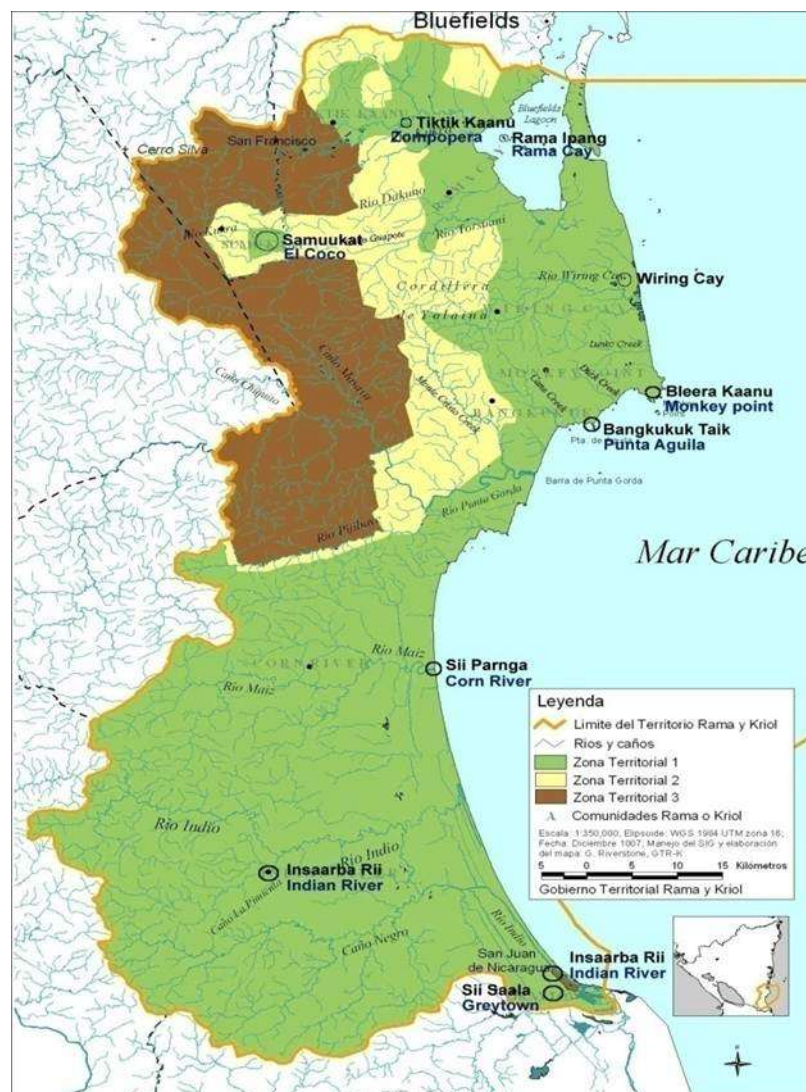
political life of the nation. It is in the context of the Contra war in which a large portion of indigenous people of the coast participated, the Rama included, that the revolutionary government launched a project to grant autonomy to the region as a reconciliation project. The state granted this autonomy through the Law 28 of 1987. An important component of the Autonomy Statute included the official recognition of traditional forms of local government, practiced historically by different ethnic groups, as well as the right of each ethnic group to use and be educated in its ethnic language. This recognition of all the indigenous languages and cultures of the Caribbean region opened the way to several language-planning programs, as recounted in Craig (1992a).

#### 2.3.4 The Rama and Kriol territory

The Rama people affirm that before the colonial period they used to have a vast territory which reaching from the Rio Escondido in the north (See Map 3) down to the San Juan River. However, further information from historical documents suggest that the Rama territory bordered Lake Nicaragua in the west and included the large area south of the San Juan River in the north of Costa Rica (Riverstone, 2004). It also seems that they used to have a large settlement near the Punta Gorda River (cf. Roberts & Irving, 1827, p. 98). The Rama still occupy the coastal line of their ancestral territory in an area that covers 484 256 hectares, located between the Escondido River in the north and the Indian River basin in the south, between the Caribbean Sea and Lake Nicaragua to the west, a territory mainly surrounded by natural boundaries such as creeks or rivers (McCoy et al., 2012). However, today's territory is an intercultural area where the Rama descendants and over five hundred African-Caribbean Kriol coexist peacefully. Hence, the presence of Rama and Kriol in the territory's name.

Map 5 shows the nine communities that the Rama-Kriol territory presently encompasses. Six of them are counted as Rama communities: Sumuu Kat, Tiktik Kaanu, Rama Cay, Wiring Cay, Monkey Point and Bangkukuk Taik. The other three communities, Corn River, Indian River and Gray Town mainly have a Kriol population (Riverstone, 2004, 2008, 2014).

**Map 5. Communities of the Rama and Kriol Territory**



The Rama in these nine communities regrouped themselves together with the Kriol—in accordance with Law 445, the law of ancestral land ownership, and Law 28 of the Statute

of Autonomy—and established an alliance to claim the administration and governance of their ancestral territory. GTR-K is the legal entity representing the Rama and Kriol communities recognized by the Statute of Autonomy. Here each community has a traditional local government that represents them to the Gobierno Territorial Rama-Kriol [Rama-Kriol Territorial Government] commonly known as GTR-K. This entity is recognized by the national and regional governments as the political and administrative representative of these communities.

## **2.4 The Rama Language Project**

In this section, I turn my attention to the Rama Language Project to explain its beginning, its development and the state of the project when I first started working in the field.

### **2.4.1 Sociopolitical origins of the project: a request from the Rama leaders**

As already mentioned in the 1980s, the revolutionary government of Nicaragua was concerned with integrating its Caribbean coast into the revolutionary program for the nation. The discussion for autonomy provided the basis for an official request to be made to the national Sandinista government for the revitalization of the Rama language. These developments happened in the context of multi-ethnic assemblies discussing the establishment of regional autonomy, to which the central government had summoned representatives from all the different ethnic groups. In those meetings, the leaders of different groups would stand and introduce themselves first in their ethnic language and then in Spanish, the official language of the country.

When the Rama leader took the floor to introduce himself, he said later that he felt deep shame at not being able to speak Rama, his ethnic language, and of having to use Kriol instead, a form of the English-based creole spoken in the region by the African-Caribbean population and known as Miskito Coast Kriol in the literature (Holm, 1978). Although it had become the native language to which his Rama community of the island

of Rama Cay had shifted, he considered it then only as the legitimate language of the Kriol community. This new feeling of shame is what provoked his official request to the Sandinista government for help to “salvage” or rescue the Rama ethnic language.

This official request to save the Rama language was transmitted by 1985 to a willing foreign linguist, Colette Craig, professor of linguistics from the University of Oregon and specialist of Central American languages, who happened to be occasionally on the ground in Nicaragua.<sup>21</sup>

## **2.5 The work of the Rama Language Project (RLP)**

Before the description and documentation work of the Rama language by the RLP, there was very little information about the Rama and about their ethnic language. In fact, while the Rama leader was requesting the revitalization of the ethnic Rama language, Rama and non-Rama alike strongly despised the language. It was regarded as a non-language that the Rama themselves called a “tiger language,” i.e. an ugly language that was said to sound like the howling of a tiger. Therefore, the Rama chief’s position was very paradoxical because he was suddenly asking for something that he did not really want and that his community did not want either. However, it is interesting to note the other connotation of “tiger” for the Rama, since there are magnificent and powerful tiger creatures in the Rama’s mythology. The old Rama believed that the greatest Shaman among the people had the unique gift to “speak with the tiger”. This might suggest that the persecution and oppression suffered over the years by this very marginalized ethnic group might have destroyed their ethnic pride in the most valuable and emblematic part of their culture, their ethnic language (Grinevald, 2005c). In this

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<sup>21</sup> She was an interpreter for American delegations organized by the Council for Human Rights in Latin America (CHRLA) that visited the country to see in-situ the effects of the Contra war (Craig, 1992a; Grinevald, 2010).



context, the first task set by the RLP was to try to change the Rama people's own conception of their ethnic language.

Before the RLP, the only information available about the Rama were the 1885 reports from Moravian missionaries on the island of Rama Cay (Schneider & Jürgensen, 2014) and the academic works from the beginning of the twentieth century from the ethnologists Eduard Conzemius (1927, 1930b) and Walter Lehmann (1920). The latter is also the author of the first vocabulary of Rama (Lehmann, 1914). The Rama also appeared in the medical anthropologist writings of Franklin Loveland (1976), whose records support the notes of the other accounts of the culture of the Rama and their geographic location.

### 2.5.1 Counting the Rama speakers

The first step to work with a non-documented language is to look for and identify speakers of the language. Before the RLP, there was a belief, even published in the national media, that there were only three old speakers of Rama left, on the Island of Rama Cay. This persistent belief was analyzed and corrected by the RLP linguist as she conducted a census to identify the potential informants for the project, with the help of Barbara Assadi, an American anthropologist who had lived among the Rama for over six years in the 1970s. By then, Craig (1987) presented three findings about the language. First, Craig's study of the existing documents (mentioned above) revealed that the Rama language had historically had between 200 and 500 speakers. Her second finding was that there were many more speakers of the language left than the mythical three elderly speakers of Rama Cay. Indeed, Assadi introduced the linguist to a key member of the community of remaining speakers, by then in her sixties, who assisted the RLP team of linguists and anthropologists to get in touch with other speakers. This brought to light an important discovery: that there were indeed a few dozen speakers of Rama left, including a few monolingual speakers (see table 5). However, those people did not live on Rama Cay, they lived scattered on the mainland, mostly along several rivers: Wiring

Cay, Cane Creek, Punta Gorda, Indian River or Corn River (Grinevald, 2005c). The third finding was that there were no children learning the language at home, and apart from one isolated teenager as the youngest native speaker, there were only adult native speakers left, the majority in their sixties by then. This represented the main concern for the survival of the language given that parent-child transmission of the language had stopped a while back (Craig, 1987c, pp. 12–14).

**Table 5 Number of speakers of Rama in 1987**

**By level of command of the language, sorted by gender**

	Mother tongue	Fluent	Limited	Only understand	Total
Men	22	4	6	2	34
Women	9	1	9	5	24
<b>Total</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>58</b>

(Craig, 1987c, p. 12)

It was also notable that a large majority of native speakers were men, many of whom lived totally isolated in the forest. However, the most striking discovery was that there were, indeed, several dozen speakers left.

### 2.5.2 Language description: working with speakers and bibliographic production

Attempts were made to collaborate with as many speakers as possible, and in total eighteen were interviewed. But collecting Rama data from all of them was not possible; some of the speakers were frightened and remained mute, while others mumbled so much that their speech was incomprehensible and could not be transcribed even with the help of the main speakers of the project. In the end, the linguist could only work

with three speakers who had different skills and provided different kinds of data (Grinevald<sup>22</sup>, 2003).

Before the mid-1980s, most of the indigenous languages of the Caribbean were considered incomplete languages with no grammar, and were at best called “dialects”<sup>23</sup>. As already mentioned, the Rama language was even regarded as an animal language, a tiger language. Hence, one of the primary tasks of the RLP was the legitimization of the Rama language, making it necessary and urgent to demonstrate that it was a real language, that it could be written and had a grammar.

The first publication to present the language to the general public was entitled “La Lengua Rama Sobrevive [The Rama language is alive]” (Craig G., Rigby, & Tibbitts, 1986) and had for its purpose just that. It offered the first results of the collaboration between the linguist and Miss Nora Rigby (see 4.2.2 below), a key speaker of Rama and an inspired and active informant for the RLP. The linguist and Miss Nora had the initial help of Bonny Tibbitts, an American research assistant who was fluent in Kriol<sup>24</sup> and initially assured effective communication with the speaker. The publication included a story in the language of the Rama, with translation in Spanish and grammatical notes (phonological, morphological and syntactic) that provided evidence that the Rama language was still alive and a “normal” language that could be analyzed.

Craig (1987), in her article “Una Lengua Rama para los Rama” [A Rama language for the Rama people], reflects on how, for the purpose of identity, the variety of Kriol spoken on the island of Rama Cay, the main center of Rama population, could have been used

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<sup>22</sup> The RLP linguist Craig returned to her maiden name Grinevald after 1996.

<sup>23</sup> The term as used here has nothing to do with an actual definition of dialect. In this sentence it means a popular belief, at least in Nicaragua and other places of Latin America, that a spoken language was “incomplete”.

<sup>24</sup> Research on Rama language was carried out in Kriol.

for revitalization. This Rama Cay Kriol, as it was named, was hardly understandable by the Kriol speakers of the town of Bluefields. But it was totally rejected as not acceptable for the purpose of ethnic identity. Rama felt that they could not claim to speak a Kriol language, considered the language of the Kriol population, and that only the Rama language was considered legitimate, despite the tendency to denigrate it and its scarce use (see also Grinevald, 2005b; Koskinen, 2006).

After these first publications, the RLP produced articles of interest both to the academic community and the general Nicaraguan community. There was a grammar of the Rama language (Craig, 1991), an analysis of language shift among the Rama (Craig, 1992b), an analysis of the cultural and linguistic situation of the Rama and the origins of the RLP (Craig, 1992a). Indeed, the latter appeared in the proceedings of a famous symposium, *Endangered Languages and their Preservation*, presented at the 65th Annual Meeting of the Linguistic Society of America in 1991<sup>25</sup>. The symposium aimed to raise for the first time among linguists the issue of working on endangered languages and of their revitalization. Hale and Craig G.'s papers about two of the indigenous languages of Nicaragua, Miskitu and Rama placed these two languages in the international scholar realm.

Apart from the scholarly publications, the RLP produced also texts for the Rama people including a small book with basic Rama expressions (Craig, 1989), a simplified grammar of the Rama language (Craig, 1990), a trilingual elementary dictionary (Craig, 1987a), a

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<sup>25</sup> The symposium was actually planned by Hale and Craig, both linguists working at the time in Nicaragua, and members of Linguists for Nicaragua, a network of professional linguists working on all the languages of the Caribbean coast, and connected to the CIDCA research institute.

series of illustrated dictionaries about various themes, among them: animals, the winds, how to build a dory or boat, etc. (Craig, 1994).<sup>26</sup>

The publication work did not stop there. In 1996, the state acknowledged the right of ethnic communities to use and preserve their languages in the “Law for the use of ethnic languages of the communities of the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua” (Ley 162, 1996). This law about linguistic rights, followed by the Law of Territorial Demarcation of 2003, and the Statute of Autonomy, offered the possibility of using the Rama language in the process of demarcating and establishing the limits of the Rama territory by identifying geographical features with names in Rama language. Consequently, as a continuation of the work with the Rama, Grinevald and Kauffmann, in their article “Toponymy of the territory in the language and culture of the Rama People”, recounted how the GTR-K requested assistance from the RLP to use the Rama language to identify and demarcate the Rama territory (Grinevald & Kauffmann, 2006). Later, in “Growing back the Rama language” (2008), Kauffmann and Grinevald also summarize the processes and actions taken to revitalize the Rama language. The work of the RLP has also produced a scholarly text which provides theoretical and practical support for the linguists doing fieldwork among speakers of indigenous languages (Grinevald, 2003, 2007c, 2007a; Grinevald & Bert, 2011).

#### 2.5.2.1 *Miss Nora Rigby, the first teacher of Rama: An inspired, visionary and natural linguist*

Miss Nora Rigby<sup>27</sup> had worked with six people prior to her work with Craig (Grinevald). She was open to work, but she did not understand what the previous researchers were

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<sup>26</sup> The list provided here is just a little glance at the publications of the RLP. For a better overview of the publications, the materials (not all) are available at <http://www.turkulka.net/hablemos-rama>

<sup>27</sup> It might be of interest that I mention the name of Miss Nora Rigby in this thesis; however, when still alive, she demanded to be called by her full name and not to be anonymized (Craig, 1992c).

doing. They were not linguists. They wanted information about the Rama language, but they were collecting information at random. According to Grinevald, Rigby was a visionary with a natural talent for serving as an informant of the language. She had the willingness to share her language and was used to talking to foreign visitors, adapting herself to Kriol to make communication easier. She wanted to save her language from total oblivion (Craig, 1992c; Grinevald & Pivot, 2013). Furthermore, she was a natural linguist who understood the tasks and implications of studying her language (Grinevald & Kauffmann, 2004; Grinevald & Pivot, 2013). Rigby, against all odds, external and internal beliefs, thought of the Rama language as “twisted”: “it is no good, but if I had a child who is no normal, I still would love him”<sup>28</sup> (Grinevald 2016, pc). She believed that her ethnic language was an important part of her identity; hence, her sayings “Our language is our right”, or “Without our language we are not people”, have become a motto for those concerned about the future of the Rama language (Koskinen, 2006, p. 296).

As part of her concerns about her language, she understood that, besides sharing the language so that the linguist could study and document it, it was necessary to transmit the language to the younger generation. She personally took the initiative and asked for a time-slot in the local school to teach the language to the smallest children. She explained that she did not want to work with the teenagers given that they would not respect her as a teacher because she was illiterate, but the small ones would not have a problem with her being an illiterate old woman. Consequently, Rigby worked for ten years with the preschool teacher of Rama Cay as a volunteer, without payment, as the Ministry of Education did not accept her as a teacher. Grinevald reports that Rigby was a brilliant woman, but in a male-oriented community, she was treated with contempt for being a woman and illiterate. Being part of the RLP’s original team empowered Rigby

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<sup>28</sup> Quotations and transcriptions from Kriol as written in books.

to become a bold defender of the language. It opened the doors to opportunities for her to be heard and share her appreciation for her language, and to call on authorities and members of the community to do something to revert the language's loss (cf. Craig, 1992c; C. Grinevald, personal communication, August, 2013).

Rigby shared her passion with her family, and one of her nephews, Mr. Walter Ortiz, and one daughter-in-law, Christina Benjamin, both native speakers of Rama, joined her as informants of the language. She requested materials to teach the language and requested instruction on teaching techniques. By then, the RLP funding had ended for that stage, but she managed to get assistance from Miss Haldis Juliana Balto, a Sami who worked for the Sami Council at the Fundación para la Autonomía y el Desarrollo de la Costa Atlántica (Foundation for the Autonomy and Development of the Atlantic Coast, FADCANIC by its Spanish acronym)<sup>29</sup>, one partner agency in Bluefields. Rigby learned from this Sami assistance to prepare flashcards for teaching languages along with the principles of the Total Physical Response (Language teaching method developed by Asher (1969) and its implementation in schools (cf. Grinevald & Kauffmann, 2004). Once she had the chance to teach in Rama Cay, she spent ten years at the end of her life teaching the language of her ancestors. While she was alive, the local authorities never recognized her efforts to maintain the language. Instead, she faced opposition. After her death, she has become of symbol of struggle in her community, that even one of the largest regional universities, the Universidad de las Regiones Autónomas de la Costa Caribe Nicaragüense, commonly known as URACCAN, named its central library and collection of cultural books about the Rama after her (Grinevald, 2016, PC).

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<sup>29</sup> <http://www.fadcanic.org.ni/>

### 2.5.3 The teaching of Rama after Miss Nora Rigby

After Rigby's death, her nephew, Walter Ortiz, was hired by the Ministry of Education and took over her teaching task with preschool children for ten more years. He still lives on Rama Cay and, as the only native speaker who can read and write, he is still active as a human resource for the transcription of Rama. It is important to note that, even though the teaching of Rama was not an immersion program but two hours per week, both Rigby and Ortiz completed a cycle of twenty years of Rama language teaching in preschool.

Later, other efforts have been made on Rama Cay by some elementary school teachers—who were children by the time Miss Nora started in preschool, now considered new (or neo—) speakers or people with a certain command of the language (cf. Grinevald & Bert, 2011; see also Appendix 1). These teachers were trained by Miss Juliana Balto in other methods to teach the language, for instance, Asher's Total Physical Response (1969). Later in 2009, one of them taught Rama in Bluefields under the sponsorship of the GTR-K that organized courses for the youth attending secondary school and university in Bluefields. The purpose of these courses was to position the language as one of the languages of the region.

Outside Rama Cay, other people have also tried to follow Rigby's steps. One is an elementary school teacher, a new speaker who studied on Rama Cay and now teaches Rama in Tiktik Kanu. The others are illiterate native speakers of the jungle from Cane Creek who decided to teach Rama in Bangkukuk Taik in cooperation with Javier Hodgson, the local schoolteacher there. One of these speakers was Pedro MaCrea, Rigby's son. In 2012, Rigby's daughter-in-law, Miss Christina Benjamin (wife to Pedro), of the RLP's original team, started teaching the language together with Angela Benjamin. Christina Benjamin continues this task there at present. Three of these people have been key contacts during my fieldwork. Mr. MaCrea has hosted me in his house in Cane Creek. Miss Christina Benjamin has allowed me to organize the workshops with her students,



and Javier Hodgson has become her assistant and my on-site interpreter during the workshops.

## **2.6 A Sociolinguistic Analysis of the Rama Language**

As a continuation of the work, in 2009, the Rama and Kriol Territorial government or GTR-K, sent a request to the RLP for assistance in their project to revitalize the Rama language. Their request opened a new phase in the efforts toward revitalization, resulting in a new generation of researchers arriving in the area. The goals of this new phase were: first, to study the current situation of the language in terms of the changes undergone by the language (Pivot & Chevrier, 2013); and second, to carry out a sociolinguistic study of the language aimed to clarify the confusing discourse about the Rama language circulating at that time (Grinevald & Pivot, 2013; Pivot, 2010, 2011, 2013, 2014).

### **2.6.1 Confusing discourse about the language and its revitalization**

The sociolinguistic study of the language was carried out by Bénédicte Pivot, at that time a doctoral student in the research laboratory Dynamique du Langage of the University of Lyon 2. Pivot departs from the reflections of twenty-five years of efforts to revitalize the Rama language. She describes the initial sociopolitical environment in the area in 1986 and the role of key members of the community, especially Miss Nora Rigby, a visionary elderly woman who became the local driving force for the recovery of the language value and its revitalization (cf. Grinevald & Pivot, 2013).

Before talking about the teaching of Rama, it is important to understand that a long process has led to that possibility. This process can be understood only if it is seen in light of the regional political situation explained earlier in this chapter and within the context of movements to promote recognition and teaching of indigenous languages in the American continent.

Pivot's (2011, 2014) study reveals that using the wrong concepts in the discourse about the revitalization of the Rama language caused tension and confusion in different realms. For example, there has been confusion in the use of the national law, the discourse of the people, the media, and in the national government's discourse before international agencies. Pivot suggests that, in part, the confusion had its origins in the perspective that local authorities and the population brought to the revitalization of the language.

First, the confusion in the use of the national law originates in an article in which the national constitution proclaims the existence of the Rama language as one of the languages of the Caribbean Region (articles 4 and 6 of Law N°162). As the language is mentioned in the law, people take the existence of the language for granted without questioning it. However, this perception does not take into account the real state of the language and the availability of resources needed to accomplish the revitalization task. This situation is an old problem stemming from the poor understanding of the sociolinguistic situation of the Rama language (Pivot, 2011, 2013, 2014). The fact is that among those in charge of the implementation of the Bilingual Intercultural Education, or BIE, a large amount of misinformation circulated about who were the speakers of the language and about their level of command of the language. Those implementing the BIE knew little about the revitalization efforts which started in 1986. Pivot (2011) says that even the Rama teachers were confused by the terms used in the workshops promoted by the BIE, likely because the program was conceived for all ethnic groups in the Caribbean in general. However, as seen earlier in this chapter, the sociolinguistic reality of these other groups has differed from that of the Rama. For instance, Miskitu and Kriol are languages with tens of thousands of native speakers, hundreds of whom have completed higher education, compared to the handful of native speakers of Rama who are all largely illiterate.

Second, the discourse of the Rama people has also created confusion. Pivot (2014) points out that whenever one talks to the Rama about "their language," they seem to

think immediately about “their Rama language,” although this is no longer their mother tongue. If the Rama are asked if they “speak” Rama, they will answer “yes, I do,” but this actually means that the person knows a few words and expressions learned thanks to the initial efforts of the RLP. In fact, the Rama people’s first language is “Rama[Cay]kriol,” a variant of the Kriol spoken in Bluefields. Pivot significantly observes that, regardless of the fact that they speak a variant of English-based Kriol, they do not accept this language as theirs because it is for them the “next people language.” Moreover, they think of Kriol as “broken English” and are therefore reluctant to accept its introduction into the school curriculum (Pivot, 2010).

Third, despite publications by the RLP, the media also participated in spreading confusing information about the status of the Rama language (Pivot 2011, 2014). The media have published articles about the Rama language reporting dramatically about the “agony” of the language and the existence of the last three old speakers of Rama Cay, which as seen earlier, is an old myth (Grinevald, 1998). The publication of these beliefs does not reflect the reality of the language, ignoring the larger numbers of native speakers of Rama, just not in Rama Cay, and the fact that there are even new speakers of the language. In fact, the language has gained a certain vitality: more people have become familiar with the language’s sounds and vocabulary, acknowledging its status as a real language, and, clearly its importance for ethnic identity for the members of the community (cf. Grinevald & Bert, 2011; see also Appendix 1).

Finally, there has been confusion in the discourse of governmental institutions when speaking about the Rama language in international forums. For instance, people involved in discussions about bilingual education emphasized the formal teaching of the Rama language in schools. Their claim was, according to Pivot (2011), based on the constitutional rights given to ethnic groups to preserve and be educated in their own language. Furthermore, most Latin American constitutions (see also Milian i Massana, 2004), the United Nations, and UNESCO supported the implementation of Intercultural

and Bilingual Education (IBE)<sup>30</sup> in multilingual and multiethnic countries. However, ignorance of the conditions of the Rama language resulted in much confusion as the conditions are not present for the kind of IBE program these institutions have in mind. This lack of understanding resulted in ideological tensions among the different actors involved in the revitalization of the language.

An additional example of this confusion was the Nicaraguan government's proposal to have the Rama language added to the UNESCO's list of Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2009. The proposal was written without any consultation with the GTR-K. In fact, the central government did not request any accurate and proper information about the language. The document included erroneous facts, e.g., stating for instance that the Rama lived in El Rama, a town with a predominating mestizo (Indigenous-Spanish) population, far outside of the Rama territory (Grinevald 2016, PC).

In the midst of these misconceptions, the Nicaraguan government started a quadrennial program for "cultural revitalization and productive development in the Caribbean Coast." Members of the Rama community who participated in the initiative started talking about the Rama culture as a way to distinguish themselves from other ethnic groups, making this new discourse use the language as a form of ethnic identity marker (cf. Pivot 2011, 2014).

Pivot (2011, 2014) further analyzes the challenge of the IBE as proposed in the rest of Latin America as part of the panorama of the institutionalization of indigenous language teaching in the continent. The notion of Bilingual Intercultural Education, also called "Indigenous Education or Ethno-Education" (López, 2006, p. 236), rests partly on contradictions which are rooted in the way that scholars conceptualize language and language transmission and currently dominant ideological western models (p.237).

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<sup>30</sup> A different program from BIE above.

Such Western models include a school curriculum for the preservation of the indigenous languages-suitable for large languages such as Quechua and Guarani, with millions of speakers and a literary tradition, but unworkable for the majority of small indigenous languages with mainly an oral tradition and illiterate populations.

## 2.6.2 Rama: A “very endangered language” by the UNESCO 2003 criteria

In 1984, the Rama language was considered, in the terminology of the time, a “moribund” language. Today the Rama language’s level of vitality would qualify as a “severely endangered language” in the terminology and criteria established in 2003 by UNESCO’s Ad Hoc Expert Group<sup>31</sup> to determine the vitality of a language (2003, pp. 7-12). Of the nine factors in the UNESCO guideline, six of them will be considered here to provide an idea of the level of endangerment of the Rama language<sup>32</sup>.

Factor 1 describes *Intergenerational Language Transmission*. This factor determines a language as “severely endangered” if “the language is spoken only by grandparents and older generations; while the parent generation may still understand the language, they typically do not speak it to their children” (UNESCO Ad Hoc Expert Group, 2003).

So, it taking as a reference for Rama the Table 5 given earlier in this chapter, in 1987 there were thirty-one native speakers of Rama, most of whom living in Cane Creek. Today, the number of speakers has decreased to twelve (C. Grinevald, personal communication, August, 2013). The youngest speaker is a man in his early forties, but

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<sup>31</sup> Grinevald was part of the expert group bringing the Rama situation into the discussion. The complete document with factors of endangerment and their descriptions can be found at <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0018/001836/183699E.pdf>

<sup>32</sup> Here, I note the specific factor that I consider pertinent to the state of the Rama language. Use of italics is mine.

he does not speak the language with his children. The other speakers are great-grandparents in their seventies.

Factor 2 measures language vitality in terms of the *absolute number of speakers* and states that “a small speech community is always at risk” (UNESCO 2003, pp. 7-12). Hence, fifteen speakers of Rama might seem a small speech community (see Chapter 3 below), but what worsens the situation is that it is not so common to have two native speakers together. Speakers live in isolated locations and far from Rama Cay, and apart from a few exceptions do not use the language for communication.

Factor 3 evaluates *the proportion of speakers within the total population* and classifies a language as “critically endangered” if there are very few speakers of the language (2003, pp. 7-12). This is clearly the case with Rama.

Factor 4 analyzed the *shifts in domains of language use* and determines that a language has “highly limited domains” when the “language is used only in a very restricted number of domains and for very few functions” (2003, pp. 7-12). In this case, Rama, although still spoken by native speakers whenever they meet each other, is used mostly in private conversation without the participation of non-speakers. It is absent from most domains of language use.

Factor 5 has to do with the language *response to new domains and media*. A language is “inactive” if “the language is not used in any new domains” (2003, pp. 7-12). The Rama language has a limited presence on the Web ([www.turkulka.net](http://www.turkulka.net)), but users are very limited. Apart from a few excerpts in a few YouTube<sup>33</sup> videos, the language is absent

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<sup>33</sup> (Los Rama) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yOQy-sZkU9M>

from mass media, and there are no new words in the language to name modern artifacts.<sup>34</sup>

Factor 6 analyses the *availability of materials for language education and literacy*, as when “written materials exist, but they may only be useful for some members of the community; for others, they may have a symbolic significance. Literacy education in the language is not a part of the school curriculum” (UNESCO Ad Hoc Expert Group, 2003). Evaluating the Rama language, we can say that materials are available, but because of the contradictions between the people’s desire to rescue their language and what was done to rescue it, the printed material produced and distributed by the RLP was not valued. These materials are free and available on the internet, but most Rama do not have access to computers and are totally illiterate or functionally illiterate. Furthermore, there are limited resources to reprint those materials. The teaching of the language is officially recognized, and there is a curriculum, but it is not implemented because of a two-sided problem. First, teachers with the training and education to implement the curriculum do not speak the language. Second, the native speakers who have been teaching the language in Bangkukuk Taik are all totally illiterate.

As we can see from these few examples of the assessment of the vitality of a language applied to the current situation of the Rama language, it is appropriate to categorize the language as a severely endangered language.

### 2.6.3 Rama: A treasure language

As previously explained, Rama native speakers are illiterate, except one who is increasingly losing his sight, and elderly, and soon there will be no living native speaker. The lack of children learning the language at home worsens the language’s level of

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<sup>34</sup> Although this would be doable, as for example when the NGO blueEnergy promoted the creation of new words to describe wind turbines and their parts. (Grinevald p.c.)

endangerment. Given that Rama ceased to be the language of communication in the Rama territory long ago, the chances of restoring the language to occupy a communicative role in Rama society are extremely low, if at all possible. Because of the historical factors explained earlier, the number of speakers decreased as the negative reputation of the language led most people to quit using it. At the time that Craig (Grinevald) started her work with the Rama people, many parents thought that the dominant languages of Spanish and English were more convenient for access to education or employment. Therefore, many others did not consider it necessary to learn a language like Rama, which was not useful for education nor for work. In other words, for many of the Rama people, good competency in either English or Spanish represented more opportunities in the long term, while the Rama language represented their past; it was more like a link to a sense inferiority in relation to other people (C. Grinevald, personal communication, August, 2013). Thus, although the language has no practical value and one might question continued efforts for its revitalization, it is important to understand that its preservation is still a request from the people. At present, the way the Rama people perceive their ethnic language has evolved. Today they want to learn it for the purpose of ethnic identity, but they do not understand that it is not easily done.

To understand the value of the Rama language to the Rama people, the members of the RLP proposed the term “**treasure language.**” The term was discussed during a workshop with many Rama people and adopted by them. The concept of treasure language seems to better fit the Rama situation than the terms “original, ethnic or ancestral language” already in use in discussions of endangered languages. The term is a metaphor that recalls the pirate history of the Caribbean Coast of Nicaragua represented in widely known stories of pirates hiding treasures of invaluable gold and silver. The point of comparison is that the language remains an invaluable treasure for the people. It contains their history, culture, and it can serve as the banner for ethnic identity. A language is hidden like a treasure, but like jewelry, is also something that meant to be shown and worn. It also has a demonstrative use: for instance, in the defense of their



territory to prove to land invaders that they are on Rama territory and that the local population are Rama (Pivot, 2014). Indeed, the language is a cultural treasure for the Rama that contains their history and culture, and reflects their cosmogony. As a result, what the Rama call ‘their language’ is a treasure language, needed for the sake of identity.

#### 2.6.4 The Rama Language as a Postvernacular Language

A vernacular language is the “language or dialect spoken by the ordinary people of a country or region<sup>35</sup>” and, as seen above, the Rama language is no longer a vernacular one. Although it is not a dead language, given that there are still living native speakers, these speakers do not use it on a regular basis because they are scattered out among Kriol speakers. To hear a real conversation in Rama between two native speakers, I needed to take a six-hour boat trip from Bluefields and near two years of visits to the field. By “real conversation” I mean a natural conversation that started spontaneously between two sisters in their kitchen. I had heard the Rama language before, but only when I initiated the situation. I asked how to say a phrase in Rama, and received the answer: more like using a two-legged Google translation version than a conversation. I can describe without exaggeration my chance to hear that conversation in Rama as an awe-inspiring experience. I simply happened to be behind the right wall at the right time, almost like a spy.

The current status of the language is what Shandler (2004) calls a “post-vernacular language”, a term taken by Pivot (2014) to redefine the role of the Rama language as a language that has a few speakers who use it regularly, a living language which is absent from the public arena and that no one is learning at home as a first language. As is evident from my personal observation above, Rama is no longer the vernacular language

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<sup>35</sup> The online Oxford Dictionary, <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/es/definicion/ingles/vernacular>

of the community or even of some families, but most Rama people know some of it: in particular, words to name things proper to their culture. They use the language as a means of identification, as a symbolic act.

## 2.7 Discussion

This section takes as its point of departure Pivot's suggestions to look at the Rama language as a **treasure language** and to understand its **postvernacular** status in a multilingual context, in order to think of the role of the language for the Rama community today and avoid the confusion that she describes. This understanding is imperative to take action in the most practical way possible for the revitalization of a language like Rama.

The endangerment of indigenous languages is neither unusual nor exclusive to a particular region in the world. Indeed, Hinton (2001) suggests that the problem is more common given that:

The languages of indigenous groups (and indeed the groups themselves) have usually not fared well under the government of the nation that has enveloped them. In the past and even today in some nations, repressive measures have been taken against minority languages. Even without overt repression, minorities may shift to the dominant language. This shift is sometimes made through voluntary, conscious decision. A group that does not speak the language of government and commerce is disenfranchised, marginalized with respect to the economic and political mainstream (2001, p. 3).

However, the phenomenon of language endangerment has become more visible as we live in a "time of unprecedented efforts on the part of minority peoples to keep their languages alive and to expand their usage" (Hinton, 2001, p. 4). Although legitimate, in that indigenous people are now legally entitled to use their language, these

revitalization efforts need critical analysis to avoid the confusion generated by political activism without expert advice. As explained above, the initiation of revitalization efforts for the Rama language responded to a petition from a leader who needed to identify his ethnic group with his ethnic language, but who, at the same time, held contradictory attitudes toward that ethnic language. The petition came in the context of a national government policy where the rescue of the language was part of a plan of reconciliation with the indigenous people of the region. As discussed by Pivot, the awareness of the real situation of the Rama language, developed through the fieldwork of the RLP, was not taken into consideration by the political and institutional engagement with the Rama people.

The reason why I have taken the time to present the complex situation described by linguists involved in the RLP is because, as a Nicaraguan from North Region of the country, I had no clue about the real situation of the Rama language before my first meeting with the senior linguist and founder of the RLP, Colette Grinevald (formerly Craig). When I proposed my research project, I was influenced by reports in the news media, by articles about the Intercultural Bilingual Education in the Caribbean Coast of Nicaragua, unaware of how these articles were biased by the perspectives of larger ethnic groups experiencing their own difficulties implementing bilingual education in their territories (Zelaya, 2015). That is to say, learning about the sociolinguistic and political situation in the region was, for me, a research journey in itself. This explains why my research project, from its original research title to its research questions and research plan, has evolved over time as my understanding of the real situation has changed. The fact is that I had to acquire field experience to acquire a realistic understanding of many issues, despite being a native Nicaraguan and spending 95% of my life there. Moreover, I still have many questions to answer.

From a sociolinguistic point of view, I became aware of the complexity of the task and the importance of a deeper analysis of the different factors that affect revitalization efforts as the “work on language revitalization tend to be characterized by an absence

of attention paid to internal conflict and struggles within the social movements involved” (Costa & Gasquet-cyru, 2013, p. 213). A careful sociolinguistic study of the current situation of a language is the only way to prevent further complications.

From a period of obscurity in the previous decade, the Rama language has gained not only the attention of scholars and local media, but has also become a subject of discussion internationally. However, the erroneous approach of the local leader and the regional and national authorities to promote the language (see 3.3), as well as their reluctance to use the available information about the Rama language, have not yielded the expected results. To avoid repeating the same mistakes of the past, it is important to recognize the implications of working with a severely endangered language. Toward that end, I learned to appreciate Pivot’s work on Rama language revitalization and its attention to the tensions caused by the internal political situation in the community and by policies at the national level. I am therefore convinced that future work in the field should take as its departure point a consideration of the real state of the language in order to avoid initiating impractical efforts. That is why I would like, at this point, to state clearly the constraints on my research project and its expected outcomes in relation to the Rama language’s status as a severely endangered language.

### 2.7.1 Rama a severely endangered language

As seen early in 3.3.2 of this chapter, Rama is a severely endangered language. In keeping with the principles discussed in this chapter, the nature of my Ph.D. project demands a comprehension of what language revitalization means in the context of the Rama language, and what implications this has for the project’s approach. The implementation of a revitalization program has often been plagued with difficulties, but in the case of the revitalization of the Rama language, the situation is particularly challenging. A common way of thinking among people concerned with the teaching of indigenous languages is to consider the communicative approaches to language

teaching. However, in cases of languages in the extreme state of endangerment, such as Rama, there are additional considerations to think about:

- Most language teaching approaches are based on the teaching of mainstream languages (for example, English or Spanish). Their application in a context where there is a high level of illiteracy can create a great deal of frustration (see L. Cope & Penfield, 2011).
- Even though Rama is supposed to be taught officially in schools (of the Rama territory), the existing curriculum is of no use to Rama native speakers who teach if they are illiterate.
- Teachers of Rama may have some knowledge of the Total Physical Response Approach, but they are limited to imitating what Miss Nora Rigby did.
- There is neither the budget nor sufficient numbers of trained speakers of Rama to implement bilingual education as proposed by BIE.

Furthermore, as for most languages of the Americas, Rama has been a language of oral tradition, as well as the Kriol they speak. Therefore, written literature is not a part of their social practices. It is accordingly necessary to recognize that it is not so easy for people with no literary tradition to learn the usefulness of literature. In the particular case of the Rama, there are a number of books and documents published by the RLP (see 3.2.1) and other people who have been working in the area (e.g., Miss Juliana Balto who worked with Miss Nora Rigby), including a grammar and dictionary of Rama, even if they were not initially accepted (Grinevald, 2005c).

Contrary to how many believe a language revitalization project should operate, language teaching of an endangered language offers some particular challenges that one must face. It is essential to be clear about the goal of the program, which in the case of Rama cannot be to produce fluent speakers, and to choose an appropriate approach to teaching the language with this in mind. In the context of endangered languages, many internal factors could have either negative or positive impacts on the project.

Language teaching requires trained teachers and educational materials, but “there are no pedagogical materials or trained language teachers to teach most endangered languages, and very few language revitalization programs are old enough to serve as models for RLS<sup>36</sup>” (Hinton, 2001, p. 4)<sup>37</sup>.

## 2.8 Sami-Rama collaboration

In the 1980s, there was a surge in international cooperation to support the indigenous groups of the Caribbean Coast of Nicaragua and the efforts to establish the autonomy of the region. Among these cooperative efforts was a project funded by the Norwegian government to support small fisheries in the Atlantic (see Jentoft, 2008). From 2001 to 2007, The Norwegian Program for Development, Research, and Education (NUFU) funded the project “Cultural revitalization, environment, and sustainable productive systems of indigenous peoples in the Caribbean Coast of Nicaragua.” Part of this project was a joint project between Trømsø University and URACCAN, culminating in the publication of *The Rama People – Struggling for Land and Culture* (González, Jentoft, Koskinen, & López, 2006), which includes a chapter by the RLP on the Rama toponyms of the territory (Grinevald & Kauffmann, 2006).

### 2.8.1 FADCANIC – Miss Juliana Balto

In the broader context of cooperation between Norwegian and Nicaraguan institutions of the Caribbean Coast, there was also the participation of a Sámi person in the revitalization of the Rama language on Rama Cay. Haldis Juliana Balto worked for the Sámi Council on linguistic revitalization and language teaching materials through

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<sup>36</sup> Reversing Language Shift (Fishman, 1991)

<sup>37</sup> See note on this at the end of this chapter.

FADCANIC.<sup>38</sup> She engaged herself in the revitalization of the Rama language by designing teaching materials, writing the curriculum for the Rama language class, and assisting Miss Nora Rigby with teaching methods, especially the Total Physical Response (See 2.5.2.1). She also trained younger teachers who took over the teaching task in Rama Cay and Bluefields (see 2.5.3).

## 2.8.2 Socio-linguistic contrast between Rama and one of the Sámi languages

Since some professional workers and students from the Sámi community have participated in the specific revitalization efforts of the Rama language of Nicaragua, it is significant to contrast the situations of language revitalization concerning the Inari Sámi and the Rama language. Different programs have been developed to revitalize languages in the Sámi group of languages (Keskitalo, Määttä, & Uusiautti, 2014; Olthuis, Kivelä, & Skutnabb-Kangas, 2013; Sarivaara, Uusiautti, & Määttä, 2013).

Balto's work motivated a master's student of the Indigenous Studies Master's Program at the University of Tromsø to visit the area and compare some aspects of the revitalization of Rama and Inari Sámi. During her fieldwork in Rama Cay, she was able to observe some of the differences between the two efforts to revitalize minority languages. In a presentation of her work, she writes:

The situation is more dramatic for the Rama language, and the Rama language is considerably more threatened [than Inari Sámi] because there are so few language users of the Rama language. And the children are not taught the language as efficiently as it is the case in Inari. But what is important is that the Rama are working towards revitalizing the language (Satta, 2005, p. 31).

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<sup>38</sup> <http://www.sami.uit.no/sdg/arasm/2007/2007.pdf>

Indeed, by the time she was there, the “users of Rama” were mostly people who had learned a few words of Rama and some new speakers. She perceived their enthusiasm but noted the low efficacy of their language teaching.

Annika Pasanen (2010), a Ph.D. student at the University of Helsinki, presents some details about the revitalization of Inari Sámi by 2010. This revitalization effort begins in the 1970s with the language’s introduction in primary school, followed by the establishment of institutions to promote the language, such as radio broadcasts, journals and adult education in Sámi. Pasanen also highlights the limitations of the revitalization program in terms of the number of speakers, the marginalization of the language in school, its limited presence in the media, and the existence of only two language nests (a total immersion language program in a local minority/indigenous language): one in Inari and another one in Ivalo. She points out that, although there had been an interruption in the intergenerational transmission of the language, the impact of the immersion programs has been notorious. She reports that since 2000, the Inari Saami language has been a medium of instruction in primary school, which has led to the reversal of the language shift in some families and many other social networks. The language has gained in status and prestige; thus, it has more visibility in the community, with approximately fifty children learning Inari Saami in language nests. There has also been an increase in the use of Inari Sámi in the media and literature (Pasanen, 2010).

This report from 2010 shows the major contrasts between the revitalization of the Rama and the Sami languages. If I am to compare the two situations, only four of the points in Pasanen’s presentation point to comparable conditions, the others being dramatically more negative in the case of the Rama. The areas that are, to some extent, similar in both situations are:

- A) A marginal role in school: Rama has no official curriculum, its inclusion in school instruction is entirely dependent on the teacher’s will and criteria. Teachers do not speak the language.



- B) Interruption of intergenerational language transmission, meaning school children do not learn the language at home. This is the same situation in the Rama territory.
- C) Better status and prestige for the language through revitalization efforts. This is one of the achievements of Miss Nora Rigby and the RLP.
- D) More visibility in the community. More people are proud to show publicly how much Rama they know. However, most people know only a few words of the language.

As argued in this chapter, the conditions for the teaching of Rama are extreme, with strong implications for the type of pedagogy to be used and for continued efforts to revitalize the language. Hence, the relevance of understanding the concepts of Rama as a “treasure language” or a “post-vernacular language”, in order to grasp that a Rama language classroom is so atypical that, because of the lack of mastery of the language itself and the very low general level of illiteracy, mainstream language teaching methods would be inappropriate and very difficult to implement. The revitalization of the Rama language must, therefore, be seen and understood within its specific sociolinguistic context, and certainly “language revitalization movements must be understood in their own terms” (Costa, 2016).

Comparing revitalization programs is always complex and difficult. Poor outcomes in one program can actually be regarded as giant steps in others. In the case of Rama, the situation is one of a strong legal basis for revitalizing the language, expressed interest in the community for the Rama language taken as a mark of identity, but extremely scarce resources.

Concluding the present chapter, I hope to have provided the reader with an overview of the particular historical situations that have affected the Rama community of Nicaragua. It has also been my intention to highlight the reasons why a minority endangered language like Rama needs to be preserved on the basis of its historical, linguistic and

cultural value, and, not less important, its symbolic value for the Rama people. A second reason to include this chapter was the necessity to describe the context in which I worked and the special conditions in which I implemented the methods that I present in Chapter 4. The chapter also provides insight into a complex situation that explains the reason to support this study with a multidisciplinary theoretical framework that I will present in the following chapter.

## **3 Chapter: Theory**

### **3.1 Introduction**

While studying Mural Workshop methodology, I faced the challenge of finding a theoretical framework to support my assumption of the workshop's pedagogical nature. Thus, in my master's thesis (Zelaya, 2011), I anchored my assumption in the work of Paulo Freire (1970) and Montessori (Montessori, 1917). I continue to look at this type of workshop as a methodology for working with children in a particular context; however, in the research under discussion, I have challenged myself to integrate approaches that are more current. The integration of these theoretical elements assembles vital concepts that allow for a better understanding of the analysis. The pedagogical theories included here emerged in different sociohistorical settings, but they share something in common: they regard social interaction as the source of knowledge.

Like knowledge, communication also originates from social interaction. That is why I turn my attention to social semiotics as a perspective to study how communication takes place in social learning (e.g. Halliday, 1978; Kress, 2000; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006; Van Leeuwen, 2005). The main reason for the inclusion of multimodality is to expand my understanding of how language occupies a central role as a mediator and contributes to the process of learning (Halliday, 1993; Hasan, 1992; Vygotsky, 1986).

The present chapter presents first a review of principles relevant for this study, found in the pedagogies of Freire and Montessori, then integrates elements of social semiotic multimodality and its perspective on communication and its role in educational activity.

#### **3.1.1 Freire and his pedagogy of the oppressed**

The center of Paulo Freire's pedagogical approach is his postulate that education is the key to an emancipation of people's way of thinking. He advocates an egalitarian, dialogic and democratic educational model intended to achieve social transformation. In his

work, he proposes a model for popular education—or education for critical consciousness. Freire mainly developed his model out of his experience in the Brazilian educational system, his daily contact with educators and his observation of their work (Aasen, 2006; Freire, 1967, 1970, 1973, 1994b, 1994a; Freire & Faundez, 2013; Holst, 2006; Shor & Freire, 1987). Freire's approach encompasses the following components: 1) teaching departs from daily experiences (everyday life); 2) educators must identify generative theme; 3) educators must problematize the themes; 4) themes must promote critical discussion (conscientization); 5) conscientization produces cultural and political action. These Freirean postulates will be considered in the coming sections.

### 3.1.2 Montessori and her scientific pedagogy

Maria Montessori was the first woman to achieve a doctoral degree in Sciences and Medicine in Italy and pioneered the use of scientific observation of children's way of learning. She started this kind of observation in her work with disabled children. By studying these children, she realized that they were subjected to living in appalling and restricted conditions (Itard, Husson, Bourneville, Delasiauve, & Bousquet, 1894; Montessori, 1918; Pla Molins, Cano García, & Lorenzo Ramírez, 2001). To deal with this situation, Montessori found inspiration in the work of Edward Seguin (1906)<sup>39</sup> for her development of a procedure based on clinical observation, with which she studied schoolchildren to identify children's desires and ways of learning (cf Montessori, 1914, p. 79). Based on her studies, she proposes a method where children are encouraged to interact with the surrounding environment to develop their cognition (Montessori, 1949, 2003, 2012; Pla Molins et al., 2001; Signert, 2004).

Coming from two different sociohistorical contexts, these two pedagogues worked with people who underwent difficult conditions. Their understanding of people's needs

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<sup>39</sup> Seguin developed a method to work with mentally disabled children.

resulted in the articulation of new educational methods that challenge the traditional model of the school with new forms of organizing educational processes.

### 3.2 An alternative school model

Freire (1970) regards the traditional school as the reflection of an authoritative society. He describes the traditional school as an institution where the role of the teacher is as follows:

- (a) the teacher teaches, and the students are taught;
- (b) the teacher knows everything and the students know nothing;
- (c) the teacher thinks, and the students are thought about;
- (d) the teacher talks and the students listen—meekly;
- (e) the teacher disciplines and the students are disciplined;
- (f) the teacher chooses and enforces his choice, and the students comply;
- (g) the teacher acts, and the students have the illusion of acting through the action of the teacher;
- (h) the teacher chooses the program content, and the students (who were not consulted) adapt to it;
- (i) the teacher confuses the authority of knowledge with his or her own professional authority, which she and he sets in opposition to the freedom of the students;
- (j) the teacher is the Subject of the learning process, while the pupils are mere objects (p. 73).

In response to this authoritarian model, Freire proposes a new one called the *Culture Circle*, which he presents as a new institution of popular culture and the counterpart to the traditional school.

The culture circle is not a conventional classroom. It is not crowded with passive students. The role of the educator therefore changes radically, replacing the

authoritarian teacher with a coordinator who helps to organize the debate about the issues that participants want to discuss. However, it is also a place where all participants discuss their existential situations in dialog with their debate coordinator (see generative themes below). The integration of these existential experiences is a crucial difference from the traditional school. Here, the discussion is centered on the participants' experiences. As a new form of organization, the culture circle allows a closer relationship between educators and students that forms the essence for the democratization of education (Barreto, 1998; Bowers, 2005; Elias, 1974; Freire, 1970, 1973, 1974, 1994a; Holst, 2006; hooks, 1994)<sup>40</sup>.

Montessori also deals with a restrictive model of education in which emphasis is placed on controlling children's discipline. She claims that schools and the pedagogical practice (of her time) adopted principles of slavery. As an example, she points out how the school suppresses children's freedom with the school desk, designed and built to limit children's mobility, keep them in one place and maintain school discipline (Montessori, 2008, p. 37ff). Opposing such arrangements, Montessori proposes that education, rather than being teacher-centered, should be focused on children.

Montessori further proposes a new role for teachers. She argues that children are in constant movement, exploring their environment, and are not "inert and incapable being[s] for whom everything must be done, as [beings] without an inner guide, whom the adult must guide step by step" (1996, p. 11). Montessori asserts that "the child who has never learned to act alone, to direct his own actions, to govern his own will, grows into an adult who is easily led and must always lean upon others" (1971, p. 23). The role of teachers is contradictory, Montessori claims, in part because "what any teacher requires of his pupils is attention and concentration on what the teacher does."

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<sup>40</sup> See also Percy-Smith, 2012 to compare another approach to the democratization of education with emphasis on youth and children.

However, she observes that the natural behavior of children is to explore their surrounding environment freely. Children's lack of attention and concentration is "natural"; therefore, once a child is "given freedom and no interruptions by the teacher, he performs full, complete concentrated work" (Montessori, 1949, pp. 250-251). Hence, the teacher should be a guide, an observer, and a facilitator. The teacher is responsible for organizing the conditions that provide an appropriate learning environment to arouse a child's interests so that the child has the freedom to make choices. The teachers are the guide who sets boundaries by providing evolving tasks according to children's capacities, keeping their freedom in mind. The teacher can observe and recognize children's particular necessities and provide a favorable environment for learning (Lillard, 2005).

For Montessori, there is a relationship between children's physical activity and the development of their cognition (Montessori, 1949, Chapter 14). By observing small children, Montessori concluded that there was a relationship between their hand movements and their need to express their emotions and thoughts. Consequently, Montessori's approach favors the intense manipulation of concrete objects and materials designed to develop abstract thinking. This observation resulted in a strong emphasis on the elaboration of didactic materials aimed to foster the self-learning of children. The design of materials, as well as children's free access to these materials, are essential parts of her approach as it allows children to choose and learn by themselves (Lillard, 2005; Montessori, 2008).

Montessori stresses the establishment of a horizontal relationship or a relationship of equality between teachers and children. She criticizes the adult tendency to impose an agenda while expecting children's "peaceful adaptation" (1971, p. 17), which results in a tense relationship between the two parties. She observes that teachers must be

empathic with their students<sup>41</sup>; however, to accomplish this kind of relationship, educators must place themselves on the children's level and learn how to awaken them (Montessori, 2008, p. 48).

### 3.2.1 Freire's reconceptualization of culture

Culture is a concept that plays a central role in the subsequent sections of this chapter. This is therefore an opportune moment to introduce what Freire calls the *anthropological conceptualization of culture*. Freire's approach is based on constant praxis.<sup>42</sup> Local cultures are continuously subject to transformation as a direct result of the ways that people act upon the world.

To transform the world, people need to understand their surrounding environment. As people realize how nature works, they can change it. Knowledge of nature is culture just as the objects produced to transform nature and satisfy needs are culture (Freire, 1967). A practical example of this can be found in the case of the Rama people. They are skilled sea people. The sea allows them to move around and get in touch with other people. It also provides them with food. Thus, many men are skilled sailors and boat-makers. Over generations, they have learned how to build an excellent small boat, functional both in the open sea and in small rivers. They know the design and have the skill to use axes and fire<sup>43</sup> to transform the trunk of a tree into a boat.

Since Freire often refers to the anthropological concept of culture, it is also useful to take into account how culture is defined by an anthropologist. Malinowski understands

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<sup>41</sup> She observed the the relationship of teachers to handicapped students.

<sup>42</sup> Praxis instead of practice is used in Freire as way to underscore the philosophical implication of this word.

<sup>43</sup> While doing fieldwork, I had the chance to watch a man working on a wood trunk. The outside of the boat was already finished and he was burning the upper part to 'dig' and shape the interior of the boat (Fieldnote, 14.02.2015).



culture as the transformation of nature due to the work of humans as a process of adaptation (cf. Malinowski, 1938, p. 219). Along the process of adaptation, people produce “artificial equipment [...], material, spiritual, and social, [that] we call technically culture” (Malinowski, 1938, p. 211). To produce all the above and change nature, people need to understand the world or realm of nature.

Following this line of thought, understanding the world is, according to Freire (1983), another form of reading. Reading or interpreting the world is the key to human learning. It is a vital premise that marks the point of departure that leads to understanding and then distinguishing the world of nature from the world of culture.

Freire (1967, 1970, 1972) describes the world of nature as the surrounding environment around us and those objects that we find in it without any human intervention, in their natural state. On the other hand, the world of culture results from human activity that operates on the world of nature. Humans acting upon the matter in their natural state results in new objects, and these objects, in turn, come to fulfill a function in that particular society. Awareness of this process is a determining factor for conscious learning<sup>44</sup>. Freire explains the importance of understanding this notion of culture in the following way: “The anthropological concept of culture is one of these hinged themes. It clarifies the role of people *in* the world and *with* the world as transforming rather than adaptive beings” (Freire, 1970, pp. 120-121; see also Freire, Leonard, & McLaren, 1992). According to this reconceptualization of culture, culture is all that is created by human beings; it is the result of human actions framed by their social context. This concept implies that artifacts, produced by people, reflect the particular way that those people live and interact in their communities to transform the world. Thus, the Freirean anthropological definition of culture as “situated in the experiences of everyday life,

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<sup>44</sup> For archaeologists, studying the objects produced by a human group is vital because these objects can disclose details about the people who made them (Gosden & Marshall, 1999).

discovered by observing the community life of students— democratizes pedagogy because the curriculum is built around the themes and conditions of people’s lives” (Freire et al., 1992, p. 29f). In this sense, the anthropological concept of culture outlines the course of a learning process, mediated by the world, based on a dialogic pedagogy (Freire, 1970). It departs from the analysis of an immediate, existential reality; therefore, it has an inductive nature. The study of human cultures is carried out using dialog and collective discussion to problematize that existential reality in the quest for ways to transform it (cf. Gonzáles, 2007).

### 3.2.2 Context and its role in education

Both Freire and Montessori use the terms “surrounding” or “surrounding environment” to refer to the context in which learning experiences take place (Freire, 1970; Montessori, 1914). Although they do not explain the term, they highlight how relevant it is for learning. That is why I will use the conceptualization of context presented by Halliday (2007), and Halliday and Hasan (1985), to shed light on the communicative aspect of this work, along with Percy-Smith (2012) to frame context from a pedagogic perspective.

Halliday draws on the work of Malinowski (1923) and Firth (1957) to conceptualize a dual concept of context. The first component is the “context of culture”, a general type of context. The second is the “context of situation”, a more specific type of context (Halliday & Hasan, 1985, p. 25; see also Halliday, 2001). Halliday (2007) further illustrates that the context of culture frames the context of situation because "the context of culture defines the potential, the range of possibilities that open the actual choice among these possibilities [that] takes place within a given context of situation" (p. 44). On the other hand, the context of situation is “the situation in which the linguistic interaction takes places [and that] gives the participants a great deal of the information about the meanings that are being exchanged and the meanings that are likely to be exchanged”(Halliday & Hasan, 1985, p. 10). It can be said, then, that the context of

situation is the particular circumstance in which an act of communication happens. The relation between the context of situation and context of culture, according to Hasan (2001), is so close that it is possible to get to know a culture by looking at its context of situations.

Percy-Smith (2012) defines context from an educational perspective. His conception of context refers to the idea of surrounding environment, but also includes different actors involved in an activity. He explains it as follows:

Contexts are not just fixed variables or locations for action but themselves are imbued with values, shaped, regulated, and reinforced by formal (decision-makers, planners, police, etc.) and informal groups (community groups) in society, and continually reinterpreted and reshaped as groups engage with their contexts (Percy-Smith, 2012, p. 15).

The above affirmation lets us see how different participants play a role in the formation of a context for learning. It suggests that the inclusion of people's interests increases their participation in their education. That is to say, the creation of an appropriate learning environment "can hence influence and shape the nature of individual agency and activity" (Percy-Smith, 2012, p. 15). It turns passive receptors of knowledge into active partakers of the process.

### 3.2.3 Freire's path to an educational model to foster critical thinking

Since people's existential situations are the starting point for Freire's approach, the following concept of 'generative themes' constitutes the second step in his model. In the following section, I will explain the idea of generative themes and, subsequently, the other four steps.

### 3.2.3.1 *Generative themes*

In his theory, Freire (1967) introduces *generative themes* as words that describe existential situations in the life of the community. These words are “the concrete representation of many of these ideas, values, concepts, and hopes, as well as the obstacles which impede the people's full humanization” (Freire, 1970, p. 101). Freire further elucidates why these themes are called generative in a short footnote of his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970). There he explains the following:

I have termed these themes "generative" because (however they are comprehended and whatever action they may evoke) they contain the possibility of unfolding into again as many themes, which in their turn call for new tasks to be fulfilled (Freire, 1970, p. 103).

Above, Freire provides two fundamental characteristics of generative themes given that not every word that we will hear in a visit to a community is a generative theme. First, the themes are open units ‘designed’ to trigger critical thinking in a discussion since they describe circumstances that affect people's lives; therefore, they appeal to people’s emotions and motivate them to take action. Second, they have the flexibility to “generate” further reflective discussion and, consequently, more themes, due to the innate human characteristic of creating and re-creating one’s surrounding environment (Freire, 1967). The ultimate goal of reflection on generative themes is to challenge people to consciously change the way they understand the world (cf. Freire, 1967, 1970). Once the themes have been identified, they must be problematized.

### 3.2.3.2 *Problematization of the themes*

The methodology for the problematization of themes is framed by the social and historical context, explained above. Problematization results from a critical egalitarian discussion that Freire defines as problem-posing education —commonly known as

popular education<sup>45</sup>. This approach is opposed to what he characterizes as 'banking pedagogy,' a metaphor that refers to the act of depositing something in a bank as a parallel to the action of teachers depositing knowledge into the empty minds of students (Macrine, 2009).

The problematization of a theme constitutes a strategy to develop critical awareness to provoke reflection and action in a particular situation. In other words, problematization seeks to promote efforts to transform any alienating circumstances into an opportunity for learning. Problematization allows awareness about the difference between the world of nature and the world of culture (Freire, 1967, p. 108). The objective to problematize a theme is that learners reflect upon their limit situations to overcome them.

Freire (1970) builds on the work of Alvaro Vieira Pinto (1960), who asserts that limit situations are not "the frontier which separates being from nothingness, but the frontier which separates being from being more" (p. 284). This understanding takes us to a next concept, conscientization.

### 3.2.3.3 *Conscientization the ontogenesis of Cultural and political action*

Freire conceives man<sup>46</sup> as an unfinished being, in a state of constant intellectual growth because of his dialectical relation with the world. Freire's educational philosophy presents learning as a cognitive activity. It is a critical approach to reality and a continuous process in any given sociohistorical context (Freire, 1967, 1970, 1975, 1979). Freire emphasizes that "people, as beings *in a situation*, find themselves rooted in

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<sup>45</sup> In this dissertation, I refer to the Freirean approach, although there several approaches within what is known as popular education (cf. Arnold & Burke, 1983).

<sup>46</sup> Men and man can be understood in Freire as synonyms for "human beings".

temporal-spatial conditions which mark them and which they also mark” (Freire, 1970, p. 109)<sup>47</sup>.

Conscientization results from the human capacity to distance oneself from one’s actions and objects that one has created in order to admire them. Only people can objectify and think critically about the reality they transform, an awareness about reality that is the essence of conscientization, which “clarifies the role of people in the world and with the world as transforming rather than adaptive beings” (1970, p. 121). In this matter, it is possible to say that conscientization is the result of people’s discussions of and reflections on existential situations. It works to conquer one’s reality (cf Freire, 1979, pp. 15-16).

Cultural and political action results from implementing what Freire calls libertarian education. From the Freirean point of view, education is a political act because it promotes critical thinking that challenges the power structures organizing society. Freire claims that “through a true praxis, [people] leave behind the status of objects to assume the status of historical Subjects” (Freire, 1970, p. 170). People are born into a system but can change it. Education is also a cultural action because it results from human praxis directed toward the world (Freire, 1970, 1975). Conscientization and cultural-political action are necessary steps to construct people’s identity, a crucial premise to achieve cultural freedom because a “particular problem is the duality of the oppressed: they are contradictory, divided beings, shaped by and existing in a concrete situation of oppression and violence” (Freire, 1970, p. 55). Therefore, it is crucial for people to fight this duality and reaffirm who they are. This issue demands a consideration of the term identity.

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<sup>47</sup> Emphasis in original.

Drawing on Hildebrandt (2007) and Ricoeur (1994), Raab (2009), describes the existence of two interrelated components in the conception of identity. The first stems from the Latin *idem*, which means “sameness, similarity and/or continuity” and the second derives from *ipse* or the self. Raab asserts that there is an interrelation between these two conceptions because “*idem* identity has two components: sameness and similarity referring to the categories into which items are placed; and continuity alluding to sameness over time. *Iipse* identity depends on continuity” because we are attributed by others (*idem*) so that we can compare or contrast ourselves with them (self) (pp. 207,208). In other words, the *self* always needs the *others* as referent. In the same vein, Jenkins (2014) argues that identity is the human capacity—rooted in language—to know ‘who’s who’ (and hence ‘what’s what’). This involves knowing who we are, knowing who others are, them knowing who we are, us knowing who they think we are, and so on” (p. 6). Simply said, identity is to be aware of who is who in relation to others. To return to Freire, it is possible to say that the construction of an identity is each “individual’s ontological and historical vocation to be more fully human” (1970, p. 55).

Freire’s cultural action is based on the assumption that once people have comprehended their inherent creative and transforming power over nature, they are empowered to change the world. Therefore, people no longer feel forced to fatalistically and passively accept any incidental event. For Freire, the anthropological concept of culture is based on the premise that man<sup>48</sup> does not need to be something else to interact with the world; the only requirement is to be a man. Human beings are continually transforming their surrounding reality through manual work. In Freire’s pedagogy, culture is the result of man’s work (1970). This definition of culture aims at

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<sup>48</sup> In this section I will use the term ‘man’ and ‘men’ as synonyms for ‘human being’ given that Freire uses man in his original works in Portuguese.

raising people's awareness of the fact that their work is part of their culture; so, culture is inherent to human praxis.<sup>49</sup>

These ideas, drawn from Freire's libertarian education and Montessori's emphasis on promoting child experimentation with the surrounding environment, lead me to reflect on the meaning of autonomy and its relationship with learning.

### **3.3 Autonomy and learning**

Both Freire and Montessori pay attention to social interaction in the way children interact with their surrounding environment and its impact on children's education.

Thus, Freire, in his article "The Importance of the Act of Reading" (Freire, 1989), recalls his experience as a child and ponders how children start exploring the world by touching and manipulating nearby objects. Freire depicts many details of his early learning experiences. He describes the house where he was born and its immediate environment, including flowers, noises, and objects that embodied his very first, surrounding world; the surrounding world that he learned to read (interpret) through daily interaction. Freire calls this environment "the arena of the perceptual activity" (Freire, 1989). He describes this 'arena' as something more than the room where he experienced the world by using all his senses: seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling, touching. Freire explains that it was at this time that his learning experience started. He learned to "read the world" by watching what other people did and, later, imitating it. In other words, Freire conceives the act of reading as an action that implies much more than just recognizing the letters that form a word; it is an interpretation of the world (Freire, 1989).

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<sup>49</sup> I use the term praxis in the sense Freire uses it.



In a similar line of thought, Montessori suggests that “the child is an observer who through his senses is actively absorbing images, and this is very different from saying that he can receive them like a mirror” (1996, p. 59). She asserted that children make decisions. However, adults with no comprehension of the nature and capacity of human beings to make decisions hinder children’s decisions. Because each child pursues his/her interests, Montessori argues that, consequently, teachers must devise materials and structure a motivating learning environment that allows children “the right use of imagination in awakening interest” (Montessori, 1967, p. i).

Returning to Freire’s act of reading, it is essential to see how he conceptualizes “the arena of perceptual activity” above. Although his pedagogy focuses on adult literacy, he seems to suggest that every educator must pay attention to the way young children learn naturally. This understanding can be a hint of how people learn naturally throughout their lives; thus, it is worthy of consideration.

Likewise, Montessori, whose interest is in children’s learning, regards the space where children move around as a crucial component of learning. In this regard, she claims the following:

The first problem of education is to furnish the child with an environment, which will permit him to develop the functions that nature has given to him. This is not an indifferent question. It is not a question of merely pleasing the child, of allowing him to do as he likes. It is a question of co-operation with a command of nature, with one of her laws which decree that development should take place using experiences upon the environment. With his first step, the child enters a higher level of experiences (Montessori, 1949, p. 131).

She argues that the room must be equipped with child-sized furnishings so that children will have the freedom to move around and carry any activity of their interest. By having access to suitable facilities and materials, children are trained to accomplish everyday

activities; those activities that they must do at home to satisfy their necessities. For instance, washing their hands without adult's assistance by having access to a sink located proportionally to their height provides a sense of freedom and the sink becomes, at the same time, an educational artifact, at the same time, an educational artifact (Montessori, 2008, p. 73ff). Room equipment reinforces the potentiation of routine activities to prepare children for life. Hence, instead of learning what a teacher says or what it is written in textbooks, Montessori presents an approach where children learn as they perform activities, manipulate objects or as they interact with their surrounding environment. She claims that active learning takes place if the content takes into account children's sociocultural context (Lillard, 2005). Learning in context involves actions that pervade people's everyday lives: eating, taking a shower, washing one's hands, or preparing food, among others. According to Montessori, educators have the chance to potentiate these actions to prepare children for daily life (Montessori, 2008, p. 30 ff). This preparation can be achieved, in school, using the reconceptualization of the term discipline as a synonym for freedom. The consideration of autonomy and learning leads to an examination of participation, another component in both approaches.

### **3.4 Agency and participation**

Freire's conception of problem-posing pedagogy promotes what he calls "committed involvement" in the process of liberation (Freire, 1970, p. 69). This type of involvement results from the process of conscientization, of understanding one's culture in order to transform it. This idea corresponds with the notion of agency that Ahearn (2001) describes as "the socioculturally mediated capacity to act" (p. 112).

On addressing participation, new educational theories present "pedagogy [as] a teaching and learning relationship that creates the potential for building learning conditions leading to full and equitable social participation" (New London Group, 2000, p. 10). However, to achieve true participation, it is necessary to democratize learning by

taking into consideration people's needs and interests. The case of children's participation is special because, notably, when one talks about child participation, one often refers to children's engagement with the agendas of adults (See Montessori above). Percy-Smith says that the "orientation of children and young people's participation creates a context which is skewed towards adult corporate society rather than life-worlds of children in communities" (Percy-Smith, 2012, p. 13).

Brougère (2009; 2012) considers participation as a fundamental part of social life; it is a natural right of every human being, which has been acknowledged at a political level as well. Participation implies "social action"<sup>50</sup> (2012, p. 181).

Halliday also sees participation as a valuable asset in human life since "being a member of society means occupying a social role, and it is again by means of language that a 'person' becomes potentially the occupant of a social role" (Halliday, 1978, p. 14). Another important outcome of active participation in social life is that it enables members of a social group to access all the sources of "meaning potential" or the "sets of options, or alternatives, in meaning that are available to the speaker-hearer" (Halliday, 2003, p. 223). That is to say, participation results in acts of semiosis, including those that occur in the context of education.

### **3.5 Relevance of communication in education.**

I have mentioned communication above as an essential component of this study. For instance, Montessori claims that children become independent as they learn to communicate and interact with others (cf. Montessori, 1917, p. 98, 1949, p. 126). For his part, Freire asserts that human beings are "essentially communicative creatures"

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<sup>50</sup> Compare with Freire's cultural action above.

(Freire, 1970, p. 128). Likewise, Halliday (1978), from a linguistic perspective, suggests that language grants people access to become full members of society (p. 14).

Excellent communication between teachers and students is vital in education. Freire emphatically insists that “without communication, there can be no true education” (1970, pp. 92-93). He asserts that for good communication educators must think of a way to foster good understanding among all the participants. Although Freire was not a linguist, he (cf. 1973, p. 19-20) advances the centrality of the study of the semantic dimension of the vocabulary to be included in a literacy program. He anchored this semantic analysis in the scholarly work of Saussure (1916), Trier (1931), and Guiraud (1971). In addition to this study, Freire underscores the importance of situating semantic study in the local environment—or local context, as I understand it—of the participant in a literacy program. Therefore, instead of engaging in a presentation of the semantic analysis suggested by Freire, I instead frame the issue of meaning in this dissertation with a social semiotic perspective on education. I include social semiotics to complement Freire’s approach because it offers me an integral view of the synergy of meaning, context, and learning in any educational process, including language learning itself.

### 3.5.1 Halliday’s perspective on education

Halliday’s ideas on processes of semiosis align with Freire’s postulates on the meaning of words and learning. For instance, Freire’s claim about the existence of two dimensions in a word-action and reflection (Freire, 1970) seems compatible with Halliday’s “metafunctional principle: that meaning is at once both doing and understanding” (Halliday, 1993, p. 100). Both acknowledge the existence of a dialectical relationship between internal cognitive activity and the actions that we perform in the external

world. We learn as we do, but the process does not stop there. Halliday says “learning is learning to mean, and to expand one’s meaning potential” (Halliday, 1993, p. 113).

Halliday criticizes the disassociation between learning and language. Reflecting on the issue, he asserts that “most theories of learning, including those that take account of language learning, come from outside the study of language” (Halliday, 1993, p. 93). His perception is that this gap should not exist since language and learning are intrinsically related. Halliday maintains that:

Language is not a domain of human knowledge (except in the special context of linguistics, where it becomes an object of scientific study); language is the essential condition of knowing, the process by which experience becomes knowledge (1993, p. 94)<sup>51</sup>.

This view of learning bridges an understanding of the process of learning something—for example, any subject at school—and the role of language in the cognitive development of each human being. Excluding language from a theory about learning results in a poor understanding of learning as a human activity, and has an impact on the success of any learning process. That is why, from a social semiotic perspective, “educational failure is [primarily] linguistic failure” (Halliday, 2004, 279). Furthermore, the exclusion of language in a theory of learning ignores that:

The distinctive characteristic of human learning is that it is a process of making meaning—a semiotic process; and the prototypical form of human semiotic is language. Hence the ontogenesis of language is at the same time the ontogenesis of learning. (Halliday, 1993, p. 93)

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<sup>51</sup> Emphasis in original.

From this view of learning, we understand that learning and language are intrinsically related, with the existence of one as a condition for the presence of the other.

### 3.5.2 Mediation

The concept of mediation appears implicitly or explicitly in the different theories presented in this chapter. For example, Montessori comments on the relationship between the manipulation of objects and cognitive development in children. She affirms that the objects that a child manipulates play a mediating role. Freire plainly mentions that men educate each other in a way that is mediated by the world. He sees people's immediate context fulfilling the role of a mediator. However, since it is important to take into account how human language also plays a relevant role in mediation, I will return to the question of language mediation below.

Mediation is a term based on the work of Vygotsky (Vygotsky, 1978, 1986); however, the literature suggests that both Freire and Vygotsky acknowledge the centrality of dialog in the pedagogical activity. Although both have a different perspective, they both offer an account of the centrality of the word, and how it functions. Thus, while Freire sees the word as the mediator of relations between the subjects and the world, Vygotsky identifies its role in communication, in interactions, and in the genesis and development of higher psychological functions (e.g. Alves, 2008; de Melo Moura, 2001; Gehlen, Maldaner, & Delizoicov, 2010; Marques & Marques, 2006). Before continuing this discussion of mediation, I shall define a crucial term for mediation.

Daniels (2001) defines a mediator as "the means by which an individual acts upon and is acted upon by social, cultural and historical factors" (p. 14). This definition gives us two important clues to understand the concept. On the one hand, by looking at the word "means" and some of its synonyms, we know that a "mediator" refers to an "aid, instrument or a medium" through which we can complete a particular task. On the other hand, we understand that individuals use a mediator or means for reciprocal interaction

with his/her “social, cultural and historical factors”. I refer to these factors as “context”. In a similar vein, Säljö (2006) explains that the key role of mediation is to bridge the external and internal world (p. 26). In other words, mediators relate our external experiences to our cognition (compare with activity and cognition above). Mediators help us to understand what happens during our interaction with our surrounding environment. Mediation, as an activity, is part of everyday life and its understanding is crucial given that “all human activity is mediated in one way or another either materially or through mental instruments; thus, it is necessary for educators to understand both the activity and the instruments by means of which the activity is carried out” (Wittek & Dale, 2013). As said earlier, one of these mediators is language. Thus, I consider the role of language next.

Hasan's article on “semiotic mediation”<sup>52</sup> discusses Vygotsky's insight into the importance of the role of language in the “processes of semiotic mediation” for human mental development. In her article, she suggests that “the most important role of (linguistic) semiotic mediation is to enable the speaking subjects to internalize the world they experience in the living of their lives” (Hasan, 2002, p. 113). This conception of the role of semiotic mediation seems to have a parallel in Freire's perception of the relation of the word (language) and the world when he says:

Within the word, we find two dimensions, reflection, and action, in such radical interaction that if one is sacrificed—even in part—the other immediately suffers. There is no true word that is not at the same time a praxis. Thus, to speak a true word is to transform the world (Freire, 1970, p. 87).

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<sup>52</sup> This stands for “semiotic mediation by means of the modality of language” as defined by Hasan for her discussion on mediation given that “[t]he term semiotic refers to all modalities for signing, not just language”. (2002, p. 112)

In the above quotation, we find a revolutionary concept not considered in traditional theories of education<sup>53</sup>. Freire points here to the relation between people's daily activity and the way people think. Freire's model presents language, thought and reality as elements in a constant and dynamic interaction. He observes that, as people transform their surrounding reality with their actions, the resulting reality—or, in other words, the outcome of their actions—demands new forms of expression to articulate that new reality. That is to say, whenever a man creates a new object or develops a new concept he needs the appropriate words to describe his creation (Freire, 1989).

For my discussion, it is relevant to mention that Freire (1967) emphasizes the importance of using meaningful words<sup>54</sup>—referring to the kind of language used by and with the group— to achieve success in literacy (see generative themes above). In his view of education, it is crucial to use words that people can discern in order to get people engaged in the critical analysis of their social situation. By doing so, people can discover by themselves the necessity of learning how to read and write. His assumption can be understood more clearly if seen under the premise presented by Hasan (2002), who proposes that “semiotic mediation is the inculcation of mental dispositions, that is to say, tendencies to respond to situations in certain ways and beliefs about what things are worth doing in one's community, and how they are to be done.” Hasan also identifies two kinds of mediation in every human activity which she defines as “invisible and visible mediation” whose main purpose is “the creation of culture [and to give] social subjects a lived sense of belonging to the culture in which they are located” (Hasan, 2002b). Thus, if language is determinant for the development of individual cognition, then communication, as a function of language, is essential for success in education.

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<sup>53</sup> At least in most of Latin American countries.

<sup>54</sup> See also semantic analysis above.



### 3.5.3 Coding and multichannel

Freire argues strongly: “without dialog, there is no communication, and without communication, there can be no true education” (1970, pp. 92-93). Along the same line of reasoning, Freire introduces the idea that teachers are not above their students because of knowledge possession; there is always some knowledge that students can share reciprocally. About this, he says: “People teach each other, mediated by the world, by the cognizable objects which in banking education<sup>55</sup> are ‘owned’ by the teacher” (Freire, 1970, p. 80). Freire proposes that education is part of social interaction and takes place using dialog. He states that “dialog is the encounter between men, mediated by the world, in order to name the world” (1970, p. 88). Dialog, or let us say communication, makes possible the exchange of ideas. At the same time, the known, physical objects in the surrounding world mediate learning.

In the words of Freire (1979), coding is the process by which we illustrate “a dimension of reality as lived by individuals, and this dimension is proposed for its analysis in a context different from that in which they live it” (p.18). The process of codification departs from the selection of a channel to represent a chosen theme. I must say that Freire does not theorize the term, he rather suggests that it is a decision-making activity to pick out the best way to represent a theme. The choice of channel, in this sense, is based on the potential that a given channel might offer to convey a message (cf. Freire, 1970, p. 121).

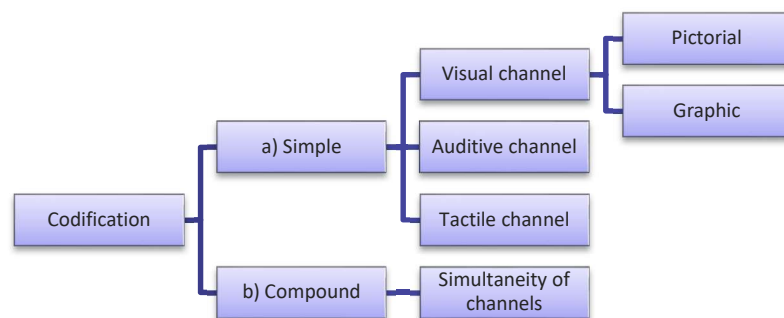
To codify generative themes is not just preparing visual aids; therefore, educators must take into consideration the necessities of the group before selecting one or several channels of communication (cf Freire, 1970, p. 114). Freire presents three channels, which correspond to these three human senses: auditive, tactile and visual. He

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<sup>55</sup> Banking education is a metaphor that refers to the act of depositing something in a bank as a parallel to the act of teachers depositing knowledge into the empty minds of students (Macrine, 2009).

subdivides the latter into two sub-channels: pictorial and graphic channels. Freire also suggests two systems of codification: simple and compound codification (see Figure 1). He explains that simple codification utilizes one of the above channels at a time. Contrary to this, compound codification uses various channels simultaneously (1970, p. 121).

**Figure 1: Channels of communication (Freire, 1970)**



Representation in Freire’s pedagogy, as I understand it, refers to how we ‘depict’ the ideas we want to convey to our interlocutors. Freire (1967) suggests concrete items such as “slides, filmstrips or posters” as ways to show concretely the materials containing the elements of an epoch (Freire, 1970, p. 101). For a better understanding of this, let us consider an example of a coded theme and its practical operationalization. As explained earlier, and according to Freire, educators can code and represent the thematic in existential situations using a number of different channels of communication.

### 3.6 Multimodality

Multimodality describes communication practices in terms of “image, gesture, gaze, posture, [...] and the relationships between these” (Jewitt, 2014, p. 15). It can also be understood “as the use of several semiotic modes in the design of a semiotic product or event, and the ways in which these modes are combined” (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001, p. 20). The notion that “all communication is multimodal” (Van Leeuwen, 2005, p. 267)

departs from Halliday's linguistic theory, in which he suggests the existence of various modes of communication other than language (1978). In his theory, Halliday (2003) claims that language makes meaning through the interaction of three "mutually constructive sets of relationships," which he calls "metafunctions." He introduces three metafunctions: "the ideational metafunction, whereby language construes human experience; the interpersonal metafunction, whereby language enacts human relationships; and the textual metafunction, whereby language creates the discursive order of reality that enables the realization of the other two" (Halliday, 2003, p. 249). The meaning produced needs materiality in order to come into existence (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006). Meaning uses semiotic resources to come into existence and is fixed in one or several semiotic modes (Kress, 2008, 2010, 2014).

The building blocks to make meanings are called semiotic resources. They are a "community's means for making meaning" (Jewitt, Bezemer, & O'Halloran, 2016, p. 71). In the words of Kress (2010), semiotic resources result from "the social work performed ceaselessly by members of social groups with the affordances of the material" (p. 80). These resources in turn "are the product of the potentials inherent in the material, of a society's selection from these potentials and of social shaping over time of the features which are selected" (Kress, 2014, p. 61). In the same vein, Van Leeuwen describes semiotic resources as:

the **actions** and **artifacts**<sup>56</sup> we use to communicate, whether they are produced physiologically—with our vocal apparatus; with the muscles we use to create facial expressions and gestures, etc.—or by means of technologies—with pen, ink, and paper; with computer hardware and software; with fabrics, scissors and sewing machines, etc. (2005, p. 3).

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<sup>56</sup> Emphasis in quotation is mine.

These resources are “system[s] of meanings” that meaning makers can use to express the “reality [proper] of the culture” (Halliday, 1978, p. 123). Semiotic resources are necessary for meaning-making since, without these elemental resources, no mode would come to exist because they are resources that we deploy to represent and communicate a message that will be interpreted accordingly in a given context (Baldry & Thibault, 2006).

The second term, “semiotic mode,” is another concept anchored in Halliday’s theory (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006; Van Leeuwen, 2005). For Kress (2010), a “mode is a socially shaped and culturally given resource for making meaning. Image, writing, layout, music, gesture, speech, moving image, soundtrack and 3D objects are examples of modes used in representation and communication” (p. 79). To put it another way, a mode is an “available means”<sup>57</sup> to make meaning (MODE, 2012; see also Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001).

Kress warns us that not everything that is socially constructed is a mode. Understanding this is vital to differentiate a semiotic mode from a semiotic resource. While the semiotic resource is necessary for the instantiation of a mode, a resource is a mode only if it fulfills a communicative function through the three metafunctions conceptualized by Halliday (1978, 2003). In this respect, a mode needs:

to be able to represent what ‘goes on’ in the world—states, actions, events: the *ideational metafunction*; to represent the social relations of those engaged in communication: the *interpersonal function*; and to represent both these as message—entities—texts—coherent internally and with their environment: the *textual function* (Kress, 2014, p. 65).

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<sup>57</sup> One of the definitions available at <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/resource>

Besides fulfilling the three metafunctions, it is essential to understand that in a social semiotic perspective “modes offer different potentials for making meaning; these [potentials] have a fundamental effect on choices of mode in specific instances of communication” (Kress, 2014, p. 61)<sup>58</sup>. Consequently, multimodality draws on four theoretical assumptions (Jewitt, 2014a). The first states that language is part of multiple existing modes. The second suggests that each mode realizes a different communicative function which depends on the mode’s affordances (see Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 123). The third proposes that people arrange or configure these modes according to the senders’ interests. The fourth assumes that modes are shaped by social practices (Jewitt, 2014a). Let me explain these four assumptions in the paragraphs that follow.

According to Jewitt, the first theoretical assumption has to do with the notion “that language is part of a multimodal ensemble” (Jewitt, 2014a, p. 15), that is to say, language is part of multiple existing modes which act together in the process of meaning-making (See Halliday, 1978).

Modes have different affordances. Thus, the second assumption is “that each mode in a multimodal ensemble is understood as realizing different communicative work” (Jewitt, 2014a, p. 16). That is to say, depending on the mode in use, the sign-maker gains access to different affordances, something which Kress defines as “the potential and limitations of material drawn into semiosis as mode” (2014, p. 64). This postulation suggests the existence of a specialization of the various modes depending on their affordances. To put it another way, language and images have different affordances; thus, modes can complement each other. This issue of affordances relates this assumption to the third theoretical assumption, which involves the notion that “people orchestrate meaning through their selection of a configuration of modes. Thus the interaction of modes is significant for meaning-making” (Jewitt, 2014a, p. 16). Modes do

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<sup>58</sup> See first assumption above.

not work in isolation; they are connected, which suggests the specialization of the various modes according to their affordances.

Recognizing that social practices influence each mode, the fourth assumption holds that "the meaning of signs fashioned from multimodal semiotic resources are, like speech, social" (Jewitt, 2014a, p. 17). Furthermore, modes are also shaped by meaning makers' personal experiences and their relation to the world. Hence, any semiotic mode which a meaning maker selects has the potential "to represent aspects of the world as it is experienced by [him/her]" (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 42). In this sense, our choice of mode to establish communication is determined by the available affordance of a mode. As a result, we choose a mode in a determined situation as a response to a particular communicative necessity. Thus, the selection of any mode is motivated by the interest of the sign-maker to represent and communicate his/her personal experiences. In Kress' words: "this interest is personal, cognitive, affective and social, and it shapes the 'direction' of the remaking of the resources" (Kress, 2000, p. 152). Following Kress, I understand that this issue of choice leads us to consider two other concepts: representation and communication.

Representation and communication are two essential concepts if one is to consider multimodality as a way to analyze interaction. There are two important reasons for it. The first is my contention that both representation and communication shed light on the process of coding the existential situations of Freire's approach. The second reason involves their intrinsic relation to the four assumptions mentioned above.

Representation and communication are, in essence, the result of social interaction. They are social processes, but they come into existence because of different intentions. The main difference between these processes is their focus. Kress (2010) asserts that "representation is focused on me, shaped by my social histories, by my present social place, by my focus to give material form through socially available resources to some element in the environment" (p.51). In other words, representation results from my

personal interests and motivation to convey my own experiences (see van Leeuwen, 2005; van Leeuwen, 2008). Contrary to this, communication is, in the words of Kress (2010), “focused on social (inter-) action in a social relation of me with others, as my action with or for someone else in a specific social environment, with specific relations of power” (p. 51). In this sense, representation and communication as described by Kress can be related to Halliday’s interpersonal metafunction, or the capacity to establish relationships between participants in the act of communication, and to the textual metafunctions, or the capacity to create carriers of meaning (Halliday, 2003, p. 249), explained above.

As social practices, representation and communication are dynamic and find themselves in constant change within the social context that frames them. It is essential to underscore that these social processes are subject to the dynamic of the social group in which they are practiced. In the words of Kress, “representational and communicational practices are constantly altered, modified, as is all of culture, in line with and as effect of social changes” (Kress, 2010, p. 6). We must therefore keep a watchful eye on the context to conduct any analysis of these two processes.

### 3.6.1 Mobility across modes

I found inspiration to study this aspect of multimodality in the work of Bourne and Jewitt (2003), Kress, Jewitt, Ogborn, and Tsatsarelis (2014), and Kress (2000, 2008). Although most of this scholarly work focuses on the teaching of science, it provides a multimodal framework through which to examine education and learning. Of particular inspiration was Newfield and Maungedzo’s (2006) work on a multimodal approach to the study of teaching indigenous poetry.

Grounded by these four assumptions and the type of interaction between modes, Newfield (2014, p. 102) identifies two distinct trends within multimodality. The first is “the orchestration of modes within multimodal ensembles where different modes

combine in different ways to form a message” (Kress, 2000). The second trend is how interaction takes place when “different resources are used at different times, sometimes in a process of semiosis that is either ongoing or interrupted but that stays with a topic, issue or experience, representing it through a range of modes at different times” (Kress 2000b, 2010a). The significance of these two trends in the study of multimodality extends to the following related concepts: design, transformation, transduction and transmodal moments.

Design is born from the communicative purpose or motivation of the sign maker. Design as semiotic activity “takes place in the field of social action, and with the agentive force of individual [...] interests” (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001, p. 63). In Kress’s (2000) words, design has to do with the selection of “the best, the most apt representation of my interest; and about the best means of deploying available resources in a complex ensemble” (p. 153). That is to say, the way we articulate the available semiotic modes will depend on our historic-cultural contexts and the internal drive that moves us to engage ourselves in the communicative act.

The notion of design above implies that it is socially produced and is not, therefore, static. It also suggests the plurality of modes in the creation of meaning. In this sense, Kress (2000) alleges that most theories about language do not pay attention to the diversity of modes that people use in communication. He criticizes these conventional theories as they see people as users of the system and leave out the fact that communication is a dynamic and multifaceted act in which users display different resources for communication depending on the users’ motivation or actual current need. Kress highlights the existing contradiction of such theories with the dynamic nature of human semiosis as these theories’ focus is on “the use of an existing stable system and of its elements rather than of remaking and transformation” (Kress, 2000, p. 150). That is to say, that the ensemble of modes that we select to make meaning is continuously redesigned as a response to our agentive role in a communicative act. This is the essence of transformation.



In the words of Kress (2000), transformation implies “the constant reshaping, the Redesign of the materials, which reflect the prior designs of others” (p.154). It is a semiotic activity that involves “the remaking of meaning by changes within the same mode” (Jewitt et al., 2016, p. 72). Kress’s view of design and transformation takes up the notion that users of a given linguistic system do not merely limit themselves to the use of a pre-established system, but also exert an agentive role that allows them both to use the existing system and to redesign it according to the message they want to represent or communicate.

However, since communication is always multimodal, the arrays of modes that a meaning-maker prefers in accordance with her/his communicative purposes (in addition to the multiple transformations his design will undergo during the course of his interaction with others) require not solely the restructuring of semiotic components within the same mode. It still demands the uninterrupted transfer of semiotic material from one mode into another. Kress (2000) refers to this aspect as something that mainstream theories on linguistics do not take into account. For instance, these mainstream approaches fail to deal with relevant processes such as those of synaesthesia and transduction (Kress, 2000), where synaesthesia refers to “the human potential to represent meanings using multiple senses” (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000, p. 159), and transduction to the transference of “meaning from one semiotic mode to another semiotic mode” (Kress, 2000, p. 154).

Contrary to the internal semiotic activity conceptualized in Kress’s term “design,” the notion of transduction entails “remaking meaning across modes. For example, writing might be remade as drawing” (MODE, 2012; See also Newfield, 2014). Given that affordance varies from mode to mode, transduction as “a shift across modes involves the use of the different semiotic entities of the mode into which meaning materials are moved” (p.72). Seen from this perspective, transduction is intricate and multidimensional. On this matter, a complex process like the mobility of meaning across modes can generate situations that need further consideration. Attending to such

situations is necessary since transformation addresses the internal mobility of meaning within the same mode while transduction deals with meaning transfer from one mode to another. Therefore, these concepts can be obscure in complex situations of mobility of meaning (Newfield, 2014). Recognizing the ambiguity of the terms above, Newfield (2014) introduces the term “transmodal moment.”

To understand transmodality it is essential to go back to Kress’s notion of mode and multimodality. First, consider that modes provide a means of “fixing meaning” (Kress, 2014, p. 71). To put it simply, meaning is intangible as long as it is in the mind of the meaning-maker and it comes into existence by means of a mode. This fixation of meaning in a mode is what I understand as a modal moment. The second crucial point here is that “multimodality offers the possibility of choice of modes to make meaning materials, to realize meaning” (Kress, 2014, p. 70). Part of this choice in multimodality is the agency and the capacity that individuals have to transform meanings from one semiotic mode to another, or what Newfield (2014) calls a transmodal moment that she describes as follows:

The transmodal moment is the moment of modal shift between texts realised in different modes in a chain of semiosis. It refers to the external manifestation of semiotic consciousness, the realisation of an idea in a new or different mode from that in which an idea was originally encountered, what might be called the ‘translation’ of that idea into a new or different mode (pp. 103-104).

Newfield proposes transmodal moments as an alternative to deal with the fluctuation of other terms referring to transmodality. Regarding this issue, she asserts: “the term ‘transmodal’ avoids this ambivalence, pointing clearly to meanings which are manifested externally in material form, as well as being derived from the concept of ‘mode’ at the heart of multimodality” (Newfield, 2014, p. 103).

Just as all other processes of semiosis, a transmodal moment is complicated; “it involves a maze of semiotic decisions and interventions” (Newfield, 2014, p. 104) and, therefore, is a challenging task to describe. However, Newfield elucidates that an analysis of these moments can shed light on “shifts in materiality, medium, genre as well as meaning, orientation, disposition, subjectivity, identity and affect” (Newfield, 2014, p. 104). Furthermore, such an analysis can also illuminate “how modes relate to, and call up, the semiotic practices of different communities at different historical periods” (Newfield, 2014, p. 104).

### **3.7 Summary**

This research project addresses a situation involving sociocultural oppression. The approaches of Freire and Montessori presented above are educational models that emerged as a response to oppression. In the case of an isolated minority group, oppression can take different forms. For instance, the language barriers set by the incomprehension of the sociolinguistic situation of a group, including the standardization of education. In a situation like that of the Rama people, it is pertinent to consider the pedagogical component along with theories of communication.

It is for this reason that this chapter has presented elements of the theories of Freire and Montessori as an attempt to construct a model of education that can foster participation and critical thinking. It has integrated elements that shed light on the concept of context, a common element in all the theories included above. The chapter also discusses the role of mediation, a relevant concept for an understanding of the processes of coding and decoding.

As a second component of this theoretical presentation, I have included diverse elements of social semiotic and multimodality theory under the premise that educational processes are processes of semiosis. These theoretical aspects of social

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semiotic multimodality underpin the multimodal study of how an oral generative theme can move across modes.

## 4 Chapter: Method

### 4.1 Introduction

My research uses a qualitative approach that I anchor in a transformative research paradigm (Mertens, 2007, 2015). In the literature about research methods, there is always discussion of the use of adequate terminology, especially when seeking the epistemological support of a particular research paradigm (Berliner, 2002; Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Mertens, 2015). This research primarily builds on Freire's pedagogical principles and addresses a problem faced by a group of people and an under-resourced community who struggle to revitalize their ethnic language.

I have chosen a qualitative approach because it lends itself to analyzing the type of data that I have collected. A qualitative approach is by nature interpretative. It attempts to understand “the meanings, concepts, definitions, characteristics, metaphors, symbols, and descriptions of things” (Berg, 1995, p. 3; see also Morse & Richards, 2002). According to Patel and Davidsson (2003), qualitative research has as its primary purpose to visualize the whole picture of a phenomenon. Thus, to analyze data, qualitative research uses “a set of interpretative activities, [and] privileges no single methodological practice over another” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013, p. 11).

Moreover, qualitative research is situated. In this regard, Denzin and Lincoln (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018) assert that qualitative research “involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (p. 3). This contextualization of the phenomenon under study is vital in order to understand, for instance, why mainstream language-teaching methodology can be fruitless in the context of the revitalization of a severely endangered language.

My choice of methodology is the result of much consideration and reflection. In my view, a qualitative methodology addresses many of the issues that have motivated this research. For instance, the transformative paradigm takes into consideration participation, emancipation, and post-colonial and indigenous issues. It also, importantly, encompasses the Freirean philosophy and approach which is an essential theoretical component of this dissertation. Likewise, this paradigm “emphasize[s] that the agency for change rests in the persons in the community working side by side with the researcher toward the goal of social transformation” (Mertens, 2015, p. 8). Furthermore, Marshall and Rossman (2006) argue that research can “contribute to radical change or emancipation from oppressive social structures, either through a sustained critique or through direct advocacy and action taken by the researcher, often in collaboration with participants in the study” (p.5). The consideration of the roles of the community and researcher in the research process places my research into the participatory approaches (Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Lather, 1992; Mertens, 2010).

Although identifying a research paradigm for my research was not difficult since I built much of my theoretical approach on Freire, deciding on a strategy for the study was problematic. On the one hand, although Freire’s work is regarded as both a pedagogical theory and a research method (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013, 2018; Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Mertens, 2010), finding information about adapting Freire’s ideas as the basis for a research method is more complicated. For instance, when I researched Internet databases, I saw more entries on Freire’s work on literacy than on any other topic. Conversely, the impact of Freire’s work on research methods is discussed more from a philosophical perspective than a practical one.

Deliberating on an approach for my research was far trickier. On the one hand, I explored approaches from intervention research to evaluate how feasible they were for my project (Eri, 2012; Hermes, Bang, & Marin, 2012; Phye, Robinson, & Levin, 2005; Plomp & Nieveen, 2013). For instance, I considered Engeström’s activity system as a formative intervention as one possible approach. This approach finds contradictions as a source of

change and development. It also addresses the agentive role of participants and situations beyond the control of researchers. Finally, it focuses on some of the problems that I had in mind for my research (cf. Engeström, 1987; Engeström, 2011; Engeström et al., 2016). These point of view, as I understand them, stem from the common influence of Marxist thought on Freire and Vygotsky, the latter being a significant influence on Activity Theory (Engeström, 1987; Freire, 1998; Ratner & Silva Nunes Henrique, 2017).

On the other hand, I was certain that could use Freire as a valid approach to conduct my research since his work has influenced research in critical pedagogy (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Indeed, Freire (Freire, 1967, 1970) is also concerned with contradictions, which he terms “limit situations,” or situations that can be overcome to start something new.<sup>59</sup> Freire believes that freedom results in spontaneous activity (1970). Discussing agency, Freire describes conscientization as a process which results in people’s transformation into active subjects (e.g., Freire, 1970, p. 133).

With these ideas in mind, I determined to use a Freirean approach. Freire can be regarded as one of the founders of the participatory action research (PAR) approach (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Mertens, 2015; Streck & Jara Holliday, 2015). Eikeland (2012) asserts that intervention, action, and applied research are anchored in philosophical pragmatism (Greenwood & Levin, 1998), critical theory (Carr & Kemmis, 1986), experimentalism (Kurt Lewin)<sup>60</sup>, and political activism (Collier, 1945). In the case of Latin America, especially in popular education and PAR, the approach is epistemologically rooted in critical theory (Torres, 1992) and especially in the work of Freire (1982).

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<sup>59</sup> Freire builds this definition on the anthropological work of Alvaro Vieira Pinto (1960)

<sup>60</sup> Presented by Campbell (1978)

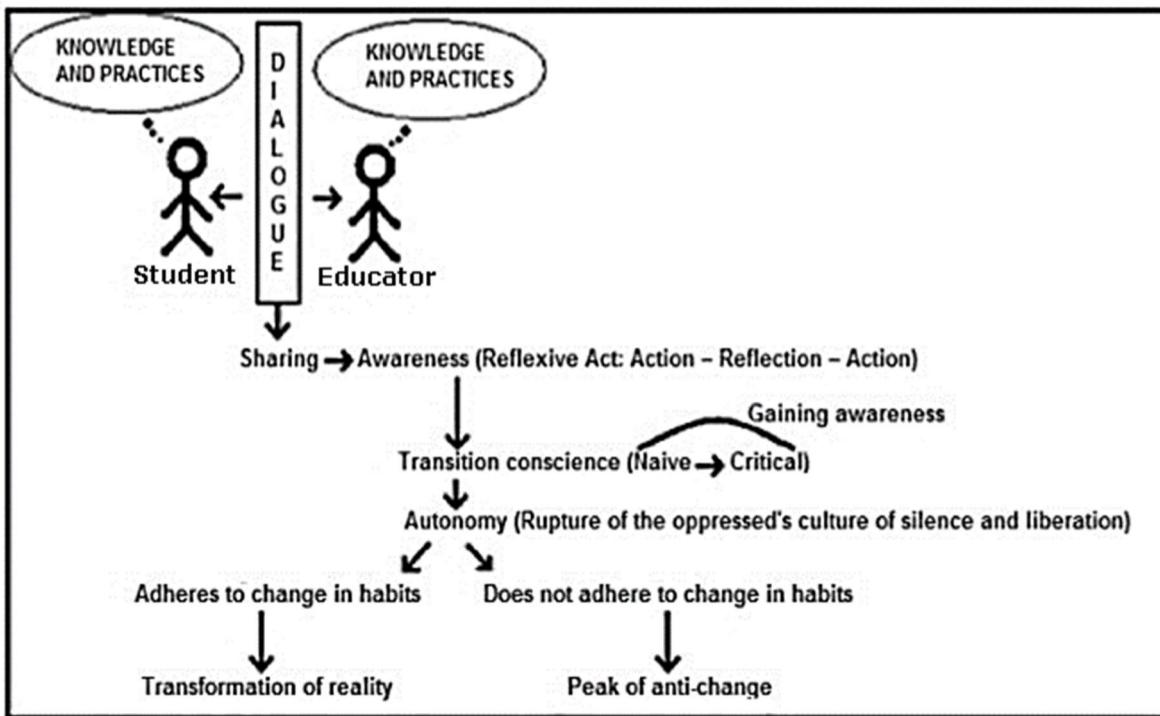
The following are some of the characteristics of this approach that I regard as most useful for my project. 1) PAR defines my participation in the process as it “recognizes a role for the researcher as facilitator, guide, formulator, and summarizer of knowledge, and raiser of issues” (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 230). 2) This approach takes into account that “as with democracy, participation is both an end and a means to achieve it, among other ends” (Chevalier, 2013, p. 177). It is community centered as it “expresses a commitment to bring together broad social analysis, the self-reflective collective self-study of practice, and transformational action to improve things (Kemmis, McTaggart, & Nixon, 2014).”

Freire’s (1970) main method is dialog with the goal of achieving conscientization. Therefore

the object of the investigation is not persons (as if they were anatomical fragments), but rather the thought-language with which men and women refer to reality, the levels at which they perceive that reality, and their view of the world, in which their generative themes are found (1970, p. 97).

Figure 2—on the next page— illustrates the place of dialog in the process of research. The idea is that all the participants in the process have some knowledge that can be problematized, analyzed and transformed into new knowledge.





**Figure 2: Freire's model (Martins & Alvim, 2012, p. 287).**

As explained in Chapter 3, the dialog is triggered by introducing generative themes, whose identification is the first step in the process. Interviews and informal encounters served as techniques for data collection, identifying themes that could be codified and decodified by participants (Freire, 1967, pp. 111-115).

Likewise, this process of dialog is a semiotic process. This is why I use theories of social semiotic multimodality to analyze the process of communication in the workshops (to which I will return later in this chapter).

#### 4.1.1 Fieldwork

I carried out my fieldwork in the Rama territory, in the communities of Rama Cay and Bangkukuk Taik (see Map 5 in Chapter 2). As noted in Chapter 2, access to this Caribbean Coast territory is difficult. Getting to Bluefields, the regional capital, is the first step to reaching the Rama territory from the rest of the country. There are two ways to travel

to Bluefields from Managua: by plane or bus/panga (boat). Going to Bluefields by airplane is the fastest (one hour) and most comfortable form to get there. A trip by land starts on the bus, which takes up to nine hours to reach the fluvial port of El Rama, followed by an over two-hour long boat trip down the Escondido River (see Map 3 in Chapter 2). Traveling to the Rama communities is much more complicated, since ground transportation connecting Bluefields with towns and small villages is almost nonexistent. There are only a few stretches of road (totaling just 21.5 km) in good condition and no roads at all in the Rama-Kriol territory. Therefore, marine transportation, by river and sea, is the primary means to get to the various communities.

My opportunity to enter this area came from Colette Grinevald, the RLP team, and coordination with blueEnergy (bE)<sup>61</sup>, a non-governmental organization that implements development projects, including adaptation to climate change, in the Rama communities. blueEnergy's work with the Rama has built a network of cooperation in most of the territory's villages which I could use as a platform for my visits and stays in the region.

#### 4.1.2 Rama Cay

Rama Cay is a small island of 1,8 hectares and around one thousand inhabitants. It is about 15 kilometers south of Bluefields. Before taking a trip to this island, it is necessary to arrange travel with people who own a boat because there is no public transportation system. The trip might take between twenty-five minutes and one hour depending on how fast the motor of the boat is. The trip takes over three hours if traveling in a rowing boat.

I chose Rama Cay as the point of departure for my field experience with the Rama for three reasons: 1) my interest in observing how these people live and their culture; 2) I

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<sup>61</sup> <http://www.blueenergygroup.org/>

wanted to connect with schoolteachers to learn how they teach the Rama language. Furthermore, the school in Rama Cay is the center for the school “nodo”<sup>62</sup> in the area. Rama Cay’s local school is the largest in the territory, although a very small one in comparison to other schools in the country. It has two hundred students in elementary education, while the secondary school has seventeen students in Saturday school (Fieldnote, 21.08.2014). The school’s principal is also in charge of overseeing the rest of schools in Rama territory, including Bangkukuk Taik; and, 3) my final reason for visiting the island was to get in touch with people who were students of the pioneers in teaching Rama, Miss Nora Rigby and Walter Ortiz (see Chapter 2). Some of these former students are now considered new speakers (see the speaker’s typology in Appendix 1). These people also have a positive attitude towards the language, and a few of them struggle today to keep the language alive. It is important to mention that Mr. Ortiz, the native speaker who lives on Rama Cay, is the only one who can read and write the language; therefore, he was a central resource for the transcriptions of the recordings.

#### 4.1.3 Bangkukuk Taik / Cane Creek: The true home of the last cluster of speakers

Access to Bangkukuk Taik is much more difficult than access to Rama Cay. The community is located between the coordinates 11.5628 latitude and -83.7141 longitude, 55 km south of Bluefields. There is no public transport system and organizing a trip there is demanding. Although it is possible to pay for private transportation to these areas, finding a boat is not an easy task. Because of the isolation of the territory and treacherous ocean currents, not many people have the experience and skills to pilot a boat in the open sea to reach this area. Therefore, traveling to these communities requires a lot of preparation of transportation and supplies such as food, water,

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<sup>62</sup> School nodo is an administrative unit used by the Ministry of Education to refer to a cluster of schools in rural areas.

medicine and, in my case, school materials. The duration of the trip is between three and seven hours depending on the boat's motor size and the weather conditions.

My first visit was a trip organized by blueEnergy and Barbara Assadi (see Chapter 2). Assadi introduced me to the people in the area and their leaders. As in Rama Cay, I was introduced as a new member of the Rama Language Project and the person who would be working with them in the next two years. This introduction was necessary, as past and current conflicts caused by settlers from the Pacific Region of Nicaragua have resulted in much mistrust toward visitors from "the Pacific" ("the Pacific" being their name for the rest of the country and home to the "Pañas"<sup>63</sup> or Spanish-speaking mixed-race group (Fieldnote, 13.08.2014)).

My primary reason for conducting the Rama Language Workshops in Bangkukuk Taik was my encounter with Rama speakers early in February 2014 (see Chapter 2). Additionally, after conversations with elders and teachers of Rama Cay and Colette Grinevald, I decided that the best place to continue my fieldwork would be this community because of the number of Rama speakers who still live in the area nearby.

My third motive for visiting the area was the ongoing teaching of Rama in the local elementary school by a native speaker. It is important to note that this native speaker was Miss Christina Benjamin, one of the three language informants for the Rama project since the 1980s (see Chapter 2). By the time I arrived, she had been teaching Rama for a few months. I was interested in observing how an *illiterate* person taught the language, since this scenario could be considered a non-traditional language classroom where the use of traditional language teaching approaches is challenging considering the unique needs of the students and their teacher.

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<sup>63</sup> Paña is a short term to refer to España (Spain).

## 4.2 Sample

Patton (2002) shows that one of the distinctions between quantitative and qualitative research is the size of the sample and how it is chosen. He argues that qualitative research “typically focuses in depth on relatively small samples, even singles cases...” (p. 169). Creswell (2013) brings up the question of sample size explaining that sampling “is not only to study a few sites or individuals but also to collect extensive detail about each site or individual studied” (p. 157). Extensive collection of data is not aimed at generalizing from the collected data, but at elucidating details particularly relevant to the investigation (Creswell, 2013, p. 157). The sample in my research is small, but it was chosen according to certain criteria. It is a type of sample collected by the method that Creswell (2013) calls “criterion sampling” which “refers to picking cases that meet some prespecified criterion” (p. 350).

I chose the group in Bangkukuk Taik based on three criteria. First, although the group in Rama Cay is the biggest—two hundred children versus only twenty-two in Bangkukuk Taik—the latter was the only group studying the Rama language with a native speaker as their teacher when I started my fieldwork. The second criterion was the existence of a nearby concentration of Rama speakers (eight in total). Being close to these speakers gave me the chance to collect more samples of the language and increased my opportunities to hear the language in a real conversation. Third, since the community remains relatively isolated because of its location, the way its people live today resembles the way the Rama lived in earlier periods. I was aware that trying to find a pure Rama lifestyle was a romantic idea, but nevertheless thought I would be able to see more of the remaining elements of this culture in places further away from urban centers. I also wanted to complete the picture that I had built in my mind during my conversations with Colette Grinevald.

The community has an elementary school. By February 2015—by the time of my second trip—there were twenty-five children registered officially. They were subdivided into

two multi-grade groups. Two teachers worked two different shifts. A female teacher (T4) was in charge of the morning shift group. This group consisted of sixteen children ages three to eight. They attended school from eight to eleven o'clock in the morning. These children were split into three subgroups: preschool, first grade, and second grade.

The second group attended school in the afternoon. A male teacher (T3), who worked as the coordinator of the activities in the local school under the supervision of the school principal of Rama Cay, was in charge of this group. He was in charge of the second multi-grade group. This group was the smallest, with only eight children attending school regularly out of an official registration of fifteen. The children's ages in this group varied from nine to fifteen, and they attended school in the afternoon from twelve thirty to four o'clock. This group was also divided into three sub-groups: third grade, fifth grade, and sixth grade, although no child attended fourth grade in 2015. Teachers in this territory work under difficult conditions, lacking of school supplies and receiving no assistance from the main educational institutions in the area. Although T4 and T3 hold bachelor's degrees in Marine Biology, they do not have formal training as teachers. Their only training comes from the monthly in-service training meetings that teachers hold in Rama Cay.

A female Rama native speaker (T1), often referred as a native speaker in this study, was in charge of the Rama language teaching in this school. While she had no official position, she was in charge of teaching the language and worked under a particular regime in the school. She did not work officially for the Ministry of Education given that she is illiterate and therefore has no formal education as a teacher. Instead, she worked under the supervision of the teacher responsible for the upper grades in the afternoon, who gave her time to teach the Rama language. During the Rama Language Workshops, she was assisted by a new speaker, a former student of Walter Ortiz and a retired schoolteacher in Bangkukuk Taik. The latter also helped me with translation into Kriol whenever needed.

I have designated these four teachers T1, T2, T3, T4, T1 being the teacher with whom I worked the most and T4 the teacher who participated the least, only providing me with background information.

As for the students chosen for this study, I worked with the second group: nine students plus T1 and T2. These people constitute the sample for the interventive part in this study. The following table below (Table 6) details each student that attended our workshops. The table also provides a number that identifies the child in the coming chapters.

**Table 6: Children and teenagers who attended the workshops in Bangkukuk Taik**

No	Grade	Gender	Age	comments
<b>S1</b>	2	Female	9	She attends school in the morning and joined the workshops voluntarily
<b>S2</b>	4	Female	13	
<b>S3</b>	4	Female	15	
<b>S4</b>	6	Female	16	
<b>S5</b>	—	Female	17	She finished school in 2014 and joined our workshops voluntarily
<b>S6</b>	3	Male	12	
<b>S7</b>	3	Male	12	
<b>S8</b>	4	Male	13	
<b>S9</b>	4	Male	13	

Interestingly, although one of the officially registered children never showed up, two girls who were not officially part of the teacher's groups participated in the workshops. The youngest (S1) was a nine-year old second-grader girl and her sister (S5) who had already finished school. While the workshops were held in the classroom, the participation in our workshops was open for the youth of the local community.

I used the school strategically because these children have obligations at home when they are not attending school. Organizing workshops outside school time would likely have meant that most children would not have been able to participate. I used the building and flexibility in the school program to organize the workshops. The five children officially registered who never attended school had moved with their families to another place to take care of their families' crops on their farms.

### **4.3 Participatory Action Research Intervention**

Although the method for this research project contains elements of Participatory action research, I use the term intervention to refer to my participation in the Rama Language Workshops. Intervention is used by both interventionist and action researchers (Eikeland, 2012). In the literature, it is not unusual for researchers to use any type of PAR (Branom, 2012; Good, 2015; Holkup, Tripp-Reimer, Salois, & Weinert, 2004; Parsai, Castro, Marsiglia, Harthun, & Valdez, 2011).

My intervention took place in four stages. The first stage was my initial visit to the territory to observe the situation in the local community (see Table 7 below). I compared this information with the documents that I had studied at CIDCA before my visit. During this visit, I became familiar with the local school and its organization. I also introduced myself to the majority of the seventeen local families. My purpose was to explain the reason for my presence in their community and my work with the Rama Language Project.

The second part of the intervention was two meetings with T1 and T2 to explain what we were going to do in the workshops. As described earlier, T1 is illiterate. With no formal training as a teacher, conversing with her about methodological issues was not feasible. Thus, the participation of T2 bridged the gap between T1 and me. Together, T2 and I planned each one of the workshops. We also evaluated the outcomes after each session and we discussed the possible materials for the next day. T2 also provided me



with background information on the participants since he had been their teacher a couple of years earlier. Moreover, he has family connections with most of the children in the school.

The third stage was the implementation of the workshops. Chapter 1 explains the double purpose of the Mural Workshops methodology. Hence, I have adapted and implemented this method, whose educational principles and procedures is relevant in the context of revitalizing the Rama language. I divided these workshops into six phases for each workshop following the steps suggested by the muralist (e.g. Centeno Scott, 2004; García Blandón et al., 2004; García Peralta & Pavone, 2004; Moreno Aguirre, 2004; Pavone & Hopewell, 1999). Consequently, the teachers and I implemented this plan in each of the sessions as follows:

- 1- **Plenary:** In this phase, we discussed and reflected on a generative theme related to the community. Here, the aim was to choose a topic for the individual drawings. We used diverse kinds of materials at this stage, such as bilingual Rama stories, newspaper articles, old pictures of Rama people, and artifacts used by people in the community.
- 2- **Individual proposal:** we encouraged each participant to draw freely individually. The aim here is for them to trace sketches of their ideas or represent their interpretation of the theme discussed in the plenary.
- 3- **Choosing a proposal for group design:** in this stage, we brought the sketches with their suggestions into discussion. Our purpose here was to start a negotiation process to select the different visual elements to be included in the final composition.
- 4- **Collective drawing:** here, children drew and painted collectively and made a composition which included their ideas as a group, which would be used as visual material to learn Rama in the following stage.

- 5- **Learning and practicing the Rama language using our visual composition:**  
The Rama speaker (T1) and her assistant (T2) was in charge of this part. We displayed the composition either on the wall or the floor (depending on weather conditions), and T1 started eliciting words, phrases, and sentences in Rama describing the images. The children followed her, repeating what she said. T2 assisted T1 introducing new phrases or clarifying the content of the composition.
- 6- **Evaluation of the experience:** We held a collective reflection at the end of the process to sum up individual learning experiences or to look for alternatives for the next workshop.

While the fifth step does not belong to the standard sequence in the organization of a Mural Workshop, I added it in order to integrate the practice of the Rama language in the workshops.

The fourth phase consisted of analysis of the collected material and evaluation of the intervention. This included a multimodal analysis of how the workshops had contributed to the improvement of the teachers' performance by providing them with a comprehensible methodology to conduct similar workshops centered on Rama language in the future. The process of intervention is illustrated in Figure 3 (See next page).

**Figure 3: The intervention process**

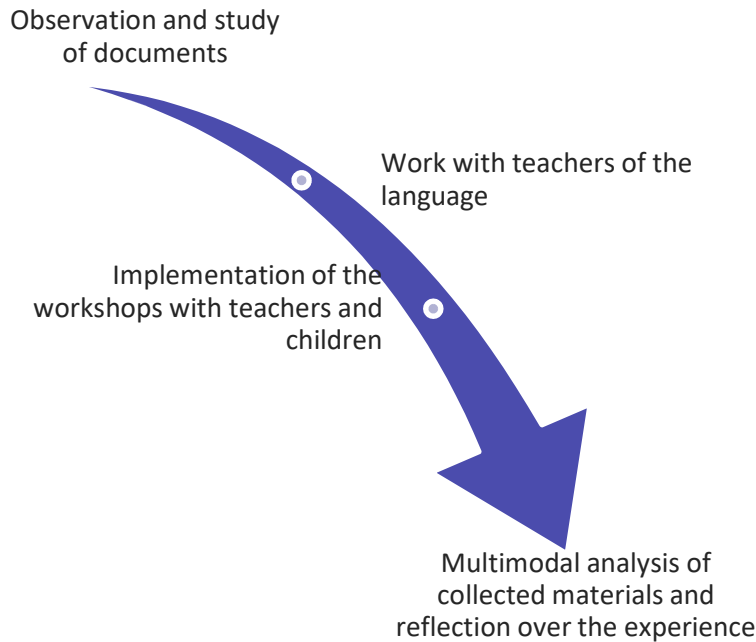


Table 7 shows a detailed list of the visits to the Rama and Kriol territory. It provides the readers with the date of the intervention, the activity performed, the location of the intervention and a brief description of how the intervention was carried out. In Appendix 7 there is complementary information about these visits.

**Table 7: Overview of visits to the Rama-Kriol territory**

No	Date	Activity	Where	How
1	08.01.2014	Contact organizations working in the Rama and Kriol Territory	CIDCA, Bluefields	Informal conversation with blue Energy field workers.
2	09.01.2014	Get in touch with school teachers and Rama leaders	Rama Cay	Formal meeting at the Cultural House.
3	10.01.2014 11.01.2014	Documentary research	CIDCA, Bluefields	Selection of literature for future consultation inside the library.

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				Designing a bibliographical database.
4	20.02.2014	Get in touch the Rama native speakers	Rama and Kriol Territorial Government office.	Informal meeting with speakers.
5	21.02.2014	Data collection	Rama Cay	Observation in school
6	04.08.2014 12.08.2014	Documentary research	CIDCA, Bluefields	Reading and making notes on historical information relevant for Chapter 2.
7	13.08.2014 19.08.2014	Formal meeting with community leaders	Bangkukuk Taik	Oral informed consent Obtaining permission to visit and work in the community.
8	23.08.2014	Data collection	Rama Cay	Gathering information about what the Rama consider to be their culture in a workshop conducted by teachers in Rama Cay.
9	13.02.2015	Data Collection	Bangkukuk Taik	Observing daily life in the community.
10	14.02.2015	Documentary research	Bangkukuk Taik	Reading school programs.
11	15.02.2015	A formal meeting with parents in the local school.	Bangkukuk Taik	Informing parents about my stay in the community and my work with their children. I asked their permission to document the process.
12	17.02.2015	First Workshop	Bangkukuk Taik	Introducing myself to the schoolchildren. Observe a lesson in Rama.
13	18.02.2015	Second Workshop	Bangkukuk Taik	Conversing about Rama legends and Rama daily routines. Free drawing.
14	19.02.2015	Third Workshop	Bangkukuk Taik	Introducing a few curiosities: briefly discussed how to mix colors and explained how children could use the chromatic circle to produce secondary colors out of the three primary colors. Free drawing.
15	23.03.2015	Fourth Workshop	Bangkukuk Taik	Using the bilingual (Rama-Spanish) story of the Manatee to practice Rama words with a native speaker.

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				Drawing individual interpretation of the story.
16	24.03.2015	Fifth Workshop	Bangkukuk Taik	Talking about and reflecting on different activities the children got involved in after class: Football, fishing, cooking, rowing. Practicing Rama with the native speaker.
17	25.03.2015	Sixth Workshop	Bangkukuk Taik	Talking about Bangkukuk Taik. Conversing about the technique that one of the participants encountered previously. Encouraging them to experiment with the materials they were given. Drawing an individual representation of the community.
	16.10.2015	Seventh Workshop	Bangkukuk Taik	Reviewing the techniques that we had practiced in March. Starting a new series of collective drawings.
	17.10.2015	Eighth Workshop	Bangkukuk Taik	Planning and drawing a collective representation of the local community.
18	17.10.2015	Ninth Workshop	Bangkukuk Taik	Talking about the future of Bangkukuk. Making a drawing of the future in the community. Using the drawing to talk about Bangkukuk Taik in Rama.
19	18.10.2015	Tenth Workshop	Cane Creek / Bangkukuk Taik	Getting feedback from the children about the experience in the workshop. Practicing Rama using the drawing we had prepared previously.

## 4.4 Data collection

Data for this dissertation were collected over the course of five trips to the field. I started my fieldwork in January 2014 and completed it in October 2015. During fieldwork, I used the following data collection techniques: documentary research, participant observation, conversational interviews, and focus groups. Table 8 shows a comprehensible overview of the data collection methods and the respective samples.

**Table 8: Overview of data collection methods**

<i>Date</i>	<i>Method</i>	<i>Sample</i>	<i>Duration</i>
<i>08.01.2014</i>	Documentary research	Five WANI publications	7 hours
<i>09.01.2014</i>	Observation (fieldnotes)	One workshop on Rama Language	2 hours
<i>10.01.2014</i>	Documentary research	Three publication on the Rama people and their language	8 hours
<i>20.02.2014</i>	Observation (fieldnotes)	One class (Rama)	1 hour
<i>04.08.2014</i> <i>12.08.2014</i>	Documentary research	Five WANI publications A Collection of Rama teaching materials	15 hours
<i>13.08.2014</i> <i>19.08.2014</i>	Observation (fieldnotes)	Three workshops on Rama traditional agricultural and fishing practice	6 hours
<i>23.08.2014</i>	Focus group	Nine young adults attending secondary school	2 hours
<i>17.02.2015</i> <i>19.02.2015</i>	Conversational interviewing Observation (fieldnotes)	Three workshops, One class (Rama), a female community member, local teachers, nine students	6 hours
<i>23.03.2015</i> <i>25.03.2015</i>	Conversational interviewing Observation (fieldnotes)	Three workshops, a male elder of the community, Rama language teacher, seven students	10 hours
<i>16.10.2015</i> <i>19.10.2015</i>	Conversational interviewing Observation (fieldnotes)	Four workshops, three speakers of Rama, nine students	12 hours

#### 4.4.1 Analysis of documents

As in much qualitative research, I started my journey by reviewing existing reports about the Rama people. Documentary research (Bowen, 2009; Coover, 2012; Evers & Nock, 2009; Prior, 2003) is an established method of collecting data; therefore, in my current research, I analyzed documents about the Rama language and Rama territory. The result of this documentary research constitutes Chapter 2, where I present information that contextualizes this research project. Furthermore, I use this information to furnish many of the details about the Rama that I present in the multimodal analysis.

Although documentary research has particular principles, I used it as a complementary tool in my research (Weller & da Silva, 2011). McCulloch (2004) underscores the richness that written documents can offer researchers exploring past contexts, and documentary research provided additional information of great value to the contextualization of my analysis and the whole dissertation (see Chapter 2).

#### 4.4.2 Conversational interviewing

Conversation analysis is described as a “method for investigating the structure and process of social interaction between humans” (Peräkylä & Ruusuvuori, 2013, p. 287). I will not enter into a deep analysis of these conversations. However, I used my informal conversations with the locals as a method to collect samples of people’s discourse. I used these in my quest to find possible generative themes that, according to Freire, can be efficiently identified by having casual encounters with local people (1967, p. 111). I collected data through what Roulston (2008) calls conversational interviewing, “an approach used by research interviewers to generate verbal data through talking about specified topics with research participants in an informal and conversational way” (p. 128). I decided not to structure formal interviews, as I failed to ask specific questions on my first visit to the field. Informal conversations were more useful in this case, as informants were encouraged to talk freely without feeling the pressure of being formally

interviewed. I elicited the information that I wanted by asking questions in the course of an average conversation. One example of this is shown below.

***Excerpt 1: Example data obtained through the conversational interview (fieldnote 18.03.2015):***

Israel: —I wish I could speak more with the children. I feel as if they were afraid of me—.

Informant: —No, they are not afraid. You know. What happens is that they speak only Kriol and do not feel comfortable speaking English. They think they do not speak good Spanish, but they understand you—.

The time and place of these conversations were not planned; however, I made notes of people's answer to particular questions of relevance for my research. Notes on these informal discussions were registered in fifty pages of my fieldnote diary.

#### 4.4.3 Focus group

Cohen, Manion and Morrison present focus groups as “an adjunct to group interviews [...] growing in educational research” (2011, p. 436). In the same way, Kvale (2007) explains that a focus group is “a non-directive style of interviewing, where the prime concern is to encourage a variety of viewpoints on the topic in focus for the group” (p. 84). As an alternative form of a group interview, it is not “ a backward and forwards between interviewer and group (Cohen et al., 2011). Furthermore, a focus group “reduce[s] the distance between researcher and researched” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013, p. 54). Along the same line, and referring to Freire's pedagogy (1970), they assert that focus groups have a “pedagogical dimension” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013, p. 316). In this sense, the workshops contain this pedagogical dimension.

As for the size of the sample in a focus group, Patton (2002) explains: “Focus group interviews are typically based on homogeneous groups. Focus group interviews involve



conducting open-ended interviews with groups of five to eight people on specially targeted or focused issues" (p. 236). A small sample and reducing the distance between the participants and the researcher were the two criteria that were used to determine the focus group with the youth of Rama Cay as a data-collection method. The data collected from this focus group was recorded and classified as a part of my fieldnotes.

#### 4.4.4 Participant observation

Marshall and Rossman (2006) define observation as "the systematic description of events, behaviors, and artifacts in the social setting chosen for study" (p.79). Since I lived with the people with whom I worked, I chose participant observation because of the guidelines it provides for establishing relationships with people. This type of observation offers the possibility to understand the organization of internal issues, cultural boundaries and the relations among people. It makes it possible to get an in-depth insight into social practices. Therefore, it permits a better understanding of the local culture (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1994; DeWalt & DeWalt, 2002; Savage, 2000; Schensul, Schensul, & LeCompte, 1999; Spradley, 1980).

During my stay in the Rama territory, I wanted to collect as much information about the Rama as possible from primary sources. In my visits, I tried to observe the Rama way of life: domestic chores, agricultural and fishing activities, among others. To do so, I visited different families to detect similarities in their way of living. In other words, I have used participant observation to observe the local context, since daily life is the source of themes for discussion in Freire's experience-based pedagogy (cf. 1967). I implemented participant observation in two different settings: a) the community and b) the school.

I used participant observation of the community to learn about:

- their social practices
- what languages they use and how
- the way their community is organized
- their primary economic activities
- their access to education

I used participant observation in the classroom to look into:

- the relationship of the school with the community
- educational practices implemented by the teacher
- the current attitude of students at my arrival
- changes in students' attitudes over several months
- the language they use during classroom interaction and how they use it
- interaction teacher-student and student-student
- production of drawings and art
- samples of Rama language from the workshops

To carry out the observation process, I used a table (Table 9 below) as a guideline, with the different dimensions to be observed during my fieldwork.

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**Table 9: Description of direct observation**

<b>Activity:</b>	<b>Conversation</b>	<b>Observer:</b>	Israel Ramón Zelaya
<b>Place:</b>		<b>Reference</b>	
<b>Date:</b>			
<b>Time:</b>			
<b>Dimensions</b>			
<b>1. Space</b>	the physical place or places		
<b>2. Actor</b>	the people involved		
<b>3. Activity</b>	a set of related acts people do		
<b>4. Object</b>	the physical things that are present		
<b>5. Acts</b>	single actions that people do		
<b>6. Event</b>	a set of related activities that people carry out		
<b>7. Time</b>	the sequencing that takes place over time		
<b>8. Goal</b>	the things people are trying to accomplish		
<b>9. Feeling</b>	the emotions felt and expressed		
<b>Comments</b>			

The dimensions in this table were taken from Spradley (1980, p. 78). Below, I present an example of how I registered my observations during my fieldwork.

These records were organized following what Wolfinger (2002) calls “comprehensive note-taking” (p. 90).<sup>64</sup> Table 10 is an example of how observation notes were registered and coded.

**Table 10: Example of observation notes**

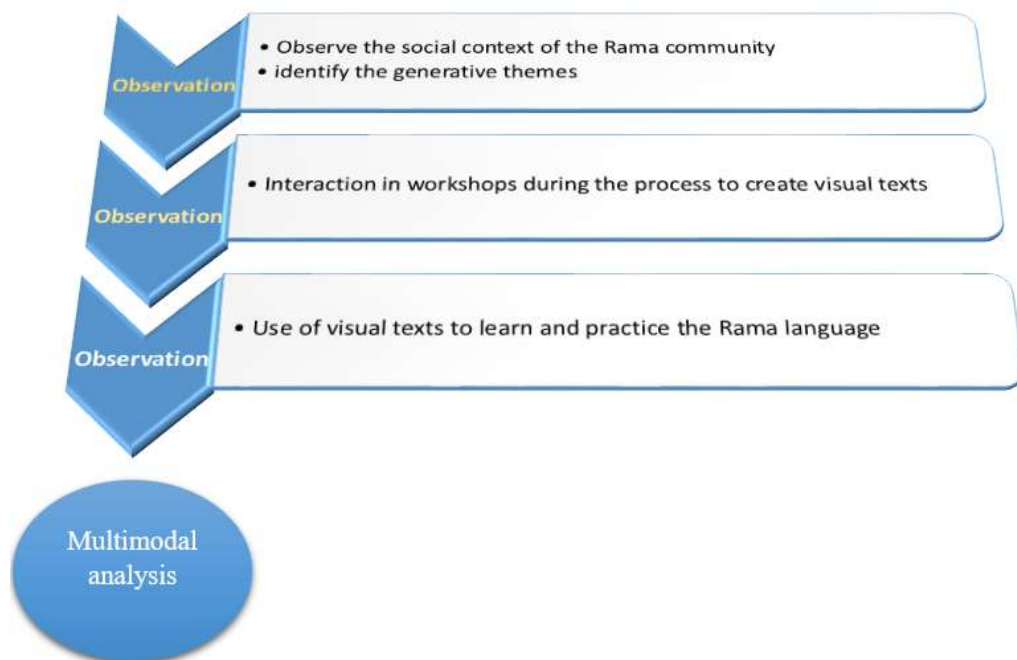
<b>Activity:</b>	<b>Conversation</b>	<b>Observer:</b>	Israel Ramón Zelaya
<b>Place:</b>	Bangkukuk Taik	<b>Reference</b>	<b>8-3</b>
<b>Date:</b>	15.08.2014		
<b>Time:</b>	11.00		
<b>Dimensions</b>			
<b>1. Space</b>	Community house		
<b>2. Actor</b>	T1 and a visiting native speaker of Rama		
<b>3. Activity</b>	Conversation on traditional plants		
<b>4. Event</b>	People are participating in a bE workshop on climate change impacts and adaptation.		
<b>5. Time</b>	The conversation had a duration of approximately 15 minutes as people were waiting for lunch.		
<b>6. Goal</b>	List some plants used in traditional Rama cuisine		
<b>Comments:</b> Kriol was the language used in communication. Names of plates and plants were delivered in Rama; however, most discussion was in Kriol. I believe that these people are so used to using Kriol that they use it regardless of their interlocutor’s language.			

Figure 4 summarizes the whole process of observation. The data collected through observation was used to illuminate the multimodal analysis.

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<sup>64</sup> See also fieldnotes bellow.

**Figure 4: Participant observation**



## 4.5 Data analysis

The following section describes the process and the tools that I used in the study of the collected data.

### 4.5.1 Observation

Data collected through observation served to identify possible generative themes that could be used in the workshops, and to provide background information for their subsequent multimodal analysis.

I organized my observation registers in a table that gathered general information about the setting for the observed event. In this chart, I assigned the event a reference number to keep track of my notes. In the example below, “8” corresponds to the number of the visit to the Rama territory and “3” correspond to the third day of that visit (see Table 11, below). This reference can be traced in the “Overview of visits to the Rama Kriol territory and workshops” in Appendix 5.

**Table 11: Example of referencing observation**

<b>Activity:</b>	<b>Conversation</b>	<b>Observer:</b>	Israel Zelaya
<b>Place:</b>	Bangkukuk Taik	<b>Reference</b>	<b>8-3</b>
<b>Date:</b>	15.08.2014		
<b>Time:</b>	<b>11.00</b>		

I analyzed the different dimensions registered during the observation process as I perceived them. I also reviewed the personal comments that I wrote. These comments were usually my interpretation of the possible causes of the observed event. Then, I judged whether the information in the scheme could be used as background information for the multimodal analysis or as a source for a generative theme.

#### 4.5.2 Fieldnotes

Fieldnotes serve the purpose of fixing or making visible qualitative data recorded for later analysis (Creswell, 2013; Emerson, 1995; Lyle Duque, 2009). Fieldnotes are a way “to stay close to the data” (cf. Denzin & Lincoln, 2013, pp. 469-747). Fieldnotes are diverse in form. They “can be collected in a variety of formats, including written, dictated, and even visual sketches”(Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2017). In participant observation, fieldnotes can catch “the most noteworthy, the most interesting, or the most telling” (Wolfinger, 2002, p. 89) details that may be of relevance when interpreting data.

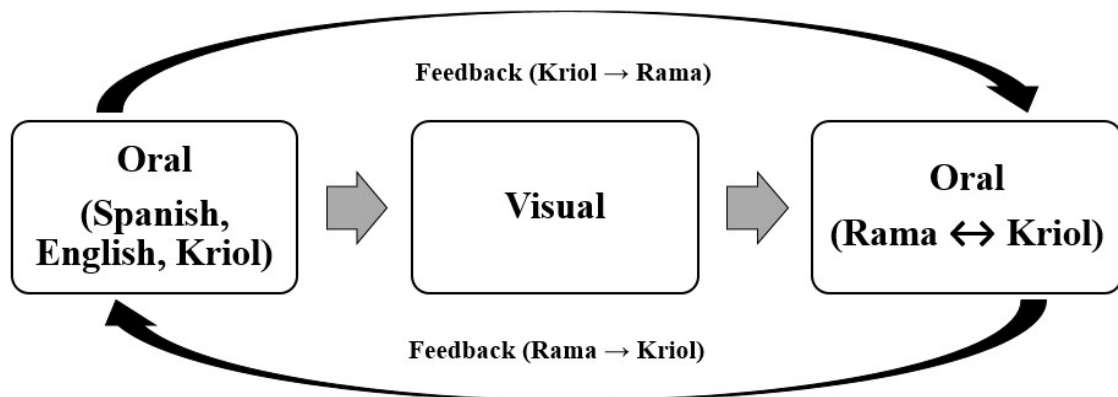
In this study, I relied on my fieldnotes either for reconstructing the context or for providing supporting details and background information for the multimodal analysis in an attempt to “improve the depth of qualitative findings” (Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2017) and support my discussion in this dissertation.

## 4.6 Multimodal analysis

The multimodal analysis in this study focuses on how participants in the workshops use different semiotic resources and modes for communication in order to code and decode generative themes. It also studies how a theme undergoes a process of mobility across modes (Kress, 2000; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006; Newfield, 2014; Van Leeuwen, 2005). As noted in Chapter 3, communication plays a crucial role in any pedagogical activity (Freire, 1970; Halliday, 1993; Kress, 2000; Vygotsky, 1978). Therefore, the integration of social semiotic multimodal analysis of communication was a necessity, as this academic field provided the tools to conduct and analysis of the communicative component.

### 4.6.1 Generative themes across modes

I found inspiration in the article “Mobilising and modalising poetry in a Soweto classroom” (Newfield & Maungedzo, 2006), which gave me insight into the process of mobility across modes. This article motivated me to analyze the interaction in the Rama Language Workshops. The idea behind this analysis was to describe the orchestration of modes (Bourne & Jewitt, 2003; Kress, 2000; Newfield, 2009) that took place as a verbal generative theme mutated into a visual composition and subsequently into an oral theme again. I aimed to test how this dynamic could be used as one practice in the revitalization of the Rama language. The interaction of the different modes, as well as the mobility across modes that occurred along the workshops, is represented graphically in Figure 3, below.



**Figure 5: Interaction of different modes in the workshops**

As seen previously in the implementation of the workshops, the six phases of each workshop started with the presentation of a generative theme in the plenary phase (see above). This phase usually consisted of an oral presentation in Spanish, Kriol, and English. Subsequently, in phase two, the facilitators encouraged the participants to draw their interpretation of the presentation. The assumption here is the occurrence of a transition of modes between phase one and two, since the theme is instantiated in visual representations (see Kress, 2008, p. 17). The third phase was a space for negotiation. In this phase, verbal and visual language comes into play whenever participants exchange ideas about their composition. This can be understood as an example of the orchestration of modes (see Newfield, 2014, p. 102). This orchestration (of visual-verbal modes) continued throughout the fourth phase, where participants had to coordinate actions and exchange ideas to reconstruct and represent collectively the theme that each person had deconstructed in the previous phases. In the fifth phase of the workshops, another transition was observable. It took place when T1 ‘translated’ the visual images into a verbal description (cf. Kress, 2000). The last phase as a recapitulation of the whole process was again an orchestration of modes: orality, visuality, and gestures were part of the diverse modes.

Parallel to this mobility across modes there was also a shift in the use of languages. Initially, Spanish, Kriol, and English were used all the time. However, as the participants



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started taking over the process and drew their representations or negotiated with others, Kriol language became the working language in the room. In the final stages, when T1 assumed her role and started using the drawings, Rama and Kriol were used together. This interaction between languages is represented in Figure 3 above.

For this multimodal analysis, the following dimensions were observed: Semiotic resource, representation, choice of mode, identity, shift of modes, and mediation. Table 12 shows what each dimension means in this analysis.

**Table 12: Dimensions for the multimodal analysis of the RLW**

<b>Dimensions</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>What I observed</b>	<b>Comments</b>
<b>Orientation</b>	Names an effect of the person who engages with a semiotic object		
<b>Deixis</b>	Names locations and directions within the semiotic object, which direct participants		
<b>Transmodal modes</b>	Shift of modes in a semiotic chain		
<b>Agency</b>	Socio-culturally mediated capacity to act		
<b>Identity</b>	Representation of an image of the self		
<b>Mediation</b>	Use of physical or mental tools to bridge the external and internal world		
<b>Disposition</b>	The arrangement of the various component in a layout		
<b>Subjectivity</b>	User's desires, interests, affect		

The definitions for these dimensions are taken from (Ahearn, 2001; Kalantzis & Cope, 2000; Kress, 2000, 2010; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006; Newfield, 2014; Raab, 2009)

I video-recorded various moments during the workshops because I wanted to preserve the spoken language, gestures, and movements of the participants for later analysis. In this sense, having videos of different moments guaranteed the fidelity of my record of events observed in the field (cf. Denzin & Lincoln, 2013). I also registered my observations in my fieldnotes. The use of video was not extensive since I did not want to disturb the children's attention; moreover, due to the lack of electricity I had to use the charge in my camera wisely. As seen throughout my descriptions of the different modal moments, the focus of the analysis was on the people and how they engaged in the process to produce the visual compositions.

To present the data collected in videos, I transcribe them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013). Although, I used videos, to transcribe them, the Intelligent Verbatim Approach since my purpose was to collect Rama language samples. The use of videos for these purpose, allowed the translator and I to see the place in the visual image where the speaker of Rama set her attention as she uttered chunks of spoken language. The sentences in Rama are written in bold in the transcriptions. An indented sentence below in italics is the translation of the sentence above. Excerpt 2 below exemplifies the transcriptions.

***Excerpt 2: Example of transcription***

172. **Uut... uut ki nikitnga puksak**  
*Boat...boat two man is on the boat.*

Kriol is written using the English spelling system, but I have kept grammatical features whenever the translation comes from a Kriol speaking person like in the example above.

## 4.7 Ethical considerations

Ethical dilemmas are always present in any research process (Flick, 2009). The choice of method that we might implement brings along ethical concerns that we must analyze carefully to avoid contradictions and conflicts, especially in qualitative research which is complicated by nature with more challenging ethical issues (Hennink, 2011). Similarly, it is always important to be aware that ethics, in a context like that in which I worked, implies much more than the generic sense of obtaining “informed consent and protecting participants' anonymity, [but ethic’s guidelines must be adapted] to specific situations” (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 82). In the context of working with endangered languages, Austin (2010) calls this adaptation “applied ethics”. By this, he means the application of particular ethical principles whenever we interact with other people and adapt them to these people’s characteristics. We need to consider the extent to which our work affects the other parties personally (see the short note in 2.9.2).

### 4.7.1 Ethical issues due to language attitudes

Working with a severely endangered language was a particular situation that had ethical implications for my project. Relevant ethical issues resulted from the fact that “language endangerment typically involves two languages (and cultures) in contact, with one replacing the other” (Grenoble & Whaley, 2006, p. 14). This was a sensitive issue because revitalization programs involve the strengthening of an endangered language. Therefore, the idea of implementing such a program implies an attempt to change people’s attitudes toward the endangered language (Grenoble & Whaley, 2006, p. 13). This resulted in two central questions that I pondered: 1) could people’s skepticism lead to conflicts in the community? and 2) would members of the local community support the inclusion of their children in a language revitalization program?

I had to deal with this ethical dilemma carefully because of two reasons. First, it was true that my project's emphasis was on contributing to the efforts to preserve a minority language; nevertheless, it was also true that the community had adopted and adapted a foreign language (Kriol) as the language of their everyday life. Furthermore, after years in contact, they had blended their culture with new cultural elements (from other groups)<sup>65</sup>, creating a "new culture." In this regard, I needed to consider the sensitive issues prudently before implementing any action in the territory in order to prevent doing something to the detriment of the other's culture and language.

Based on my early conversations with members of the Rama community and my documentary research, I thought of a possible answer to these questions. In the case of the present study, and based on people's current attitude, it was possible to infer that members of the local community would not actively participate in the revitalization process; however, that would not mean that they would present opposition. On the other hand, the existence of ideological tension could represent an opportunity to potentially use a Freirean approach to mitigate the ideological tension usually found in revitalization projects (cf. Grinevald & Bert, 2014).

#### 4.7.2 Ethical problems related to participant observation

For field linguists working with endangered languages, it is necessary and relevant to immerse oneself in the local culture in order to be able to observe and understand the social context of the language. This immersion had led linguists to experience special circumstances (Grinevald, 2005a; Hill, 2006). For instance, Mason (2002) asserts that "observational studies often involve the development of close relationships in the field [which] also raises some specific issues." Mason also mentions three examples "of these

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<sup>65</sup> This contact can be observed also in many word loans from Miskitu and English which were found during the documentation process of the language, e.g., the days of the week in Chapter 5 (see also dictionary at [www.turkulka.net](http://www.turkulka.net)).

[issues] relat[ing] to questions about reciprocity, mutuality, and equality in relationships.” He also emphasizes the impossibility of living with research subjects and at the same time maintaining a distance from them; thus, “it may be inappropriate to assume that reciprocal relationships can or should be developed” (2002, p. 100).

Thus, it is mandatory for the observer to carry out an analysis of these issues. Such ethical situations point to a transformative axiological perspective which implies “respect for cultural norms” and which defines[,] beneficence [...] in terms of the promotion of human rights and increase in social justice [and] reciprocity” (Mertens, 2010, p. 11). The consideration in this ethical perspective is congruent with the research method for generative themes, which implies the use of participant observation, where egalitarian teacher-student relationships leads to the establishment of a close relationship between teachers and students (Freire, 1967, 1970).

#### 4.7.3 Dealing with ethics in this research project.

Primarily, I observe the guidelines established by the Norwegian NESH (2013). However, there are three special considerations that I will mention.

1) Talking about the Rama language with local people can arouse bitter and fruitless discussions. In Chapter 2, I described the ideological contradictions involved in speaking the language of another ethnic group, in this case, Kriol. That is why I approached the issue about the Rama language with sensitivity and tact. Given that I worked with children, I focused the workshops on community life, in my opinion, a neutral theme that could provide us with samples of actual Rama language.

2) I had to deal with the issue of informant consent in a particular way given that the Rama speaker (in charge of the class) and most parents are illiterate; we did not, therefore, sign a contract. Instead, I informed the Rama speaker and the parents in a formal meeting the details and purpose of my research project and explained my relationship with the Rama Language Project (RLP). In this sense, connection with the

RLP is a significant component of this consent agreement because the RLP is part of the joint efforts of the community itself and researchers to revive the language and the cultural expressions of the Rama people (see <http://www.turkulka.net/nosotros>). As part of the RLP, I also adopted the Advocacy Model to deal with ethical issues (Cameron, Frazer, Harvey, Rampton, & Richardson, 1993), which is why I present some pictures and mention names as a response to the explicit request of the participants (see Chapter 2).

3) Regarding my interaction with children, which can be of particular concern in most research projects involving children, I can say that there were two specific considerations with the Rama children of Bangkukuk Taik. The first was that children participated in the workshops while attending school, which included the constant supervision of their teachers. The second was the fact that the native speaker and teacher of the language was either the grandmother or aunt to the majority of the children who worked with us. In this case, these children were under the guardianship of one of the oldest persons in their extended family.

## **4.8 Summary**

In this chapter, I adopted elements of Participative Action Research as my choice of a method for my research. The chapter pointed out why I have made this decision. It further demonstrated the epistemological foundations of this approach and showed the relation between the method and the selected theory that underpins this research project. The chapter further contextualizes the investigation process by giving geographical details as well as a description of the schools and people engaged in the process. It reported the sample in this investigation and justified the reasoning behind the selection of the sample. The chapter also gave a synopsis of the intervention process to situate the reader in the space and time relating to the investigation as a whole. An additional part of the chapter is the description of the data-collection instruments and their implementation. The chapter also specified the dimensions to be

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included in the analysis, anchoring the diverse criteria for the analysis of the dimensions in the theory presented in Chapter 3.

Finally, the chapter analyzed the ethical considerations related to this study and specified how they were addressed during the research process.

## **5 Chapter. Analysis of collected data**

### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents the data collected during my fieldwork in the Rama territory from January 2014 through October 2015. To structure this chapter, I have followed a descriptive approach according to the chronological implementation of the steps in the Rama language workshops. So in the first part, I will present where and how I have collected the generative themes. Then, I shall refer to the local context of the Rama community where the workshops were implemented. Next, I will describe my findings of the current teaching of the Rama language. The fourth section of this chapter presents and analyzes the data collected in the Rama language workshops. Having analyzed these data, I will continue to examine some data that illustrate how the RLW can empower students and teachers in the community.

I want to clarify also that sometimes I write in the first person (I) and sometimes write in the first plural person “we.” The reason for this apparent mixture is that I carried out participant observation, which means I participated in the organization and conduction of the workshops. Hence, “we” refers to an activity that we (the local teachers and I) performed as a team. However, I was the only person observing and documenting the educational events in the workshop; then whenever I refer to observation and findings, I report it in the first person “I.”

### **5.2 The local context**

For the sake of a good understanding of the social context of the Rama community where I implemented the workshops, I shall start by presenting the information gathered during my first visit to Bangkukuk Taik from August 13 through August 19, 2014. I had two purposes during this stay. The first was to introduce myself to the



community and ask for the formal permission from the local leaders. The second was to collect information about the community and the local school.

#### 5.2.1.1 Economic activities in the area

The Rama people's principal economic activities are still based on what they obtain from nature. Before visiting the Rama territory, I had read that the Ramas were skilled seamen and fishers. However, during my first visit to Bangkukuk Taik in August 2014, I learned another piece of information about them; I figured out that they were not only experienced fishers but also skilled farmers. I learned about this particular piece of information while observing two workshops conducted by a blue Energy (bE) staff member with two groups of community members.

The objective of these workshops was to learn about the economic activities of the Ramas with focus on the way they used to do things in the past and compare them with the current tendencies in their economic activities. In this meeting, the participants worked together in small groups and prepared little cards with information. These cards were posted later on the chart along with the information provided by the other groups of participants as showed by Picture 1.

**Picture 1: bE workshop on climate change**



While observing how they presented the information about their economic activities, I expected an affirmative answer, for instance that they would say they were fishers. However, it was exciting and surprising to learn that the Ramas have also been farmers who planted all kinds of tubercles, squash, cocoa, bell peppers, watermelon, bananas, cassava corn, and beans as shown on Picture 1 on the right.<sup>66</sup> It also was interesting to observe how the older people knew more about agriculture compared to the younger ones. In this group, adults' focus was on talking about farming while the younger people were interested in talking about fishing. I figured out something interesting through an informal conversation with one of the adult participants.

***Excerpt 3: Conversion on Rama economic activities***

**Researcher:** *I was surprised today in the school.*

**Interviewed:** *Why?*

**Researcher:** *Em...I thought most Ramas were fishers.*

**Interviewed:** *Yeah! Em.. but not everybody. Before we planted cassava, dasheen, bananas, beans. More than now, but young people like fishing*

(Field note, 15.08.2014)

Excerpt 3 seems to explain why the adults were experts on illustrating techniques for planting while the younger people were more active and talkative when telling us about fishing techniques and the different seasons for the fishing activity. This piece of information was important, as it provided elements to confirm the inclusion of the local activities as one of the generative themes for our Rama Language Workshops. This was also an issue that was mentioned in the focus group in Rama Cay (See 5.2.2 below).

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<sup>66</sup> These are some of the things that they produce locally.

### 5.2.1.2 *Education in Bangkukuk Taik*

My quest to find out about the local community and its people and the information that I gathered along the way provided me with a good insight into how the people of this community understand their local environment. The information below compiles my fieldnotes. It aims at giving the reader an insight into the school life and will be used in the subsequent section.

Bangkukuk Taik inhabitants face multiple situations to send their children to school. The possibilities to attend school regularly are limited for the majority of the children of the community. Sending kids to secondary school is more challenging for them. The local youth can only attend secondary school if their parents have the resources to send their children to Bluefields. This opportunity depends on the existence of relatives or good close friends who can host their children in the city (C. Billis, personal communication, 15.08.2014).

It is interesting to mention that Bangkukuk Taik—a community that occupies the hills near the sea—owes its origins to the necessity to build a school in the area. The original Rama settlement was Cane Creek, but there, the families lived separated from each other, scattered over a significant extension of territory. Indeed, the community was not a population center. It was a community only for the Rama people, but not in the eyes of the authorities. Without a village with a concentration of children, it was not possible for the leaders to send a petition requesting a school because the national government would never approve the construction of a school in an isolated location with a dispersed population. They needed this new community to prove that there was a population of children who needed a school. After the foundation of the community, the local leaders presented a request for construction of the school. The school project was approved, and the government paid for the construction of a fifty square meters single room school, which was finished in 2005. It is constructed on a reinforced concrete frame which is held by six concrete stilts at approximately 1,5 meters above

the terrain. It has zinc roof and wooden walls and floor (C. Grinevald, personal communication, June 10, 2015).

There are seventeen families in Bangkukuk Taik. The minimal distance from one house to another is one hundred meters, and the school occupies its center (Field note, 14.08.2014). However, the existence of the school has not solved some situations, yet. For example, most families usually move to Cane Creek during the harvest season and take their children with them. This mobility causes that many children do not attend school for many weeks (Field note 22.03.2015). Moreover, the teachers need to leave the area at least once a month due to the inadequate goods supply in the area and administrative requirements either in Rama Cay or in Bluefields, not to mention the transportation difficulties. Their stay outside the area lasts, at least, one week every month diminishes the number of school hours per school year.

## 5.2.2 Collecting the generative themes

Generative themes (Freire, 1967, 1970, 1973) are a key element of this research project. So, before the implementation of the RLW. As described in Chapter 4, I collected the themes through focus group (Cohen et al., 2011; Denzin & Lincoln, 2013; Patton, 2002), and observation (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1994; DeWalt & DeWalt, 2002; Savage, 2000; Schensul et al., 1999; Spradley, 1980) as the main techniques. In the coming section, I will first, present the information gathered in a focus group on Rama Cay. Then, I will describe the generative themes that I found while observing in the communities.

### 5.2.2.1 *Focus group in Rama Cay*

I organized this focus group with the help of a colleague and two local teachers on Rama Cay. The focus group took place during my second visit to Rama Cay. It was my first visit alone (the first time, I traveled together with the linguist C. Grinevald). In this visit, I aimed to observe and collect data to expand my understanding of the Rama culture,

especially, to comprehend the way they live and how they perceive their ethnic language.

The local teachers organized the focus group with the participation of a group of eleven young adults (ages between seventeen and twenty-two). These people attend the local Saturday secondary school.<sup>67</sup> My colleague introduced me to the students and explained the purpose of my work during the session. The working language of this meeting was Spanish.

I started my participation in this session with a simple activity to split the group into smaller groups randomly. Thus, they were asked to count **one, two**; then, I grouped the all number **one** in group 'A,' and all number **two** would be, group 'B.' I expanded the teacher's presentation about my work and me.

Once the groups were divided, I gave them two specific questions that they would answer after discussing them with the members of the teams. They were also told that each group would choose a person who would present their answers. The questions were:

- *How do Rama people define themselves?*
- *What kind of activities do Rama people do?*

Since the language for communication was Spanish, the summary presented below is my translation. Although these students speak Kriol and understand spoken English, the majority could neither read nor write English. That was the reason for choosing Spanish

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<sup>67</sup> This is a special group in this school. It is not covered by the budget of the school and is served by volunteer teachers every Saturday so that those students who are married with children or those who work can continue with their education. Normally, younger students travel by boat to Bluefields and stay there during the week to attend school.

as the working language. Tables 13 and 14 summarize answers to question one, and two respectively.

The first question seeks to find information about how the Ramas describe themselves as people in a multicultural area.

**Table 1: Question 1**

How do Rama people define themselves?	
Group A)	Group B)
<p>We are the Rama folk with our own <u>tradition and culture</u>. They are people who live in the South Caribbean (Nicaragua).</p> <p>They are distinct from others because they are autonomous; they have their own <u>language</u> (dialect<sup>68</sup>). They <u>hunt wild animal</u> such as wild hogs (wild boars), etc. They also live on what <u>they fish; fishing is their only economical income</u>. They have their own <u>customs and traditions</u>. Also, they have also [traditional] <u>dishes</u> as Rundown,<sup>69</sup> gallopinto [fried rice and beans] with coconut, flour tortilla, and desserts: cassava cake, banana cake, dasheen cake among others.</p>	<p>They are an indigenous people and live in the South Caribbean of Nicaragua. They have a language, the <u>Rama language</u>.</p> <p>They are usually kind and easygoing people. They have their religion and visit the <u>Moravian church</u> (some). Among the Rama population, <u>beliefs</u> have been passed from generation to generation. They have <u>myths and legends</u> such as the twi twi little bird, the Tarpoon legend, the siren and the <u>manatee</u>. <u>Some houses have a unique structure</u>, elevated over the terrain, wooden floor and roof made out of palm tree.</p>

The second question try to find information about the Rama daily activities. The Table below shows some of the typical activities among the Ramas.

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<sup>68</sup> Here dialect means indigenous language. The term as used in this part, is not an academic definition and means something like an uncompleted language. This wrong conception of the indigenous language has been widely propagated and many scholars have tried to revert it and demonstrate that indigenous languages are also languages as any other in mainstream language (cf. Salamanca, 1984, 2013a)

<sup>69</sup> This word is also spelt 'ron down' by Kriol people. It is a typical dish made out of fish, cassava, dasheen, white taro, and plantain boiled in coconut milk.

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**Table 2: Question 2**

What kind of activities do Rama people do?	
Activities Group A)	Activities Group B)
Fishing Agriculture Hunting	Fishermen They make arrows
Craft	Big containers made out of wood trunks (Baul) Traditional house construction They make dorys (boats)
Entertainment	Entertainment
Cooking typical foods Oyster soup Clam soup Fish Rundown	Clam soup with banana Oyster soup Food Rundown Corn tortilla
Typical drinks Wabul (a type of smoothy) Bunya (a type of smoothy)	Almond pozol (a drink made out of mashed almond)
Typical dance Mazurka Polka	Typical dance
Religious	Traditional medicine

Although the answers to the questions above were repetitive in many cases, I identified and grouped the following generative themes: Fishing and agricultural activities, handicraft work, entertainment, culinary art, cultural events, traditions and beliefs, and ethnic language.

Some of the essential observations during this workshop disclosed some particularities about the Rama community, at that time still unknown to me. This information was handy when I implemented the workshops in Bangkukuk Taik in February 2015. Some of the features that called my attention were:

- Girls were shy in comparisons to boys, but they were open to answer questions. For instance, three out of nine were engaged in the discussion.
- It was interesting to observe that the whole group referred to themselves (Ramas) mainly as “they.” However, the use of the third person here might not be relevant regarding an interpretation of its use. I rather think that it was the way how they could deal with descriptions in general and not a form of denying their identity. For example, I approached three of them after the session and asked them about some particular details, and they used “we” to refer to the activities they had described.
- During my visits to the Caribbean region, I found out that some of the dishes like rundown, drinks like *wabul* and activities such as hunting, fishing, and agricultural activities are not exclusive to the Ramas. However, rundown and *wabul* are unique from the coastal line communities of the Caribbean area of Nicaragua. Likewise, musical genres such as polka and mazurka are Europeans and can be found in the rest of the country.
- They referred to their culture as inherited from their ancestors. This cultural information relies more on oral tradition as there are not a historical record of the Rama people (See Chapter 2).
- They mentioned traditional legends and stories as part of their culture. Group B provided examples of these stories and legends.
- They included religion (Moravian church) as their religion. However, this information is not valid for the whole territory. For instance, the church in Bangkukuk Taik is a Protestant church, but it is affiliated to another denomination.



- Their affirmation that having their own language and autonomy distinguishes them from other people confirmed that the ideological confusion about the language and their independence persist. These issues appear as part of the findings in the work of Pivot (cf. Pivot, 2010, 2011, 2014 in Chapter 2). Interesting to mention is the fact that although there is only one person who speaks the language in the island, the Rama youth of the island still suggest the ethnic language as a symbol for identity (Grinevald, 2005b; Koskinen, 2006).
- They mention some cultural elements such as myths, legends, customs, and traditions. This detail provided me with ideas to find themes for discussion in the workshops that were planning for Bangkukuk Taik.
- Their description of the Rama as having a 'unique structure, elevated over the terrain, wooden floor and roof made out of palm tree' gave me an idea that the houses constructed in the area have had that structured. However, the same type of homes is common in the Caribbean Coast Region, as I have seen in my visits to the Region.

I have included these observations to establish a point of comparison and contrast with the data that I collected in Bangkukuk Taik, given that both are Rama communities, but they seemed to be slightly different the way they live.

#### 5.2.2.2 *Social practices*

The following information is based on my documentary research and observations in the field. I include this information in this chapter because I considered that it was relevant for the contextualization of the generative themes.

First, the Rama people are family oriented and usually, have a multi-generational family. By this, I mean there are houses where the grandparents, parents, and grandchildren

live together in the same house. They live in small wooden houses, built on stilts with a thatched roof. It seems the situation has been the same for some generations as this information is also present in the first writings about the Ramas (cf Conzemius, 1927; H. G. Schneider & Jürgensen, 2014). However, in at present, some of them have been able to afford to buy zinc for the roofs, but this is not a typical situation. Regardless the Ramas live in different communities scattered around the territory, people usually have a near relationship with their relatives and friends. The Rama people have a sense of community well-being. Therefore, they quickly share food supplies and medicines. For instance, if they hunt a big animal such as wild hog or a big fish, those who have been on the hunting or fishing party share with other community members (see Shauda in Appendix 2). It also seems it is a common practice that whenever a person arrives in a boat, people to come and help and carry the visitor's belongings ashore. However, they are very reserved people that is to say they do not talk much and seem to enjoy the silence (Fieldnote, 13.08.2014).

### 5.2.2.3 *Agricultural practices*

The informants who provided this information are elders of the communities of Bangkukuk Taik who participated in a workshop on climate change. Blue Energy organized the workshop in an attempt to collect data on the ancestral agricultural practice of the Ramas seeking to promote the implementation of climate-related actions in other communities.<sup>70</sup> Additionally, I held conversations with a couple of French botanists who have worked in Africa, Asia, and South America and researched plants in the Rama Territory in the 1970s. From this conversation, I collected the following information of interest for this study:

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<sup>70</sup> See <http://www.turkulka.net/cambio-climatico/entrada/10>

- The Ramas have a well-developed and environmentally friendly agricultural system.
- Their system includes crop rotation or the alternating use of different areas for cultivation, a practice that allowed the natural regeneration of the forests (Bennet et al., 2015).
- The Ramas study the color of the soil to determine how rich it is for planting.
- The Ramas observe birds to determine the weather conditions for fishing.
- The Ramas select old trees for firewood. They cut one tree at a time for the use of the whole community.
- Agricultural production is excellent, but people do not have the means to transport their crops to the market.

#### 5.2.2.4 *Generative themes for discussion in the RLW*

With the information that I gathered in the sections above, I formulated the following generative themes:

1. This is my community.
2. Daily activities in Bangkukuk Taik.
3. My ideal community.

### **5.3 The teaching of the Rama language in the community**

The teaching of the Rama language as it has been done up to now was of interests for this research because of the following reasons: it was a point of departure for implementing the RLW, and a point of contrast to analyzing the contributions of the RLW at the end of the process. The collected information on the current situation gave me the chances to evaluate the possibilities to introduce the teachers and students to the RLW methodology and use it in the revitalization of the language. On the other hand, understanding how the language is taught currently provided the elements of

divergence with the RLW, which in turn, would be the potential contributions of this study.

From my visits to the field, I learned that the Rama language continues to be on the margin of the institutional interest in the country. The excerpt below comes from my conversation with one of the new speakers of Rama and me on August 22, 2014.

***Conversation 1: Who teaches Rama?***

<b>Researcher:</b>	So, nobody is teaching the language on Rama Cay?
<b>Informant:</b>	No, I was teaching when I worked here, but I moved to Bluefields and now is difficult. There is a teacher in Torsuani. She knows Rama and likes teaching it, but I do not know if she teaches Rama now.
<b>Researcher:</b>	What about Bangkukuk Taik?
<b>Informant:</b>	Miss Cristina teaches the language when she is in Bangkukuk, but when she goes back to Cane Creek, nobody does.

This short conversation reveals that there are a few places in the Rama territory where the language continues to be taught. However, it also shows that there is not any institutional framework to do it. The language is taught only if somebody is available or willing to do it. This teacher also confirmed that there were not any teaching materials. Consequently, they were still using the old booklets produced by Miss Balto (see Chapter 2), and some newer ones were written by Miss Grinevald and a group of French students (Fieldnotes, 23.08. 2014).

During my fieldwork, I had the chance to observe three times the current teaching of the Rama language. The first time, was during my second visit to Rama Cay (21.02.2014). The second one was a Rama lesson in Bangkukuk Taik taught by T1 (native speaker) on February 17, 2015. The extracts that I will present next come from my fieldnotes.

The first example in Table 15 describes a class organized as a demonstration for a French researcher and me. The organizer is a former teacher. He holds a B.A. in education and M.A. in intercultural studies. He is currently working for one of the largest universities

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in the Caribbean region. He is a new speaker of Rama who has taught the basic of the language.

**Table 3: Demonstrative Rama lesson\_Rama Cay**

<i>Participant Stage</i>	<b>Teacher (T)/Researcher (R)</b>	<b>Students (SS)</b>
<b>1</b>	The new speaker starts the lesson. He greets his students saying <b>Mliika tamaskii</b> . He draws a human sketch on the board.	SS listen and repeat Mliika tamaski.
<b>2</b>	NS points at different places as he says their names in Rama. NS points at numbers on the wall and counts in Rama (1-5): Saiming, puksak, pangsak, kunkunbi, kwikistar.	SS repeat names on the part of the body.  Students repeat the numbers
<b>3</b>	NS asks: How do you say "sun" in Rama? How do you say "house" in Rama? How do you say "boat" in Rama? How do you say "flower" in Rama? NS writes answers on the board.	SS answer: Nuunik Nguu Uut katuruk
<b>Observations</b>	The lesson was improvised because the teacher does not work in the school anymore. It was a short (fifteen minutes). Little practice of words with emphasis on pronunciation. Combination of number and objects: example, gnuu saiming (one house), katuruk pangsak (three flowers)	

Table 16 gives us an insight into a lesson as conducted by the native speaker in Bangkukuk Taik. As said, she is illiterate, and she teaches Rama following her mother-in-law's example (See Nora Rigby in Chapter 2).

**Table 4: Rama lesson\_Bangkukuk Taik**

<i>Participant Stage</i>	<b>Teacher (T)/Researcher (R)</b>	<b>Students (SS)</b>
<b>1</b>	T1 says "Mliika tasmaskii." She tells them that she is happy because she is teaching Rama and students want to learn.	SS answer

<b>2</b>	T1 repeats some drills in the language. She seems to be using the TPR as she touches parts of her body and says utterances in Rama. She seems to give feedback. She says 'good, good' after the hay repeated the sentences.	SS repeat after the speaker.
<b>3</b>	T1 continues to speak Kriol.	Students answer in Kriol.
<b>Observations</b>	Without a translator, it was not possible for me to write down the words in Rama.	

From these two examples, I shall pay attention to these issues: First, the role of the teacher, and then the role of the students and their progression.

From the two examples above, we can see that the teachers controlled the action. They organized the class, and the work seemed to be centered on what they want to teach. These teachers seem to have a good intention as they set time apart to teach the language. However, in both cases, teachers improvised their lessons. As said by the informant in Conversation 1, Rama only is taught when teachers can. The conversation and the two lessons suggest the inexistence of an adequate teaching-learning context for the language. A context created by both formal and informal actors that articulates all the efforts and guarantees the resources (Percy-Smith, 2012).

The role of students in both cases seems to be very passive, although they engaged themselves in answering the questions posed by their teachers. While it is acceptable to follow teachers as they model something for students, active participation is required for success (Brougère, 2012; Freire, 1970, 1975; Montessori, 1914; Percy-Smith, 2012). Failing to activate students might hinder learning.

In the two excerpts above there seems to be a little progression in the lessons. By listening to Rama Cay students' answer in Kriol, I got the impression that they had studied this lesson before. The teacher was satisfied with their answers, but the lesson was elementary, for instance, limited vocabulary. Although I did not understand that

much Rama there since there was nothing written on the board, I got the same feeling when I saw the teaching of Rama in Bangkukuk Taik as I could hear only very few utterances in Rama, but an extended conversation in Kriol.

Taking into discussion the above situations, the teaching the ongoing learning of Rama seems to be static, with little progression. Controlled drills are observed in both cases, but little production. Interaction in the classroom is limited to repetition. The environment is sympathetic but formal. Here it is convenient to examine if educators are taking these students to their limit situations or remain within the same thematic (Freire, 1970; Vieira Pinto, 1960).

## **5.4 Implementation of the Rama Language Workshops**

Once the generative themes were already determined, we implemented the workshops. This section presents the sequence of steps preceding to the use of the visual compositions to learn Rama, as this stage belongs to the penultimate of each workshop. Thus, first, I will focus on showing relevant details picked up from various plenaries and later on the production of visual materials.

For the sake of a good understanding, I have divided the implementation of the RLW into two different series of workshops. The first was a sequence of six workshops held in February and March 2015. We conducted three workshops per month. The second round of four workshops was held in October 2015 (See Appendix 7).

### **5.4.1 Workshop series 1: Establishing the plenaries**

As presented in Chapter 4, the plenary was the departing point of the workshops. The main idea of the plenary was to introduce the generative theme of the day. It was a moment to reflect on the reality of the local community or to talk about a polemic situation. Our plenaries were no more than ten minutes long because of the language barrier that I will explain in the coming sections.

In the implementation of these plenaries, we used a conversational approach, where we (T2 and me) talked about a situation or a topic related to the Rama community. In this discussion, I usually talked about the topic of the day, but after a short introduction, the conversation turned into an informal interview where I asked T2 about those aspects of the topic that I did not know (See Excerpt 3: line 3). The idea was to include the participant little by little in our conversation creating the environment for their participation (Percy-Smith, 2012) and also an attempt to establish a horizontal relationship with them by telling them they possessed information that I was willing to know (Freire, 1970; Montessori, 1912).

Apart from the verbal presentations, we used a limited number of photocopies mainly of the bilingual Spanish-Rama story (Craig et al., 1986). We used this story as the starting point in the workshop's plenary about the Manatee below.

#### *5.4.1.1 Talking about the manatee*

In this section, I present three extracts of transcription of one of the plenaries. I have organized it as follows: First, I will present the excerpts from the data with descriptive comments to contextualize the situation. Second, I will analyze the whole situation in the light of the theory presented in Chapter 3.

Excerpts 3, 4, and 5 show a few lines of the transcription from a video of four minutes and thirty seconds long. It records the initial part or plenary of our fourth workshop in Bangkukuk Taik. The story that we used on this day was one of the existing Rama tales at CIDCA that I brought with me for the workshops in March 2015. This story, the manatee is the first ever published text in Rama (Craig et al., 1986). The idea was to use the passage and read it together with the students as ice-breaker activity. Before reading the story, T2 explained the plan for the day and told the students that we would use the story of the Manatee. Excerpt 3 below, shows some details of our conversation with the students.



**Excerpt 2: Talking about the Manatee-1**

- 1 T2 Juleysi, what color is the **manatee**. Uh?
- 2 [pause]
- 3 R I have never seen a manatee. I do not know.
- 4 [Pause]
- 5 R ...manatee?
- 6 T2 What color is the manatee?
- 7 You don't see a manatee? [noise]
- 8 Hey.... you can tell Israel what's a manatee.
- 9 He has never seen one of them.
- 10 [CT] [Whispering]. Yes, yes, yes... [Noise]
- 11 You remember.... Juleysi! All of you know manatee!
- 12 Why are you ashamed to talk, uh?
- 13 Why are you ashamed to talk?
- 14 What color is the manatee?
- 15 [pause]
- 16 T2 White, blue, green, brown. What color is he?
- 17 Black? How is the manatee, like one fish?
- 18 [Laughing] Uh?

However, the interaction between teachers and children seemed more like an interrogation session than a dialog (see lines 06-17). However, the environment in the room was not tense; they smiled (See Picture 2). Another important detail, in this fragment, is the repetition of pauses. We stopped to give students time to answer; however, they remained silent or just whispered to each other.

During this time, students were not indifferent to the questions we asked. They showed curiosity and started a weak interaction with those nearby, whispering comments about the animal we talked about and have a look at the document, I gave them, but none wanted to read it. Although there was not an open conversation neither with their partners nor with us, whispering words between each other tell me that there was a fluid exchange of ideas many of which I could not catch because of my limited understanding of Kriol.

For the sake of a good illustration, Picture 2 shows an unusual situation. Before the shot was taken, I had given the copy with the story of the Manatee to the girl in blue and white on the left. She had a glance at the reading and passed it to the girl to her left and so on.

**Picture 2: Talking about the Manatee**



This moment is a good illustration of a limit situation in the RLW (Freire, 1970; Vieira Pinto, 1960). I perceived two reasons why reading was challenging here. The first was the languages in which the story was written, Spanish and Rama, but these students speak Kriol. Second, these students were timid, and my presence in the room was difficult for them to handle. Indeed, the initial challenge was to build a bridge between them and me. There was a friendly atmosphere, but it was not sufficient for them to read. The breakthrough came in line 42 in Excerpt 4 below.

**Excerpt 3: Talking about the Manatee-2**

- |     |    |  |
|-----|----|--|
| 38. | T2 | Who wants to read that on the board for him?     |
| 39. | R  | ¿Qué dice allí?<br><i>What is written there?</i> |
| 40. |    | [Pause]  |
| 41. | R  | Uh?  |
| 42. | S4 | Paalpa [whispering]                              |

43. R Uh?  
44. T2 Loudly, loudly [laughing] loudly everybody hears. [unintelligible] Read behind me. What the word she says?  
45. [pause]  
46. T2 Uh?  
47. [pause]  
48. T2 Erick! How you read that Erick?

One of the girls, S4 said **paalpa** in a whisper. Interesting to mention is that she did not look at us. Instead, she turned her head towards the boy to her left. Except for this brief and timid participation, the plenary consisted of questions about the manatee, as in the excerpt below.

**Excerpt 4: Talking about the Manatee-3**

51. R Erick!  
52. [Pause]  
53. S4 Paalpa  
54. R Uhu!  
55. R Do you know what it means? Paalpa? Uh?  
56. R ¿Qué significa paalpa?  
*What does paalpa mean?*  
57. T2 [drawing on the board]  
58. T2 The paalpa meat is like that? Right? [unintelligible]  
59. [drawing on board]  
60. T2 It's something like that, right?  
61. [Pause]  
62. T2 And, what color is ... [inaudible].  
63. [Pause]  
64. T2 Yuleysi, what color is the manatee? Black?  
65. S3 [inaudible]  
66. T2 Yes, that is it

In line 56, I asked about the manatee as T2 drew a manatee on the board. When T2 asked the participants if the manatee looked like the one, he had drawn (Line 58), S8 smiled and moved his head confirming that it resembled a manatee.

Excerpts 3, 4, and 5 demonstrate five situations. First, we, adults, dominated the plenary. There were only three participations by students; one of them, S4 participated twice. Now, the other students were active since they whispered, sometimes one of them mumbled something. This takes me to the second situation. There is tension because of the implementation of a new approach.

Engagement results from a struggle between present condition of people and the what they want to be (Freire, 1970). For instance, there are some clues like students' mumbling that can be interpreted as their willingness to take part in the plenary, but it seems that they restrained themselves because of an invisible barrier, probably their timidity (line 12).

Third, finding a breakthrough is educators' challenge, and it results from the creation of the necessary conditions for students participation (Percy-Smith, 2012). To help these students it was required to identify and deal with their limit situations (Freire, 1970; Vieira Pinto, 1960) affecting them. In this plenary, this limitation was their lack of confidence to read and speak Spanish.

The four situation points to the use of a known topic to depart from something they have experienced in their daily life (Freire, 1970). Using the story of the manatee arose their interest. They looked at each other, smiled and whispered. In line 65, we find evidence that they have seen a manatee but were uncertain to respond positively. This takes me to the fifth situation.

To foster students' participation teachers must find the best channel of communication (Freire, 1970; Halliday, 1993). The expected outcome from the plenaries was to engage students in a discussion so that they could break their silence. I wrote the word on the board. T2 spoke Kriol. He drew a manatee on the board. These were our attempts to get them engaged in the activity. We used all we had at hand to convey our message.

## 5.4.2 From verbal to visual: Representing my community

This section presents the path that we followed to complete a visual text during our first series of workshops. This path encompassed three different steps: drawing individually, selecting different drawings to create a visual composition and drawing a final group composition. The last part of this presentation is devoted to analyze and highlight those theoretical issues related to the data.

### 5.4.2.1 *Individual interpretation and representation of the plenary*

As said, we departed from a plenary in each session (Step 1 in the RLW). We used some minutes to talk and reflect on the topic of the day. In this case, we use much time to talk about the community. Students were invited to draw their interpretation of our presentation. They were told that they had the freedom to represent the theme, as they wanted. Therefore, each participant concentrated on producing an aspect of the community of his/her interests. Once, they were done with their drawing; we taped their drawings on the wall as shown in Picture 3 below.

**Picture 3: Individual drawing stuck on the school wall.**



The next step in the process was to choose a proposal (Step 2). The idea behind this presentation of their work was that everybody had the chance to see the others' production. It was the chance for each student to exchange ideas and opinions about his / her work or find inspiration for a future project such as the group composition. This was a process of negotiation through dialog (Freire, 1970), an exchange of ideas (Hasan, 2002b). After seeing the individual drawings on the wall, students were also encouraged to work in small groups, before deciding on a whole group composition as presented in Picture 4.

**Picture 4: Working individually and in small groups**



The reason for this different form of organizing the workshop was to promote first individual creativity, which is many times hampered by other individuals (Freire, 1970). For instance, the bossy voice of the teacher, outstanding students in a group or sometimes gender differences in a group. In principle, this way of organizing groups allows that everyone will have a drawing to share with the rest of the participants.

The third step is based on the previous discussions and drawings that every participant has made. In this stage, they renegotiated what visual elements they would include and how they would organize them. They also chose the materials, colors, and tools to represent their composition. This is again is a process of negotiation (Hasan, 1992). In principle, the participants need to plan together and experiment with the different

available materials as suggested by Montessori (1914). They need to be aware of the actions they do and the reasons of the choices they make when representing their reinterpretation of a reality (Freire, 1970, 1998; Kress, 2010; Van Leeuwen, 2008).

Figure 6 below illustrates this third step. The drawings in level 1 are some of the individual representations of the first theme “Our community.” To draw these images, participants used letter-sized sheets of paper (21,59 cm x 27,94 cm).

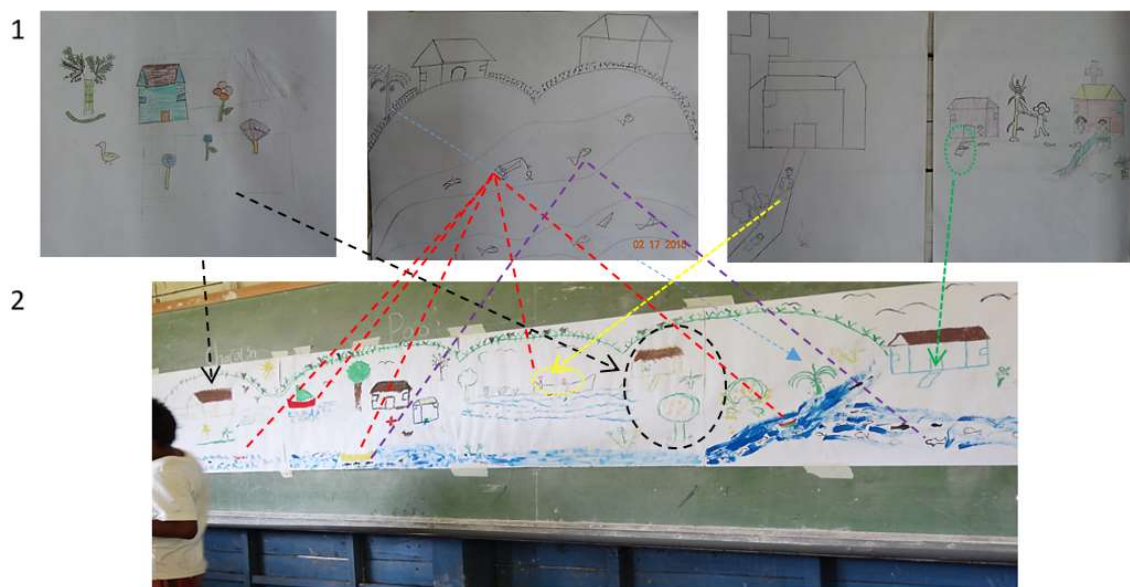
**Figure 6: From visual to visual**



The drawing in level **2** in the center is the first collective representation of the theme<sup>71</sup>. Students used four sheets of paper 59 cm x 84 cm each (59 cm x 336 cm in total).

The different compositions in the three levels belong to the same sequence of the transition of the theme “My Community,” being level **3** the last version named “Here I live.” However, to avoid confusion in the presentation of these visual compositions, I will first describe the transition from level **1** to level **2**.

**Figure 7: From visual to visual (transition 1)**



These two levels give us an idea of how the elements in the personal drawings were integrated into the collective composition in level 2. The arrows show us the represented aspects in the individual drawings and where they were incorporated into the group composition. I focused here on a few elements to prevent overloading the image with arrows. Thus, we can see that individual representation include many aspects of the individual one, but not all of them. For instance, we can see in the two

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<sup>71</sup> I zoomed in the peripheral images, which in reality were drawn on letter-size paper, to show details transferred to the large image.



drawings on the right in level one, the presence of a church. Nevertheless, the church is not included in the large composition below. The depiction of houses is prevalent in the four designs in level 1, and so is it in composition 2. Other elements such as water representing the sea, fish and a boat are found only in the second drawing (from left to right) in level 1; however, the same elements are represented in various places in the collective drawing below. Let us take the boat as an instance. It appears five times below (see red arrows). The same occurs with the representation of fish (purple arrow).<sup>72</sup> One of the houses (connected with green arrows) on the last drawing in 1, display a figure that resembles a ladder (a typical feature in the Rama house as they are built on stilts). This feature is reproduced once in 2.

Figure 8 below shows the second transition using the same theme, “My Community. The drawing in level 2, was redesigned. After reevaluating the first version, the participants discussed and said they could do a better version. The figure below shows their redesigned version.

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<sup>72</sup> There more incidences in 2, but because of the size of this image they are not visible in this page.

**Figure 8. From visual to visual (transition 2)**



As we can see in the previous examples, the configuration of the representations changed once again, although students kept the same elements (except the church). Five boats became one in drawing 3. Out of five houses, they represented one. In this final representation, the house's ladder was more visible. The visual also describes the house with a feature as if it is built on stilts (see dotted yellow circle). In drawing 3, there are fewer elements, but well defined. For instance, trees are grouped near the house, the same as the flower and an animal that resembles a chicken. All these elements create the idea of a garden. Another example is the fish in the water. In the previous drawings, they are represented more generically, but in the last composition, the different fish have different distinguishable features possibly meaning diverse types of fish. All these elements point at necessary changes in the disposition of represented elements and the motivated rearrangements the participants did (Kress, 2000, 2010; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006).

#### 5.4.2.2 *Points to ponder*

Looking back at the sequence of transitions in Figure 6 above we can see that it was necessary to orchestrate several modes to produce the group's composition (Jewitt, 2014a; Kress, 2000, 2010). To be able to coordinate all the actions to design and redesign the participants had to engage themselves in the act of semiosis using verbal language as we can see these two boys working coordinately on the same element below.

#### **Picture 5: Working together**



At the same time, the picture above can be an example of semiotic mediation (Hasan, 1992, 2002b; Wertsch, 1985). In the workshops, we used only coloring pens and watercolor. To paint with watercolor, we used only thick medium-sized brushes so delineating thin lines was difficult. The boy in the background through experimentation (Montessori, 1914) found a way to do it by using a pen to paint fine line with watercolor. The picture above shows this boy teaching the other boy his technique as they talked and worked together.

The sequence of compositions above also demonstrates the process of transduction, a transition from visual to visual (Kress, 2000). In level 1, we find several individual designs representing the personal ideas of the designers (Kress, 2000, 2010). In level 2, we see the integration of all these ideas into a larger composition. This ensemble of ideas was the result of a process of democratic negotiation (Freire, 1970), motivated by the

interest of the participants (Kress, 2000; Montessori, 1949; Percy-Smith, 2012) realized by the use of language (Hasan, 2002b). Since there was a process of negotiation, the whole sequence can be taken as an example of transmodality, verbal texts —verbal mode— were instantiated in visual texts —visual mode (Newfield, 2014). I will return to transmodality later in this chapter.

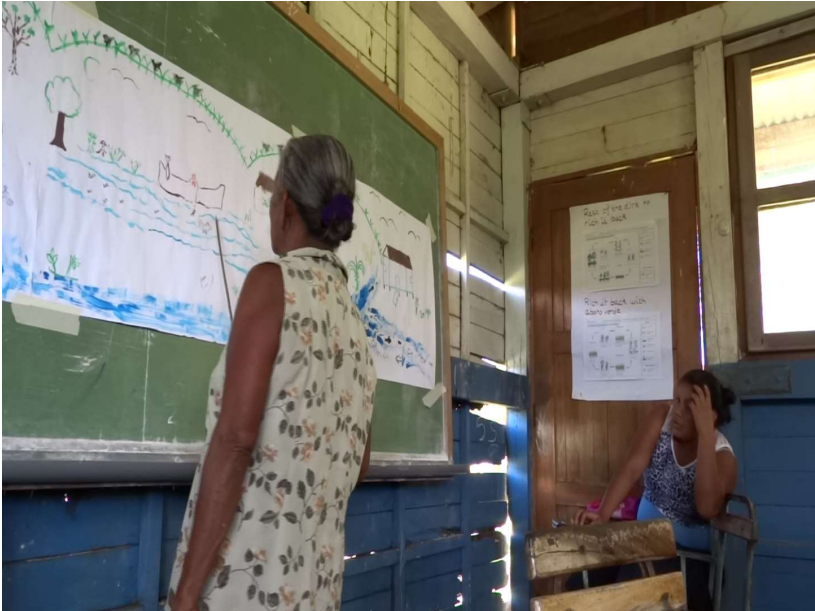
#### 5.4.2.3 *Visual to verbal*

The same as the generative theme “My Community” was ‘translated’ from verbal to visual, redesigned and transformed from visual to visual, many the visual elements in the compositions were also ‘translated’ to verbal language. This time with the intention to use the Rama language.

Excerpt 5 presents some sentences used by the Rama speaker to describe some of the elements in her class using the first collective composition (see Drawing 2 in Figure 9 above). To give an idea of the Rama language syntax, I have written the sentence in Rama in bold with its literal translation in italics in the line below. I have included the translation into English in the third indented line.

Picture 6 —on the next page—corresponds to line 57 in Excerpt 6 below. T1 uses a stick to point at the fish in the visual as she says “*There is a lot of fish in the water.*” In her transduction of the visual, she places the representation of fish into a sentence. She uses the contextual visual information that represents more drawings of fish to express her perception of the abundance of fish in the visual composition. It can be an example of how a sign can vary from a mode to another (Kress, 2000, 2010; Newfield, 2014). It suggests a case of subjectivity because what she said verbally might differ from what students wanted to represent when they drew the image.

**Picture 6: 'Translating' visual elements into Rama words**



**Excerpt 5: Describing my community in Rama 1**

57. T1    **salpka baingbing sii ki yaakari**  
fish plenty water in there is  
There is a lot of fish in the water.
58.        **uut saiming, salpka baingbing sii ki**  
dory one fish plenty water in  
There is a dory (boat) and lots of fish in the water.
59.        **uut saiming, kiikna pangsak uut ki yaakari**  
dory one man two dory in there is  
One boat, there are two men in the boat.

Subjectivity takes place in line 58 where she seems to take the boat as a point of comparison with the number of individual fish in the representation. Below in line 59, her attention turns to the men on the boat. Again, she seems to take the boat as a referent.

### 5.4.3 Workshops series 2: Moving from the concrete to abstract ideas

To facilitate the understanding, I have structure this section as a sequence of events: 1) the plenary for our eighth workshop, 2) the collective visual composition representing 'Bangkukuk Taik', 3) the plenary for our ninth workshop, 4) the collective visual composition representing the 'Future', 5) I used a multimodal perspective to compare and contrast these representation and 6) I present samples of the language students learned using their visual texts.

#### 5.4.3.1 Plenary workshop 8

To move from concrete themes to something more complex and abstract was one of the aims of the workshops. There were two reasons for this. The first—inspired by Freire's (1970) limit situations—was to challenge students to reach new a limit situation systematically in their interaction with each other and with educators. The second was to improve their techniques to draw and by doing so, creating more complex narratives to be used with their Rama teacher. However, to keep the continuity of the themes that we had started seven months earlier, we departed from our last conversations on the community and recalled what we had done together at that time. An example of a plenary of these plenaries is presented below.

Table 17 presents some details of the second plenary in our third round of workshops in October 2015. The particular workshop to which I refer in this section is our eighth workshop on October 17<sup>th</sup>. Given to hard rain, the dialog in the recordings is imperceptible; therefore, the data in this section comes from my fieldnotes.

**Table 5: Workshop\_ Talking about my community**

<i>Participant Stage</i>	<i>Teacher/ Researcher</i>	<i>Students</i>
<i>Plenary</i>	T2 organizes the chairs in a semicircle and asks SS to come closer.	SS remain silent but attentive to T2's talk. SS come closer to listen. SS respond questions without hesitation.

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	<p>He departs from the early experience in March.          He talks about Bangkukuk Taik in the present day.          He describes the village.          he challenges SS to say how is people's life there, their activities</p>	<p>SS talk about what they have in the community.          They seem more relax.</p>
<i>Non-plenary</i>	<p>T2 tells SS to feel free to get materials to draw their community individually.          He explains this time they will draw a smaller collective composition.</p>	<p>S8 organizes the materials on the table.          SS get materials and start drawing individually.          Each SS draws a sketch and shares it with the others.          SS move around exchanging ideas.          SS split themselves into teams          SS represented Bangkukuk Taik (Picture 6)</p>
<i>Language learning</i>	No language teaching	
<i>Observations</i>	<p>It has been raining, and the floor is wet because of roof leaking; thus, they remove the materials from the desk to make room and use it to place the blank pages they are using as a canvas. Students stand in a circle and exchange ideas while working on the drawing.</p>	

The observation notes above, show that T2 was in charge of the whole process without my intervention (See 5.5 below). Again, seat arrangement was different. T2 asked the students to organize the chairs in a circle so that all could see each other. Also, he asked them to come closer so that everybody could hear what was said. T2 departed from our talks early in February and March about their community.

Compared the students' participation with that of February and March (See plenary on the Manatee above), the environment was more relaxed this time. Although younger students were still a little shy, the older ones were engaged in the activities. They even got a girl from the community, one of the former students, to join them in the workshops. Another change in their participation was their willingness to take responsibilities for the different activities. For instance, in the non-plenary section, they were invited to draw. **S8** took the initiative to organize the materials so that the others

could have the needed materials at hand. Students knew already the system, so they organized themselves into groups and distributed the different task they were to do. Two new elements appeared in the group this time. The first, they moved around and shared their ideas. The second, they split the tasks according to their interest and skills. This initiative in different levels shows an improvement in their participation and agency (Brougère, 2012; Freire, 1970; Percy-Smith & Thomas, 2010).

As language learning is concerned, we did not have any at the end of this workshop. Although T1 was there all the time, the weather conditions did not allow the practice of the language.

#### *5.4.3.2 From verbal to visual: Representing Bangkukuk Taik*

Picture 6 displays the group's representation of Bangkukuk Taik in the present day. This image shows elements that we have already seen in Figure 8 above. A reason for the presence of these features is explained above in Table 17.



**Figure 10: Bangkukuk Taik in the present day**



The idea to work on Figure 10, was to establish a link between these workshops and the previous ones. A second purpose was to set a point of departure for a discussion on something more abstract. We wanted to take the group to another limit situation and explore the possibilities to construct complex narratives, which allowed us to learn complex sentences.

With inspiration on Freire (1970), we wanted to promote a reflection on the future among the participants; therefore, we needed to understand the present and speculate about the things we could change in the community. A theme like this seemed to be an appropriate discussion to engage them in the practice of critical reflection on their present reality. This theme was simple, but taking into account our previous experiences with these students and their reticence to speak, we decided to that the plenary for our penultimate workshop would be short and based on a reflection on Figure 10.

### 5.4.3.3 Plenary workshop 9

Table 18 shows details of the last plenary to plan the collective composition representing the future in Bangkukuk Taik.

**Table 6: Workshop\_Talking about the future**

<b>Participants Stage</b>	<b>Teacher/ Researcher</b>	<b>Students</b>
<i>Plenary</i>	T2 tells students: Look at the things you have now in Bangkukuk, the school, your houses, boats, animals. Now, how do you think Bangkukuk Taik is going to be in the future? If you look around, is there anything we need here? Think, what would you change if you had the chance? Consider the present situation of Bangkukuk and visualize those things that you think you could improve? T2 ask students to represent visually how Bangkukuk Taik would be in the future.	SS responds to T2 questions. They are relaxed and seem to enjoy the conversation.
<i>Non-plenary</i>	R and T2 move around and offer our help.	SS talk to each other S8 tapes paper on the board and organizes the materials on the desk and the others grab what they need. They sit in small groups but draw their proposals individually. They exchange their drawings. Some participants ask for help.
<i>Language learning</i>	T1 Uses the visual representing my community to review vocabulary in Rama. She emphasizes pronunciation. She glosses the phrases.	Ss follow her but also ask questions about the meaning of words. S8 supports T1 by asking questions about clarifying details of the drawings.
<i>Observation</i>	We sit on the floor in a semicircle. During the break, students drew a spontaneous drawing where they represented the different activities that people do in Bangkukuk Taik.	

The plenary section in Table 18 exemplifies how T2 approached the topic for discussion. He used simple questions to contrast the present situation in the village with possibilities

in the future. Then, he encouraged students to represent this future in a composition. Figure 11 shows the result of this process.

**Figure 11: Bankukuk Taik\_The future**



At this point in this presentation of the collected materials, I would like to contrast these two compositions. As said, the plenaries departed from our previous experience. We talked about the same place Bankukuk Taik, however, the representations changed.

#### 5.4.3.4 *Modalizing a generative theme*

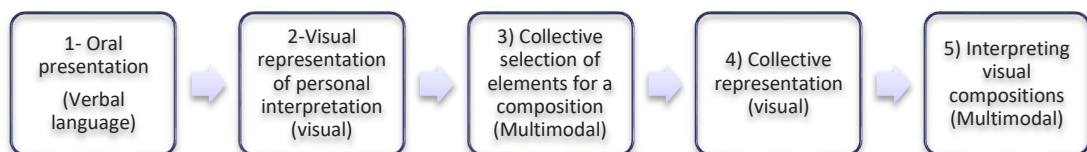
I will begin this section by stating the following. I have reserved the issue of multimodality until now because explaining the connections between the different visual elements in the visual texts would have been difficult without knowing how these texts came into existence. I have two reasons for it. First, the plenaries contextualized the workshops. That is to say, regardless of the differences in the drawings they represent Bankukuk Taik. The second reason has to do with the avoidance of repetition. The visuals (Figure 13) are labeled A, B, C and D and follow a chronological order.

#### 5.4.3.5 *Generative themes across modes*

In chapter 3, I introduced some concepts that put forward the notion that meaning can be instantiated in multiple forms or move across modes. An idea that branches out of the four fundamental assumptions of multimodality (Jewitt, 2014a). These concepts are design, transformation, transduction (Kress, 2000, 2010), and transmodal moments (Newfield, 2012, 2014).

So far, we have seen that there is a progression of activities in the workshops. In Chapter 4, I describe them as steps. Within each step, there are multiple forms of interaction, which depart from the presentation of a theme and instructions to coordinate the work (Plenary). The second is an individual work to represent the personal interpretation of a theme. The third has to do with collective work chose element to build up the collective interpretation of the theme. The fourth step is the collective representation, and fifth step is the use of the visual to learn Rama. In Figure 12 the rectangles show the predominant modes in use throughout the different steps of the workshops, while the arrows marks a transmodal moment. Figures 7 below, demonstrates that the whole process in the act of semiosis (Halliday, 1993; Kress, 2000, 2010).

**Figure 12: Use of modes**



Above, I say predominantly as I refer to the most conspicuous modes in use, as there might be a diverse orchestration of modes. In principle, what it is important to consider the above steps different transmodal moments is that the original meaning is moved across the different modes. In the case of workshops, the generative theme presented in the plenary were interpreted and represented by means of different modes. As a matter of disclaimer, I will say that an extensive analysis of transmodal moments is not

possible because of the “maze of semiotic decisions and interventions” done by the sign maker (cf Newfield, 2014, p. 104). Nevertheless, I will pay attention to the dimensions that I stated in Chapter 4, as they metafunctional in essence.

In my theoretical presentation, I introduced Halliday’ (1978) social semiotic whose conception of metafunctions (ideational, interpersonal and textual), frames the notion of the mode in social semiotic multimodality. The dimensions that I refer to in this analysis realizes a metafunctional task. Thus, I associate agency, identity, subjectivity with the ideational metafunction. I relate orientation with the interpersonal metafunction and disposition and deixis with the textual metafunction.

**Figure 13. My community: Present and future**



Comparing these four texts, regarding agency, it is possible to say that they represent the interests of the participants. For instance, neither of the visual above follows pre-established guidelines. So, each element is the result of each participant’s inspiration, represented in collaboration with his partners. Agency was exerted in the processes of designing, negotiation, and representation. Agency was the result of students committed participation (Freire, 1970; Kress, 2000; Percy-Smith, 2012).

In these four compositions, several elements reveal the aspects of identity. For instance, in the focus group above, member of the Rama community name characteristics of the Rama people and mentioned some activities. Some of these activities are represented in these compositions, illustrating how these people live. They depicted their surrounding environment as if telling us there is where they belong. However, in D they represented a school using the colors of the national flag (as most of the Nicaraguan public schools are painted) as an evocative sign that they belong to the Rama territory, but also they are members of a nation. In other words, they depict elements representing local identity and national identity.

Subjectivity can be seen in the way participants represented the visuals. For instance, the same community is portrayed differently in four texts. This subjectivity might depend on the personal interests of the participants; let us say their motivation (Kress, 2010; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006). For instance, there is a representation of the sea in A and B, but C shows something that resembles a river. The last one, D, does not have any component representing water. In this case, probably, subjectivity can be the result of how they perceive reality and how they represent that reality using the resources that they have at hand (Kress, 2010; Van Leeuwen, 2005), it can result in people interest to communicate something (Kress, 2000, 2010; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006). In this case, the difference can be their willingness to present their community in general terms (A, B), or certain aspect of it (C), or the ideal future (D).

The visuals also include details that allow us to establish a connection with the semiotic object (Kress, 2010). These visual configurations situate us in this represented community. For instance, In the four texts, the representation of abundant nature and the absence of urban structures tells us that we are in a place in the countryside. A and B display the sea. This tells us about the relation of this community with the sea. In A, B, and C we find figures representing boats and people fishing which creates the impression that fishing is a practice for the people in the represented village.

Elements of deixis (Kress, 2010) are also found in the different compositions. For instance, the presence of houses and family gardens with people nearby might suggest the relationship between these people with the house. In A, B, and C although we see people on their boats, the presence of a house connects these people with the place they live. It creates the idea of a home. In the houses on the left and school<sup>73</sup> on the right seem to frame the representations of people.

The disposition of drawing A and B was changed. Although they share many elements, the way they were represented in A, scattered along the paper we used as a canvas, creates the impression of the existence of different places within the composition. In this sense, the disposition in B and C suggests a unity between the activity in the sea (or river) and the home on fast land. Now, the comparison of the disposition in A, B, and C with that of D offers us another perspective. A, B and C offer the present from a general perspective, while D is more focused. In principle, let us remember that the authors claim that C (B) and D represent a contrast between the present situation and the future. The disposition of D seem to organize the other elements to make room for school; thus the houses here are no longer in a central position.

## 5.5 Empowering teachers and students

We followed freedom as a principle since the beginning of the workshops the whole process (Freire, 1967, 1970, Montessori, 1949, 1996). We followed this principle because the intention was to create a suitable learning context (see Percy-Smith, 2012) in the nonconventional environment, by this a mean 'illiterate' teacher struggling to maintain a language with no communicative function, but a cultural value for the community. Something that, in my understanding, is a cultural struggle (Freire, 1970, 1998). The following sections show some of the situations that took place in the

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<sup>73</sup> Children identified this blue and white (national colors of Nicaragua) as the school.

workshops that provide a perspective about how the workshops can contribute to the revitalization of the Rama language.

### 5.5.1 Free exploration of techniques

With inspiration in Montessori (1949, 1996) and following the second principle of the Mural Workshops (in Chapter 1), I placed the materials over a desk so that they could be reached by the participants whenever necessary. To encourage them to experiment, I explained the concept of the Chromatic circle below (See Table 19).

**Table 7: Talking about the chromatic circle**

<i>Participant Stage</i>	<b>Teacher (T)/Researcher (R)</b>	<b>Students (SS)</b>
<i>Plenary</i>	R explains in plain words the concept chromatic circle and then demonstrates its use to create new colors.	SS listen.
<i>Non-plenary</i>	R encourages students to try themselves. T1 and R walk around and help.	SS experiment using their paper and colors.
<i>Language learning</i>	T2 says the names of the primary colors in Rama	SS repeat named of colors in Rama
<i>Observations</i>	Once students were done with the experiment, they were asked to draw something about the community.	

This demonstration was the plenary for our third workshop (See Appendix 5). It took only five minutes mainly because of problems with the language. Thus, a demonstration was more comfortable for everybody to handle. I merely described what I did.

Choosing a demonstrative approach at this time and its results can be regarded as an example of multimodality with focus on the improvement of communication and how we take advantages of a mode affordance (Kress, 2000, 2010). I use my actions to complement those ideas that my use of language would limit students' understanding



of the Chromatic Circle. The use of several modes verbal, gestures and visual overcame the linguistic barrier.

I identified two interesting outcomes of free experimentation as I worked. I have already mentioned the first one in 5.4.2.2 above, painting fine lines using a pencil and watercolor, the second one is related to the experiment of with the Chromatic circle. One of the boys experimented mixing white and black producing a greyish shade of colors (Fieldnotes, 24.03.2015).

### 5.5.2 Synergy in the classroom

As explained in Chapter 4, T1 and T2 have different competencies. While T1 is a native speaker, she is illiterate, unable to read dictionaries, follow a written syllabus or write on the board. On the other hand, T2 has some formal training as a primary school teacher, speaks English, Kriol and Spanish, but he is not a native speaker. However, he is a highly motivated new speaker of Rama (see Appendix 1). He understands and speaks the language, but he is not entirely fluent, yet. The competencies of both a motivated learner of the language and native speaker who loves teaching it to make of these two people a good team.

The following examples give us a glance at how these two collaborated in various stages of implementing the workshops.

The first example in Excerpt 7 shows T2 as he introduced and organized the activity for T1 in March 2015.

#### ***Excerpt 6: Organizing the class 1***

1. T2 Grandma, the speaker is going to be the teacher, and we will follow her. The same things that we have done there on the board she is going to pass them in Rama and we are going to say them after her.
2. For example, how do you say this? [he points at the house] You say it in English, Spanish, it's up to you. You say 'house.'

Before coming to this point, the teacher (T2) was directing the process to draw the visual composition. In this excerpt, he is turning the class over to T1 who would continue with the Rama lesson. His explanation is simple. He presented an example, using the word house. During this explanation, he used his hands to tap and point on things as he talked; utilizing this gesture reinforcing the verbal presentation.

In Excerpt 7, T2 organized the Rama lessons using the final collective drawings of our workshops.

***Excerpt 7: Organizing the class 2***

1. T2 (talking to the Rama speaker) The same, the same drawings that we have here are said in the Rama Kriol, and you explain for us in the Rama, so we have to explain to them [the children] in Rama Kriol and then you say the same [sentences] in Rama language.
2. Here is the man passing the leaf up by the house. This one is sweeping off...sweeping the house. Them are talking together and this one backing the wood. This one... shopping off the wood. This one striking the deer with the bow and arrow.

Again, in this excerpt, T2 demonstrates what T1 shall do with the visual text. He uses a wood stick to point at the different visual elements in the drawing. At the same time, he pronounces utters either the name of things or complete sentences in Kriol.

***Excerpt 8: Eliciting sentences***

23. T2 Two man on the house tying.... say it! How you say it? Two man on the house tying.
24. T1 Nikikna puksak kalka gnuu aing yanaingsi....Kumaa gnuu tuk yaaplangi i.

In Excerpt 8 above, we see T2 leading the activity as he elicits Rama sentences using the visual as a mediator. The speaker followed him as well as the students. However, later in the process, T1 takes control of the situation, and from observing T2, she started leading the process without support.

**Excerpt 9: Rama speaker leads the process**

152. T1 Nuunik kuyak,...nuunik kuyak nuunik kaaski aakri  
*Sun is high up.... sun and the clouds are high up.*

### 5.5.3 Cooperation between teachers and students

Apart from the cooperation between the teachers, students engaged themselves in different levels of interaction with the teachers. Using the visual composition allowed collaboration between participants and teacher as Excerpt 11 shows. It gives us an insight into the first seconds of T1 using the composition in Figure 13 above. Before her intervention, T2 had already used the same visuals to practice the exercise with the T1 and her students, so this time T2 passes the leadership of the class to T1.

**Excerpt 10: Cooperating with the teacher 1**

152. T1 All right, listen! Nuunik baaning.  
*sun then*

153. S8 This is the clouds.

154. T1 Nuunik kuyak,...nuunik kuyak nuunik kaaski aakri  
*Sun is high up.... sun and the clouds are high up.*

155. Nuunik kaaski kuyak aakri  
*The clouds are high up.*

156. This one now what?

157. singsingka? singsingka, taasup  
*grass? grass, hill.*

158. S8 The whole thing is grass, auntie?.... Singsingka?  
*grass?*

159. T1 Singsingka!

In line 152 she began with a sort of command. She said “listen” as some of the girls are distracted. She uttered an expression in Rama while she pointed at the clouds on the visual. In line 153, S8 (a boy) assisted her by redirecting her to the point where the figure of the sun was located. In line 157, the speaker seemed to have problems with visual and started guessing. S8 helped her again (line 158).

Another example of this cooperation teacher-student is seen in Excerpt 12.

**Excerpt 11: Cooperating with the teacher 2**

162.	T1	<b>Kat ... saiming, kat puksat, suula, singsingka</b> <i>one... tree, two trees, three tree.</i>
163.	S8	<b>This one and that one is ibuu tree</b> <i>Almond</i>
164.	T1	<b>Singsingka saiming aakari suula ... Suula ikal akatari</b> <i>One deer is on grass... the deer is standing.</i>
165.	S8	<b>He’s running auntie.</b>
166.	T1	<b>I kat sukii</b> <i>Standing in one leg?</i>
167.	S8	<b>He’s running auntie.</b>
168.	T1	<b>Is ngalbi then?</b>
169.		[Pause].

In line 162, the speaker counts trees. S8 bring into the exercise the word **iibu**, to define the tree the T1 was pointing at. In line 164, she says a sentence, but he (165) attempts to explain that the deer was running as that was their representation. In 166, she misunderstood the visual again. S8 insisted that the deer was running.

This kind of cooperation kept the activity going on, and promoted the integration of the other students. It develops a horizontal relationship between teachers and students (Freire, 1967, 1970, Montessori, 1914, 1949). It also creates a relaxed atmosphere.

#### 5.5.4 Visual as mediator

Important to mention is the use of the visual as a mediator. For instance, during the time the students have been working on the drawing, T1 remained seated near a corner.

When the team was done with the drawings, T2 asked her to come the front (see **Organizing the class 1**). When he is done, she starts the class by standing by the board and looking directly at the drawings.

The following sequence illustrates the beginning of her interaction with the children.

**Excerpt 12: Asking questions**

- |    |    |  |
|----|----|--|
| 3. | T1 | <b>yaakaling dut?</b><br><i>what those</i><br><i>(What are those?)</i> |
| 4. | Ss | <b>yaakaling dut!</b>  |
| 5. | T1 | <b>No, me aksing (asking) yaakaling dut</b>                            |
| 6. | T1 | <b>You say kat suknuang</b><br><i>tree small</i>                       |
| 7. | T1 | <b>no, not so, I ask you again. <u>yaakaling dut?</u></b>              |
| 8. | SS | <b>kat suknuang?</b><br><i>tree small</i>                              |

In line 3, T1 spoke Rama to ask, “What are those?” as she pointed with a stick the “trees” on the hill (Scene A below). In line 4. To her question students answered with the same question. In Scene B, we see her looking at students quizzically and then she laughed (Scene C)

**Picture 7: What are those?**



Scene A



Scene B



Scene C

In line 5, she explained to them that she was asking them; therefore, they should had answered the name of the object she was pointing at in the visual. In line 7, she emphasizes her point.

As seen in this example the visual provided an important support to establish a conversational interaction between the two parties. An interesting point here is the introduction of questions in Rama to elicit sentences from her students. Another example the speaker using this kind of questions is shown below.

**Excerpt 13: Asking questions in Rama**

- |     |  |
|-----|--|
| 12. | <b>Yaakala yauanaing.....</b><br><i>What are they tying?</i>               |
| 13. | <b>Nguu aing kalka anaangaisi</b><br><i>House its leaf they are tying.</i> |



She pointed at the figure (taken from the last visual composition below) as she asked “What are they tying?” Then she modeled the answer as students repeated the sentence.

*5.5.4.1 Using their representations expanded possibilities*

Again, I use here the two themes presented above, My Community and the Future. As we used these themes to practice Rama. The example below demonstrates that student’s representations can bring into the class elements that probably are not part of the language lexis, but once they are brought into the classroom human creativity finds an answer.

Comparing the language elicited from both images, the sentences corresponding to image A are similar to the sentences produced when using earlier versions of the visual themes. The word for the visual A was “suula” (deer). While visual B the speaker introduced three new words: **Skuul** (School), **tailet** (toilet), **nanaaki** (road). The only Rama word was **nanaaki**, the other are adaptations of English.

**Figure 14: Integrating new vocabulary**

**A**



**B**



- a) **Singsingka saiming aakari suula ...**  
**Suula ikal akatari**  
*One deer is on grass... the deer is standing.*
- b) **Biip traali singsingka**  
*The cow goes on the grass.*
- c) **Uut... uut ki nikitnga puksak**  
*Boat... one man is on the boat.*
- d) **Salpka i king aing sauko....sauko**  
*A man catches a fish with hook...hook*
- e) **Skuul aing katruk.**  
*School and [the] flower*
- f) **Skuul aing nguu.**  
*School and house*
- g) **Talet singsingka taalngi yaakri.**  
*The toilet is between (in) the grass.*
- h) **Talet nkiiknga traat nanaaki....nungkingsu itraat nanaaki.**  
*The man is on the road going to the toilet.*

#### 5.5.4.2 Agency in the workshops

As said before, we talked about daily activities in many of the workshops in February and March. However, in the visual representations, we can see a few examples of activities, for instance, men fishing and some farming activities in the early compositions (Picture 7 above). However, during our final workshop, the participants decided and organized themselves to design the visual arrangement below. There was not a plenary to plan this, the ideas on the content and disposition of the different graphical elements were planned and organized during the course of the action. Participants orchestrated the interaction, they decided on colors and materials.

For instance, the previous compositions were painted using watercolors, this time they decided that they would use coloring pencils. They decided that the theme for the whole composition would be the activities; thus, if we look at the composition, there are orientation elements that situate us in a rural setting, in a place by the sea where houses are roof-thatched with leaves (possibly banana leaves). The men fishing on a boat in the sea tell while other are hunting present to us some details of the Rama culture. While if we look at the different clusters and their configurations, we will detect elements of deixis. People engaged in the activity of thatching the roof might be male members of the same family. The people sitting in front of each other might be engaged in a conversation. These configurations were the choice of the group (Kress, 2010).

**Figure 15: Daily activities in Bangkukuk Taik**



On looking at this visual, I questioned myself about the motivation that these students have to draw this visual composition. I interpret the creation of this composition as an instance of the development of agency in the workshops (Ahearn, 2001).



Here, agency can be seen in the initiative taken by these students to get together and decide by themselves what to represent and how to represent it. Although many of the represented activities were part of our talks, the visual composition was their decision. As said, they also decided on the use of material and the division of work to fulfill the task.

## 5.6 Summary

In this chapter, I have presented the data collected during my fieldwork. First, I contextualized the teaching of the Rama language. Then, I described the process to collect the generative themes to be used in the workshops. Next, I presented a description of the current teaching of the language in order to establish a point of contrast for the evaluation of the workshops. Subsequently, I described the implementation of the workshops. In this section, the transcriptions and images have been organized chronologically as I followed the structural order of the workshops. The idea was to give the reader an insight into the complex series of events that a workshop encompassed. Likewise, the visual compositions together with the process to create them are analyzed from a social semiotic multimodal approach. The chapter describes the elements of multimodality that makes the workshops a multimodal approach. It also explains what multimodal processes take place during the implementation of the workshops.

The chapter also provided evidence to claim that the RLW has the potential to be implemented in the revitalization of the Rama language. The data showed that the RLW as a method was flexible, user-friendly, promoted cooperative work at different levels and seemed to raise awareness about the importance of the language.

## **6 Chapter: Discussion of findings**

### **6.1 Introduction**

This study aims to test out a multimodal approach in the process of revitalization of the severely endangered Rama language. I intend to bring light on how the integration pedagogical principles of Freire and Montessori, and social semiotic multimodality presented in Chapter 3, can be used to foster critical discussion throughout the process of creating multimodal text, which in turn, can be used as visuals prompts in the revitalization of the Rama language.

Although academic work had undertaken the description and documentation of the language (Craig, 1986, 1987b, 1990; Craig et al., 1986 ect.), previous work has not specifically addressed the issue of the integration of potential learners of the language into the process of designing their own materials to learn the language. My study is designed to remedy that weakness by implementing an approach where children's agency in the process can turn them into active participants who cooperate with their teacher in the process of revitalizing their ethnic language.

In this chapter, I begin by looking at the current situation of the teaching of the Rama Language (RQ1) before considering the claim that the process of coding and decoding is a process of semiosis (RQ2), and finally I will discuss how the workshops can contribute to the process of revitalization of the Rama language (RQ3).

### **6.2 How is the current teaching Rama language in the local schools?**

This section addresses RQ1 and seeks to contextualize the current teaching of the Rama language in the Rama and Kriol Territory. Two reasons motivated me to include this section. The first was the necessity to observe the methods and procedures used by

teachers to understand the teaching of this language. The second was motivated by my research approach, which included elements of PAR with inspiration on Freire's philosophy on education (Freire, 1970). The use of such an approach required establishing a point of departure to expand my understanding of the current situation and visualize possibilities to contribute to the community.

In my visits to the field, I learned that there were two types of people teaching the Rama language. Old and illiterate native speakers and educated new speaker. These two kinds of teachers have different competencies that could be complementary if they used a cooperative approach like the Rama Language Workshops. Let me explain what I mean by complementary skills.

New speakers understand the language, but with limitations. For instance, those whom I met during my fieldwork cannot hold an extended conversation. As said in Chapter 5, some of them have completed bachelor studies or at least the Normal School (teacher education). This means they know about teaching methods. Also, since they have a certain command of the language, reading and writing the language should not be a problem. The native speakers, who teach Rama, lack training as teachers, due to their illiteracy, but they are willing to teach it.

In Chapter 5, I reported my observations of two lessons of Rama. One conducted by a new speaker and the other by a native. My observations reveal that although they have different competencies, they do much of the same things while in the classroom. The use of Total Physical Response as a technique to teach the language is still practice. In both cases, the teachers controlled the class, and students' participation was limited to repetitions of drills. Both lessons were basic and mainly centered on the teaching numbers, greeting and isolated nouns. In both cases, the lessons were improvised.

Since the new speaker is an educated teacher, he used the board to draw sketches and write words and numbers. He was good at motivating students. On the other hand, the

native speaker seemed to be used to answering students' questions. This is probably because of her experience as an informant during the documentation of the language; therefore, eliciting words or phrases from her was not difficult. She usually glossed whenever she was asked the meaning of something.

According to my conversations with the teacher, the teaching of the language takes place sporadically, and nobody follows a plan, which results in the improvisation of the lessons. I confirmed this improvisation during my observation of the two Rama lessons presented in 5.3. Interesting to say is that although the new speaker who conducted the lessons to teach the language in Rama Cay is a professional teacher, he neither followed a plan during the lesson, nor used any kind written of materials apart from what he wrote on the board.

One of the negative factors is the lack of a plan to teach the language, because regardless of the efforts, the inexistence of a program hinders students' progression. However, even if there were a plan adhering to it would be troublesome for an illiterate native speaker unless she receives the support from one of the new speakers.

Another negative factor is the scarcity of educational resources to teach the language. This detail is something interesting since materials have been designed (see Chapter 2), but I did not have access to those documents while I visited the communities. However, if there were written materials, they could be of no use for the native speaker without the assistance of one of the new speakers.

The points mentioned above led me to consider the necessity of collaboration between teachers. Their different competencies could be strengthened using a collaborative approach. To this topic, I will return in the final part of this chapter, where I discuss a theoretical fundament to propose the RLW as a suitable method to integrate the skills of all the participants.

### **6.3 Why coding and decoding generative themes are processes of semiosis and mobility across modes?**

This section addresses RQ2 of this research. I aim to demonstrate that coding and decoding are two semiotic processes where mobility across modes take place. I will start this section arguing why I consider the Rama Language Workshops are a social semiotic multimodal approach, and then I will discuss why I assume that the processes of coding and decoding generative themes are processes of mobility across modes.

#### **6.3.1 The RLW as a multimodal approach**

In the Rama Learning Workshop, students learn and discuss their reality-including the ethnic language-while they produce visual texts. My claim that these workshops are a multimodal approach is based on the following reasons. Since educational principles inspire the RLWs, the first reason is the dialogist nature of Freire's pedagogy that puts a lot of attention to the role of communication in human learning. Freire's emphasis on communication takes me to the second reason; social semiotic multimodality studies the social nature of communication and representation and how they are realized in multiple forms. The third reason is the perspective that social semiotic has on education.

The theories on education that I have considered in Chapter 3—Freire and Montessori—underpin the central notion assumed in the RLW that learning is the result of social interaction, (Freire, 1967, 1970, 1981, Montessori, 1914, 1949, etc.). The workshops are designed to promote cooperation between the different participants and this interaction, in turn, provokes constant communication between participants which demands the articulation of different modes of communication.

Let me consider the plenary as the departing point in a workshop. The plenaries were short, no more than ten minutes. Their primary purpose was to introduce the day's topic and organize the different stages to carry out the discussion. Regardless of the short

time of these plenaries the collected information in Chapter 5, shows that an orchestration of modes took place in each one of them. The simultaneous use of oral, written and visual language, as well as gestures as seen in 5.1.3.1, are an example of the multiple modes in use while discussing the generative theme.

The selection of either of the already mentioned modes is an example of how the presenters of the days' theme carefully chose the mode whose affordance could communicate the theme. This alludes to the third assumption of multimodality, which suggests that we select and configure modes as we interact with others and the configuration of these modes responds to our interest on the topic we would like to communicate (Jewitt, 2014a). For example, in one of these plenaries, we talk about the manatee. While it is true that we adults spoke the most, and therefore the use of verbal language is more conspicuous in the excerpts presented in the previous chapter, there were other modes in use that were not registered in the transcription. For example, students gestured to each other as T2 talked about the aquatic animal. Although it was imperceptible to me, students' use of verbal language conveyed the message to T2 that they knew this animal. In line 10 (Excerpt 3) T2 caught the message and insistently replied: "yes, yes, yes." In this same section, we find an instance of the use of visual language. T2 sketched on the board and questioned students on the manatee's color. This whole interaction—verbal, gestures, visual— between T2 and his students depicted the manatee more completely. Details of the body such as fins and shape were apparent only in this sketch.

The situation above exemplifies how the use of different modes in our plenaries resulted from the affordances that each mode offered us (Kress, 2010; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006). For instance, sketching the manatee depicted the idea of how a manatee looked like, but not its color, nor its size. The combination of visual and verbal made possible the creation of the whole pictures of the animal for those who had never seen a manatee.

The example above allows seeing an example of how meaning shifted mode. From T2's affirmative answer (yes, yes, yes) above, we infer that one of the participants described the animal, this same animal was sketched on the board. This transition from one mode to another illustrates of how meaning is moved across different modes using the affordances of the mode in which it is instantiated (Kress, 2000; Newfield, 2014).

The second and third phase of the workshops are examples of how complex communication and representation can be. For instance, in the second step of the workshops, we departed from the personal interpretation of the theme presented in one. This is an excellent example of transduction. Here we can see a process where each participant reflects and represent graphically his understanding of the topic under discussion. This subjective interpretation is next translated it into the visual mode, an excellent example of how the process of transduction took place in the RLWs (Kress, 2000). We had nine participants in the workshops, which means we got nine individual representations representing the same topic from a personal perspective. That is to say, nine subjective representations of the same theme shaped by the author's interests, the perception of the world and mastery of the instruments to create the visual (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006). For example, the Picture 8 below (see Picture 3 in Chapter 5), shows different ways in which the participants represented the theme of "my community." For me, as an observer, these pictures might not represent a community, in my terms. For example, I would expect to see a group of houses to consider this drawing a community. In this case, I perceive it only as a house. However, for the designers, each one of the drawings is a representation of their community or at least an aspect of the community.

**Picture 8: My community**



One possible reason for this diversity in the representations could be the result of the meaning-maker motivation (Kress, 2010, 2014; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006). So what if the participant thought of his house, a house he likes, or the house he wants to have. Each drawing could also be the result of how much the author can represent using that particular mode. All of these are my speculations, but a similar idea must be behind each representation.

Departing from the different designs produced previously, step three involves a more complex interaction. It implies interpreting the various drawings and their relation to the theme. At the same time, this step resulted in the creation of a new composition, which integrates the elements in the individual designs. The work dynamic in this step and its results allude to the process of transformation (Kress, 2000). As I have already explained, I proposed the theme for the day in our plenary and children drew their interpretation of the same theme individually. My 'design' of the theme was instantiated orally as I described verbally my perception of a community. In the previous step, children translated my design into their own visual design. Now their individual visual drawings were redesigned, transformed, into a new composition which reflects the same theme proposed at the beginning of the section. For instance, if we considered the different transformation of the theme 'My Community,' from its oral stage until it was presented a final composition, we will find that the whole process represents a



combination of shifts from one mode into another (examples of transduction). It also implies the transformation of the semiotic elements within the same mode and its transduction into the verbal mode (Kress, 2000). These processes happened multiple times along the course of a workshop.

Throughout the workshop process, language mediates (Hasan, 2002b, 2002a; Wertsch, 1985) the different processes for the selection, integration, and design of the new texts. For instance, although the focus of the second stage of the workshops was on producing individual compositions, it is important to say that the continuous use of verbal language transmitting the idea of “my community,” kept going the theme introduced in the plenary regardless the individual representations. This use of verbal language was the thread that allowed the initial generative theme to move forward and keep all the pieces of the puzzle ready for their integration into a more encompassing joint composition.

Step three of the workshops represent the initial phase of cooperative work in the workshops. What happened in this phase for me was an intricate exchange of ideas, where meaning was shaped and reshaped by the interaction of the group. In this phase the mediation of language was crucial since the final goal of this process was the instantiation of the theme that originated the whole process. This visual instantiation would be a resource that would fulfill the three metafunctions as a text (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006). Transmitting ideas about the theme from one person to another or exchanging techniques for using materials and drawing a visual composition would have not been possible without the mediation of language.

Another interesting example of using generative themes to design collective visual compositions is Figure 17 below (Figure 13, Chapter 5). The steps to finish A were the same steps as the ones described above. Moreover, we had the same people representing the same theme we had represented the previous day, “My Community.” However, we introduced a small variant, instead of starting the whole process to complete composition **B**, that is to say, beginning with the plenary, we decided to start

using **A** as our point of departure. The striking point here is the difference between the present and the future of the same community.

**Figure 16: Present and future**



For any observer unfamiliar with the process behind the existence of these compositions, they will be taken as two separate units. Observers will detect similarities, but probably an observer would detect more differences. Nevertheless, for the participants in these workshops, including myself, composition **B** represents the future in the community. In this particular part, we can see the limitation of the visual; its affordances cannot tell the whole story (Kress, 2000, 2010; Newfield, 2009). It is true that compositions **A** and **B** have a few common elements: nature, houses, people are visible in both. Still, two interesting features do not belong to the natural environment of these people: latrines and the school. These two elements are new to the context of the Rama community. Visual cannot tell us this information. This information comes from external sources, in this case, my documentary investigation and my fieldwork. The presence of these elements in this visual compositions rises questions about the interest of the designer whose answers are found only if one understands the social context in which these texts came into existence.

In this case, two circumstances might answer the example above. First, the implementation of the workshops with people's existential situations at the center was more than just learning some sentences in Rama or exploring this language complicated grammar; it was also about valuing their local community and culture. Let us remember that conscientization as a process of reflection on reality results in political and cultural action (Freire, 1967, 1970, 1973, 1979, 1998). Second, the workshops as a method were a combination of reflection on the community's reality and needs, as perceived by the participants. In the light of these two points, I will say the following; I found it interesting that the school and some of the houses in the drawings have outhouses. Even though most homes in the community do not have a restroom in real life (as I could observe), it was interesting that they put them in the pictures. Portraying latrines and a school in this fashion might indicate the influence of hygiene issues. The presence of the school in the visual seems to show their awareness of the importance to have access to education. These elements seem to be perceived as something that they should change in the community. For the participants having more latrines or a better school than the one they had in the present might represent their aspiration to improve their life quality.

Having presented and discussed the different elements of multimodality found in the RLW, I can say that the essence of this cooperative approach is to promote communication so that participants can fulfill the proposed goals. Among the manifestations of multimodal communication in the workshops, we find the use of language, the transition of meaning from one mode into another (transmodal moments), the representation of meaning through visual images, the design and transformation of generative themes among others. All of the above are examples of multimodal communication that took place in the workshops. This said I will continue with the consideration of the processes of coding and decoding as semiotic processes of mobility across modes.

### 6.3.2 Coding and decoding generative themes as a process of mobility across modes

Code and decode are two terms that occupy a central position in Freire's approach (1967, 1970, 1981). These terms reflect the Saussure's (1916) ideas on semantics which constitutes the base for the semantic analysis proposed by Freire (1973). Given that the processes of coding and decoding branch out from the Saussurean tradition, we can say that they are in essence semiotic processes. However, as I will explain later, I look at them from a social semiotic perspective.

As explained in Chapter 3, Freire conceived coding as a process to represent graphically the contradictions that exist in the life of people (1970). Freire defines two channels for coding the generative themes as simple and compound channels (explained in chapter 3). But, it is noteworthy to observe at this point. On the other hand, decoding takes place when students interpret in their own terms the coded existing reality (Freire, 1970). In Freire's approach, educators have the responsibility to code the existential situations (1967, 1970). As the organizers of the teaching process, educators must research and code these situations in an attempt to depict reality so that the participants can take distance and analyze it not as people trapped in that situation, but from outside it.

In our workshops, the coding process took place in a different sense. Although, we, teachers, looked for and came up with the themes, the students themselves codified the themes, and in the same way, students together with the teacher of Rama, decoded the themes in the visual to learn the language. The workshops are structured in such a way that their implementation allows that the coding process is not only the responsibility of educators, but it is a collaborative process between educators with their students (See mediation below). The third principle of the workshops alludes to this kind of participation (See principles of the mural workshops explained in Chapter 1).

The idea behind the way to codify the themes is anchored in Freire's principle which enables people to speak their word (1970). For such an outcome, it is necessary a dynamic approach capable of engaging people in critical discussions about their reality. That is why our workshops, with inspiration in Freire, integrated into the contents of discussion themes containing relevant elements taken from the everyday life of the community such as health and education (Freire, 1967, 1970, 1973, 1974). Even though Freire dialogical approach was conceived to implement literacy programs, in my opinion, the use of generative themes can be relevant for a language revitalization project, as it includes critical reflection in order to trigger critical discussion and increase the motivation of people to ponder on their need to learn something, in this particular case, their ethnic language.

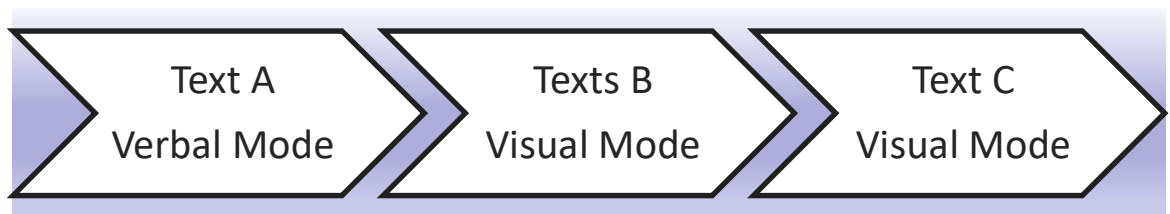
Reframing these terms using a social semiotic terminology I will say the following. If a coded existential situation is capable of conveying a message, then it is a text, which fulfills the three metafunctional tasks (Halliday, 1978). If it is coded with the intention to be interpreted, then we can say that a coded situation alludes to a design, a semiotic text capable of communicating something (Kress, 2000). On the other hand, decoding has to do with the interpretation of the coded existential situation; in this case, it can be said that this interpretation of the represented meaning is a process of transduction if the semiotic material is taken from one mode and represented into another. It is a process of transformation if the semiotic material is relocated within the same mode, (Kress, 2000). That is to say that depending on the channel used for the codification, coding and decoding are processes, which demand the mobility of meaning across modes (Newfield, 2014).

As a matter of example, let us consider the process to code visual A "My Community." We departed from a short discussion on the current situation of their community (See 5.1.5). We described the elements found in the community and then participant drew an individual interpretation of our conversation. Later, the analysis of the different representations was considered by the group for a decision-making process to select

and include those elements that would be included in the collective composition **A** (Figure 17 above). The whole process here is an example of the codification of an existential situation. The reason why I said that this is an example of decoding is because the group analyzed and coded the generative theme presented in the plenary.

Contrasting the present situation of Bangkukuk Taik (Figure 17 above) with the possibilities in the future could be a good point to start a discussion to bring forth elements for a new design. The whole process describes the codification of the generative theme, as a complex process of semiosis where meaning is represented through an orchestration of modes and moves across different modes depending on the text's function at moment meaning is instantiated. Figure 18 below describes the process to codify the generative theme "The future."

**Figure 17: Codification of "The Future"**



In this model, each arrow-like section represents a modal moment (Newfield, 2009, 2012; Newfield & Maungedzo, 2006), a moment where meaning is fixed in a mode (Kress, 2008, 2010, 2014). The space between each arrow marks the transitional moment or transmodal moment (Newfield, 2014; Newfield & Maungedzo, 2006), the instant when meaning shifts from one mode to another. In this model, I would like to say that the modes that I referred to specifically are the predominant or more conspicuous modes. The outside colored area represents other modes in use, especially those at the moment of the interaction.

In this case, the verbal text A represents the generative theme "My Community." This stage would be the presentation of the topic in the plenary. Following the organizational logic of the workshop, from text A to texts B there is a transmodal moment. I have

written Texts B (in plural) since there were several small visual representations of “My Community.” Here we find another transmodal moment. Text C is the collective visual representation of “My Community.” The reason why I have included the external colored area is that alongside the whole process other modes are used to keep the generative theme going. Verbal language and gestures are widely used as participants are engaged in the representation of the message.

As we can see above the process of codification involves different ways to ensemble modes. Verbal and visual modes work together at certain times of the process. Not less important is the orchestration of modes to carry out the codification either to mediate the process of negotiation or to represent the message. The model above shows that the process is multidimensional as the generative theme, or let us say meaning, is instantiated in different and across modes.

As said at the beginning, I would say that coding and decoding as a process allude to the communicational model proposed by Saussure. However, the fact that Freire highlights the importance of people’s context in his dialogical approach, it seems to me that social semiotic multimodality provides a better frame to analyze communication to explain the processes above mentioned.

## **6.4 What is the contribution of a multimodal approach to the revitalization of Rama?**

This section addresses RQ 3. Here I aim to make evident that the Rama Language Workshops can be implemented as a method to raise awareness on the importance of preserving the language of the Rama people as their “Treasure Language” (See Chapter 2). It is also an attempt to show that the RLW is a ‘user-friendly’ method that integrates the existing synergies in the classroom using low-cost resources.

#### 6.4.1 Establishing a horizontal relationship

One of the interesting points to be approached in the workshops was to reduce the distance between students and teachers. These aspects are part of the pedagogic inspiration of the workshops. In this regard, Freire (1970) proposes an approach to education that promotes equity, departing from the premise that we educate each other using a dialog-based method to overcome contradictions or limit situations. Montessori (1912, 1914), on her part, acknowledged the inner potential of children to explore the world and develop cognition. Neither of these two scholars sees the teacher at the center, but the teacher as a collaborator in the learning process. This element is taken into the first principle of the workshops, where students and educators collaborate in the different proposed activities. As said, it is the educators' task to organize the process and set the guidelines for its implementation. Yet, both, students and teachers are responsible for its development.

Here, I will refer to two aspects of the RLWs in particular. First, the workshops are designed so that teacher uses a minimum time in the plenary; however, educators must encourage dialog among participants as they make proposals throughout the process. Both students and teachers can equally interact while working on their drawings. In other words, communication is constants regardless of the stage of the workshops. Second, the workshops are designed in such a way that teachers can engage themselves as part of the process to code the theme. Teachers became a team with the children to design and draw, although teachers stay at the margin to allow students to gain confidence. Teachers and students gave each other suggestions and agreed on decisions, for instance, the colors that they were going to use, or just making comments on each other's drawings. This kind of interaction began to be more common in our third round of workshops which in my opinion was a sign that the traditional teacher-student relationship had started to turn into a closer and horizontal relationship between teachers and students (Freire, 1973; Montessori, 1914).



In terms of communication, the establishment of this close relationship between teachers and students allowed the collective construction of meaning (Kress, 2010). Since teachers and students worked together side by side, they learned from each other (Freire, 1970).

#### 6.4.2 Changing the environment

The workshops do not need a special place for their implementation. In our case, we used the school because the native speaker had the chance to use the school to teach the language within school time. Students were not available out of school time because they had to help their parents with different household activities. So we took advantage of students' time at school. We were very flexible as we adapted our time to students' interests.

Although we were in the school, as shown in Chapter 5, we did not follow the school pattern in the organization of our workshops. With inspiration in Freire's culture circle (Barreto, 1998; Freire, 1967, 1973; Steinsholt & Løvlie, 2004), we changed the class organization so that the workshops could be implemented in an informal environment. We did not have lectures, but conversations with students. We worked on desks and floor. We organized the students in circles for our plenaries. We worked in and outside the classroom. We also worked in the speaker's house which allowed that people not involved in the workshops came and interacted with the students and asked them questions about the drawings they had created. This kind of flexibility in the implementation of the workshops allowed the creation of a cozy learning environment and improved in cooperation with students (Percy-Smith, 2012).

#### 6.4.3 Promoting participation

In principle, we have to differentiate that participation does not mean to be present in a place, but it means to be actively involved in all activities consciously. This observation leads us to consider the principle of conscientization (Freire, 1970, 1979, 1998). The

principle of conscientization carries the idea that the individual is aware or understands why he participates in an activity or why he gets involved in a given action. Conscientization is a cornerstone of Freire's theory (1970, 1979). In this regard, if participation is to bring forth good results, it must be spontaneous and not the result of the agenda imposed by others (Brougère, 2009, 2012). In other words, real engagement must be the result of the person's interest and motivation. One of my quest for the implementation of the RLW was to achieve this kind of involvement among the participants.

I would like to refer to two examples of this type of participation. The first one is found in Table 6 (Chapter 4), where I characterized the participants in the workshops. There, we can see that neither S1 nor S5 were part of the class. S1 attended school in the morning but joined us since the beginning of our workshops. While the second one, S5 finished school one year before. This second girl came precisely because her younger sister, S1, told her about the workshops. The common link they had with the workshops was that they both liked drawing. S5 was very skillful with small details in the drawings; therefore, she became engaged continuously helping others whenever they requested support with little things in their pictures.

The second example is S8. This boy was taciturn and reluctant to talk at the beginning of the workshops. Later in October, he started to be more active during the sessions. We find this boy helping with the organization of materials (5.4.3). We also see him assisting and interacting with the native speaker in her class (5.5.3).

These examples reveal that the implementation of the workshops, to some extent, motivated students and provoked them to become part of the activity. Part of this motivation seems to come out of the personal learning because of discovery. S8 experimented very much with the chromatic circle after he 'discovered' how to produce a greyish shade of color. Later he found himself sharing his new knowledge and as he explained what he did to other participants. It seems to me that these skillful

participants' awareness that they could do something that other participants could not, as well as their awareness that they could support other participants led these people to take action. To me, this reflects Freire's idea of people educating each other mediated by the world (1970).

#### 6.4.4 Contextualized learning

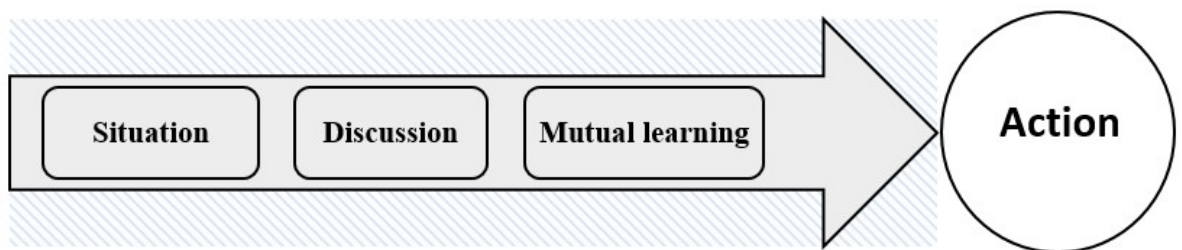
Freire's (1967, 1970) approach also frames the contextualization of learning. This contextualization was achieved by using the generative themes collected in the communities of Rama Cay and Bangkukuk Taik (described in Chapter 4).

As explained in Chapter 3, my purpose to use these generative themes was to trigger critical thinking (Freire, 1970) and have these students depart from an analysis of their reality, including their ethnic language. The study of each situation was undertaken at two different levels. First, students analyzed the situation from a personal perspective and second the same situation was discussed and studied as a group. The result of this second discussion became the material they represented as a group in a visual text.

As explained in Chapter 3, in essence, generative themes are about challenging people to identify limits situations that affect them, but the process goes beyond the mere identification of these situations. It is about taking action to overcome them (Freire, 1970; 1973; 1975). In this research, I departed from the supposition that it was necessary to revitalize the Rama language, but this supposition came from me. Personally, I understand the cultural value of the language, but I had to consider what these students thought about it. I tried to ask these students their opinion and failed. In this sense, I had a problem, because I could not impose my perspective on them (Brougère, 2012). Strategically, the workshops offered me a way out. Since we followed the free engagement policy in our workshops, that is to say, participants can join or leave the workshops at will, we did not start the workshop before everybody in the room understood that being there was not an obligation, but it was free will participation.

I knew that focussing the themes of discussion on the Rama language learning would be complicated; we decided to talk about concrete things such as the community and daily activities as the situations in our generative themes. The idea was not to stay in simple themes, but to increase the level of complexity and abstraction in each session to get participants closer to a new limit situation (Freire, 1970). Figure 19 below exemplifies how the process functions.

**Figure 18: Freire's model**



Our situations for analysis were not complex since they represent existing concrete elements in the community. However, the transition from plenaries where students did not answer our questions openly, to analyze the present and draw the future, including features that depicted two real necessities of the community, might be taken as an indicator that critical reflection was beginning to happen.

#### 6.4.5 Workshops promoted better communication

Communication is much more than using one language or another, communication is multimodal (Halliday, 1978; Van Leeuwen, 2005). Thus, we can use different resources to engage ourselves in a communicative act as long as we are motivated to do so. Indeed, meaning is born out of motivation on the part of the user (Kress, 2010). We faced communication problems due to language problems, as seen in transcription of the Manatee in the previous chapter (Excerpts 1, 2, 3). However, this was only part of our obstacles. As said, our plenaries were short in relation to the time. T2 and I used all kind of resources to make ourselves understood; however, there seemed to be a limit

situation regarding their working together. It seems to me that they were not used to working in groups nor speaking as they worked in class. This obstacle, or limit situation as Freire (1970) would term it, became an indicator to contrast the time before the workshops and after the workshops. In regard to this limit situation, the implementation of the workshops, allowed us to address it without confronting or questioning students all the time as seen in Excerpt 3 in the previous chapter. Instead, showing flexibility and empathy towards students, we worked together sharing our experiences as we let them know that we, as teachers, were also learning.

Initially, we proposed to work as a collective; however, due to students' lack of confidence to exchange their points of view in public, as Excerpt 3 (Chapter 5) shows, achieving consensus to structure a group composition was unsuccessful. On failing to get results, we turned to individual drawings. Adapting our program to participants' path took a more extended time. Nevertheless, by offering students the alternative to work individually, we gradually achieved their integration into the activity. Our purpose with this back and forth strategy was to break through the communication barrier.

Improving communication was a critical precondition for the creation of collective drawings. The idea behind the production of collective drawings during the workshop was to create the conditions or context (Percy-Smith, 2012) so that they could work without feeling the intervention of adults and orchestrate the activity after their interests (Montessori, 1917). Providing children with space for them to express their ideas for the visual composition was an attempt to foster critical thinking as they worked together. Encouraging group work produced functional outcomes, as we will see in the evidence presented in Chapter 5.

The improvement in communication among children resulted in better coordination in the planning of the drawings. Achieving this coordination took a long time. Indeed, one and a half week was the period from the day we started the workshops to the day when we produced our first collective drawing (see Drawing 1 in Chapter 5), versus one day

for each of the last three-compositions (Figures 10, 11 and 15 in Chapter 5). In this sense, it is important to notice that the path to conscientization (Freire, 1973) or consciously learning something takes time and demands patience and comprehension from teachers. We needed the children to be willing to participate and enjoy the activity (Brougère, 2012; Percy-Smith, 2012; Percy-Smith & Thomas, 2010).

While we implemented the collective work phase, we spent time talking to the participants. Informally as we held a short conversation with them, we explained that we teachers talked all the time with each other whenever we needed to coordinate something with other people. We used practical examples that came from the activities they enjoyed doing such as playing football or fishing. For instance, we asked them what would happen if two people got a boat and each one started rowing in different directions. They answered that it did not make sense. Neither was it a good idea since they needed to do it in one direction. We asked them if it was possible to row in one direction without talking and their answer was negative. We used this kind of examples in our conversations to illustrate simply what it means to work as a team and how teamwork is impossible if there is not good communication between the members. We told them that we were facing the same situation in our workshops since to come forward with a collective composition we needed to talk.

On comparing our earlier with the later compositions produced in the workshops, we can see how these compositions reflect the level of coordination among students. It suggests an improvement in the group's communication. That is why I say that one of the achievements in the implementation of the workshops was the improvement of the interaction among participants during the process of assembling a collective composition.

#### 6.4.6 Promoting freedom

Because freedom is a central theme for discussion in the pedagogical approaches of Freire and Montessori, it was included as a central topic in Chapter 3. Although freedom as a concept differs in perspective about the source of oppression—political and cultural oppression (Freire, 1970); adults controlling nature (Montessori, 1912)—in both cases, it affects the learner.

Above I have commented on the process to improve communication. This improvement also made possible that these children could speak their mind to express satisfaction and dissatisfaction (Freire, 1970). These kind of expressions were good indicators that the practice of freedom produced excellent results. If not, it was our responsibility to create the proper environment (Freire, 1967; Montessori, 1914; Percy-Smith, 2012). The practice of freedom for teachers is not an easy task. There are goals to fulfill and something to teach. However, teachers' interests might differ from that of a student. A contradiction like this sets teachers in a limit situation (Freire, 1970), which indicates that limit situation can challenge teachers in the professional practice as well.

For instance, it might sound contradictory, but a negative answer from a student might represent a headway in the practice of freedom. In our third workshop, one girl dared to express her dislike with the group work phase. If we think of children, who are educated to remain silent and never contradict adult people, telling a teacher “Me no like drawing” might have had represented a big step for this girl. For me, it was a sign that we were making progress towards the practice of freedom (Freire, 1967). I told this girl that her participation was up to her, but she could join us whenever she felt like doing so. She went away and continued drawing outside the school. I was expecting her to go home, but she remained there and returned the next day. I believe that the other children could see that we talked about freedom, that they were not in a cage and free to take decisions on their own (cf. Montessori, 1949). In principle, what we wanted to achieve was spontaneous and committed participation.

#### 6.4.7 Freedom promotes autonomy

There is evidence in Chapter 5 that participants gained autonomy in workshops. This evidence is found in the way they designed their drawing and how they took the initiative to complete the task; especially at the end of the third series of workshops. We believed that although we were using the model of the workshops, the participants were not “adaptive beings,” they could make choices at each step of the process. We encouraged them to work in such a way that they would field the masters of the activity (Freire, 1970; Freire et al., 1992).

If we considered the drawings that they have composed, we would see that although we proposed the themes, they designed the drawings as they wanted. For instance, I have mentioned the manatee in many places in this thesis. Indeed, we devoted two days talking about the manatee, but the manatee is not a central figure in their representations. There is only a small figure of a Manatee in one of the collective drawings (see Appendix 3).

While in the initial phase of my intervention, we teachers had to organize the activity, towards the end, as students learned the system, they organized themselves. In chapter 5, we can see that students split the group into two teams without the intervention of an adult. They also divided the work according to their interests and skills. Although it was notable that the two groups worked separately, they worked coordinately. For instance, whenever one of them finished a sketch, the other came and started painting while the one who drew the design took a rest— many times some of the children got engaged in the task of the other group to support them. In their way of working we perceive an excellent communication and cooperation (Freire, 1970). It is also evident that they worked following their interest (Montessori, 1912, 1914), which is good indication that they gained autonomy.



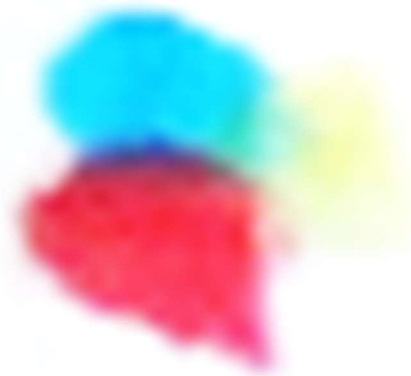
#### 6.4.8 Learning as discovery

Montessori (1914) and Freire (1989) suggested that children learned as they experimented with the objects they find in the surrounding environment. The third principle of the workshops as explained in Chapter 1 is based on this premise. We adopted this principle in our workshops and put it into practice. As said, there were times when the language barrier was difficult to handle. Thus we used different ways to approach the situation, one of them was performing a basic experiment with the participants.

In Chapter 5, we experienced how this principle brings forth results. For instance, regardless it was challenging to hold an extended conversation with the participant either because they were timid or because of language problems, their curiosity was stronger than their reluctance to speak. For instance, when I used the chromatic circle to demonstrate how we could make colors out of the primary colors. They started imitating the experiment with the circle using first the primary colors. The results many times were not as expected, as in the example below, but it prompted their curiosity. Later, as they began painting, they used this new knowledge and put it into practice.

This simple experiment triggered other experiments out of personal interests. For instance, as said in the previous chapter, one student managed to paint fine lines using a pencil to delineate small details. Another one experimented with mixing different colors and started producing a shade of colors. It is interesting to notice that this experimentation happened as they cooperated with others. Thus it became part of the collective learning.

**Figure 19: Experimenting with the Chromatic circle**



From experience with the chromatic circle, we can learn the following pedagogic realities. We can neither expect quick nor perfect results from this kind of explorations. Perfection comes after a process of repeating the experiment. The product itself might not always be so excellent, but whatever turns out of the process is also a result that can be improved. This is in principle how we could deal with a limit situation using it as an opportunity to gain new knowledge (Freire, 1970). This method includes principles of test and error; hence, whenever something turns out wrong, still we can learn from the experience and improve it.

The challenge ahead was to make these children share their knowledge with confidence and make them understand that their experience was valuable. For instance, I insisted on my questions about the manatee. In fact, I had the chance to see that animal a long time ago in a zoo, and I have read about it in books, but they know this animal from a different perspective. They have seen how it is in freedom.<sup>74</sup> Hence, by asking the

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<sup>74</sup> Manatee used to be part of the diet of the Ramas, but not anymore. They now protect it as an endangered species.

question, I tried to convey the idea that I did not have the same knowledge as the one they had.

#### 6.4.9 Visual composition as mediators to learn the language

In Chapter 5, I presented evidence on how the visual compositions mediated the process of learning some elements of the Rama language in the final stages of the workshops. In this chapter, I want to discuss why these visual compositions are suitable for this type of activity.

The term mediation alludes to the theory of Vygotsky (1978, 1986), and as explained in Chapter 3, a mediator connects the external experiences with our cognition. Codifications in Freire's theory function similarly (Alves, 2008; de Melo Moura, 2001; Gehlen et al., 2010). Freire identifies codifications as mediators between the situation under analysis and the learner (cf Freire, 1970, p. 114). In this case, students' visual compositions were the codifications of the reality as perceived by them. As said before, in the workshops students are not only the decoders of an existential situation but also the coders of that situation in collaboration with their teachers. This is probably an innovative component of the workshops as a method to promote cooperation since the codification of the themes is constructed by students in collaboration with other students. In this sense, the coded visual themes are socially constructed. The visual compositions represent the interpretation of reality as perceived by the group.

In the process of coding the generative themes, it is important to notice the role of language as a mediator. As people interact with each other, they also learn from each other. As the participants organized themselves to draw a group composition, they exchanged ideas, but also gained experiences, as the boy sharing his technique to create a new color. This interaction is a process of mediation using the mode of language (Hasan, 2002b, 2002a; Wells, 2007; Wertsch, 1985). Freire's approach takes up this idea. For him, dialog mediates learning, as learning is the exchange of ideas between

individuals (1970). Furthermore, these ideas are in line with Halliday's view of the central role of language in the process of learning (Halliday, 1993). Because of these complex processes, learning happens at different levels. It occurs at the personal level and as a group.

Regarding mediation to learn the language, the use of students' visual compositions was advantageous. For example, students decided what to code; therefore, they knew the visual text, which can be useful for learning vocabulary. Likewise, since the visual composition was their creation, I believe students had a connection with it, which might facilitate the learning of vocabulary and expression in Rama.

On the other hand, the narratives represented by the participants set guidelines for progression. Earlier in this chapter, I said that written material would be of no use for this illiterate teacher, but visual texts like the ones created by her students can be useful for her attempts to revitalize the language. My affirmation comes from my observations in the field and the examples I have presented in Chapter 5, where we can see how this native speaker in collaboration with T2 and her students conducted sessions to learn Rama following the narrative created by her students. Furthermore, a visual composition made in the RLWs offer the user some of the following advantages:

As a means of mediation, the visual provides an excellent way to handle linguistic situations. The speaker does not need to explain language features. She says complete sentences while her students follow.

The visual prepared by students provides the setting for the topic they want to learn. For example, when they represented the Daily activities in Bangkukuk Taik, the focus of the lesson was on people performing activities proper of the area.

Data in Chapter 5 demonstrate that the visual can foster progression in the complexity of the language used in each lesson. For example, if we contrast the elicited language in the lessons at the beginning of my fieldwork with those of the workshops in the final

phase of my fieldwork, we will find a visible difference. While in the initial stage we find salutations, numbers one through five or utterances like **“Pangsak katuruk”** [*three flowers*], the elicited sentences from the visual compositions at the end of my fieldwork for instance, **“Salpka i king iang sauko”** [*A man catches a fish with a hook*] reflect a degree of complexity.

Another advantage in the use of these compositions is that no matter how complicated the visual narrative is, the speaker and her students will use it on their own terms. What I mean here is that they will not be stressed with the content. They could increment the complexity of the elicited verbal language depending on their interest or their language learning progression.

Likewise using visual compositions provides the possibility to repeat sentences several times. This possibility of repetition can be beneficial because it can help students memorize complete sentences. During the implementation of the workshops, I could verify that the speaker repeated the phrases a couple of times. Taking into account that the speaker is one of the original informants of the RLP it is possible that her training to repeat sentences several times on the request of the linguists is helpful whenever she uses the visual media. Her skills plus the use of a visual composition and the cooperation of her students can in some way improve her performance as language teacher regardless of her illiteracy.

#### 6.4.10 Transferring the workshops’ model

The implementation of this approach in the context of the revitalization of languages was in my perception a groundbreaking project in the multilingual and multiethnic Caribbean Coast of Nicaragua. During the documentary research phase, I learned about the existence of other projects addressing the problem of language endangerment with successful results, for instance, language nests, master-apprentice language learning programs (Cazden, 2002; Hinton, 2001b; Pine & Turin, 2017), but I found two critical

factors that make these programs beyond the possibilities for their implementation. These two factors are money and literacy among native speaker teachers. My project deals with a poor minority community with a high rate of illiteracy and without institutional support. However, data in 5.5 of the previous chapter demonstrate that Rama teachers were able to learn and implement the workshops in cooperation with their students using inexpensive resources.

As said in Chapter 5, I implemented the workshops in Bangkukuk Taik for the first time in February 2015. Regarding the transference of the model, I conducted the first series of three workshops in order to demonstrate the model so that T1 and T2 could see how the method worked. My first move to transfer the model started when I noticed that the students were more confident if they worked with T2. I decided to ask him to take control of the class. In that way, he could help me as an intermediary with children. Also, I needed to get him fully engaged in the process so that he could learn the technique. Indeed, my intervention in this school was not only to collect data for my research, but I was there also to contribute to the community, which in turn is one of the characteristics of Participatory Action Research. Had I had implemented the workshops alone; I would have made some progress. However, T2 and T1 would remain in the community once I had finished my visits. Indeed, I could do just minor headways given that I could only be with these students for a few days, while in the long term, the teacher might be able to achieve more as he will stay in the community. Therefore, it was crucial to transfer the model so that the teachers could use it after I was gone.

In terms of transferring the model, its simplicity is one of the advantages of the methodology implemented in the workshops. It is effortless to remember the four necessary steps for its implementation. First, a plenary to discuss a subject of collective interest. The second is the time to draw each's interpretation of the plenary. The third is a time to share with others the personal ideas represented in each drawing. The fourth is the time to work collectively. This a time to share thoughts with one's partners to put together a single composition that encompasses all or at least the most representative

the views of the group. The final is the use of the visual piece as a text to practice the language. Since students were involved in the process of codification, they are familiar with the different stages. That means that students know the process. We have seen in the previous chapters, excerpts where students have taken the initiative to organize and distribute the materials. Students way of acting towards the end of my fieldwork indicates that students can be of great support to the native speaker in the process to teach the language.

Regardless the simplicity of the method, the processes that it fosters are complicated because the method is based on the interaction between students in a context that provides a diverse learning experience due to social interaction and the synergy of all skills, knowledge, and experiences of group members. Consequently, in the previous chapter, for instance, in Excerpt 7, 8, we find examples of how T2 organized the session alone. Then in Excerpt 10, we can see the native speaker T1 leading the process. On the other hand, in Table 18, we find students helping in the organization of the process. These examples give us a whole picture of the viability to transfer the model and how this new tool to work with the language could empower teachers to work in this complex context.

## **6.5 Summary**

In this chapter, I have tried to address the three research questions proposed at the beginning of this investigation. The first problem was a diagnosis to learn about my starting point and used the collected information to structure my intervention. The second part of this chapter addresses the second research question. There I discussed the multimodal aspect of the process of coding and decoding of the generative themes used in implementing our workshops. Section three of this chapter focuses on my third research question. I present a discussion of why a method inspired by Freire's pedagogy might be of current interest in the revitalization process of the Rama language. I provide

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evidence to support my claim an approach as the RLW can be useful in the revitalization of an endangered language.

The three sections presented in this chapter give the reader an image of the complicated process of linguistic revitalization, but they also offer the helpful aspects that using a multimodal approach combined with a technique that promotes critical thinking and conscientization.



## **7 Chapter: Conclusions**

This Chapter seeks to summarize the purpose and findings of this study. Furthermore, it attempts to make a connection with previous studies on the Rama community and language. It also states and describes the limitations of the present study. The chapter refers to the problems faced during the implementation of the research and their impact on the outcomes of the project. Chapter 7 also sheds light on the implication of this research project and makes recommendations for future actions. At the same time it establishes its relevance as a contribution to the field of Language Revitalization. Finally, the chapter presents a personal reflection of the learning experience during the research process. Once the plan for the chapter is presented, I shall start by summarizing the purpose and findings in this study.

### **7.1 Summary of purpose and findings of this study**

I would like to start by reviewing my problem statement and considering the relevance of my findings in this study. Hence, I recall my problem statement here, which, in turn, I use as a point of departure in this final discussion. As stated in Chapter 1, I formulated my problem statement in the following question: *To what extent a social-semiotic multimodal approach to language revitalization can be relevant to empower teachers and youth of the Rama community to maintain and develop the symbolic value of the Rama language?*

A “to what extent” question can imply a problematic and complicated answer if there is one. It also can represent a challenge whenever it comes to presenting concrete results. I ventured to state my problem like this because I believe that exploring an unknown ‘territory,’ in this case, to test a method to revitalize a moribund language can yield only preliminary results. However, my findings can lay the basis for further studies given that tangible results can only be observed in the long-term. Assuming the contrary would be unrealistic regarding time and the nature of the phenomenon under study, in this case,

the revitalization of the Rama language. On the other hand, including a social semiotic multimodal approach in the context of the revitalization of a post-vernacular language can —without being pretentious—be probably considered an innovative project on this matter. Therefore, the model presented here —which is based on the method developed by muralists to enhance participation and foster critical thinking and creativity— needs refining.

The idea to implement a social semiotic multimodal approach was an attempt to respond to the local necessity of the Rama community to preserve their language, a need that I discovered while doing documentary research at the initial stage of this project. Recalling Chapter 2 of this dissertation, we will find that the Rama language is scarcely used if so. It is used primarily by a few people in the jungle. If children need to go to school, they have to learn Spanish. If one is looking for a job, one does not need to learn Rama, but Spanish. Hence, Rama has little practical use, but it has a symbolic value (Malinowski, 1923; Pivot, 2011). In the view of this situation, if one is to implement an approach to revitalizing the language, one has to think of an attractive proposition that fosters the participation of students.

Another situation that I considered is that much of the material produced by field linguists is relevant for academics around the world who are engaged in the description and documentation of endangered languages. This affirmation is based on my own experience while looking through academic documents on the Rama language. Scholarly literature is, of course, necessary in the academic realm; however, the situation raises some questions about the pertinence of scholarly work for the users of those languages. We have to take into account that the speakers of endangered languages are mostly illiterate people without formal education<sup>75</sup>; therefore, whatever is produced will be of no use to them. I have to mention that the ideas in the previous paragraphs were from

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<sup>75</sup> Once again, illiteracy and education must be understood after their western conceptions.

the central discussions in a series of workshops organized by the Dynamique Du Langage's staff at the Institut des Sciences de l'Homme in Lyon, France in May 2014. There during two weeks, scholars from different parts of Latin America, Europe, and Asia presented various research projects about endangered languages in those regions. There, I realized that a common factor in their presentations was the issue about what to do with the results of their investigations and how one could solve the gap between the academic world and that of the speakers of the languages.

Back to the Rama language, these questions, above, open room for my position about the use of the multimodal approach that I have proposed in this dissertation. As I have said earlier in Chapter 1, it is a multimodal approach with a practical component which allows its implementation by teachers with little academic background and low economic resources. Therefore, it empowers the local teachers to work with the language creatively. Of course, the approach is not an ultimate solution, but its integration into the current teaching practice could help the teachers in the following ways. 1) The method can motivate the students to participate actively instead of limiting themselves to listen and repeat words in the language they are learning. 2) The group construction of visual texts using their own surrounding environment (context) can foster in all the participant's critical reflection about their world, and therefore their use of the target language could be more realistic and natural. 3) Given the level of illiteracy of those speakers who are interested in teaching the language, the implementation of a formal curriculum would be difficult. Hence, collectively constructed visual text in their classroom could help illiterate teachers or those with little formal training to implement lessons adapting the level of complexity of the text represented visually according to their linguistic competence.

As I presented Chapter 5, the level of complexity of the visually coded themes was progressive and so was the language production. Using these visual compositions, it is not unusual that the teacher and the students will follow a natural and increased level of complexity in their text, as it happened in my field experience.

It is essential to underscore that the term “empower” as used in the problem statement embodies, in my opinion, the Freirean principle of “conscientization” (Freire, 1973, 1979, 1981). What I mean here, is that people, in this case, students can take control of what they want to learn. By designing the visual composition, they can participate with the teacher in the process to create the lessons; thus, they learn consciously. In this regard, this multimodal approach empowers the local people to develop the symbolic value of their language (Brammer et al., 2004; Edwards, 1985; Norton & Toohey, 2011; Thornborrow et al., 2004). This is possible due to the continuous reflection and the engagement of every participant in the discussions along the process of the collective construction of the themes. Moreover, finally, I would say that this multimodal approach empowers the local people to maintain the language given that provoking the use of the ethnic language to translate images into words is an integral part of the workshops.

## **7.2 Relationship with previous research**

As far as I know, apart from Pivot’s reflections on a didactic for a “Treasure Language” (Pivot, 2011), there is not another study on the teaching of the Rama language. One must be aware that all previous research on the Rama people and language has been done, first, from an ethnographic perspective (Conzemius, 1927, 1930b, Lehmann, 1914, 1920, Loveland, 1975, 1976b, 1976a), and second from a sociolinguistics perspective, specifically within the fields of Language Description and Documentation (Craig, 1991; Craig et al., 1986; Grinevald, 2007b; Grinevald & Kauffmann, 2006 etc. Hale et al., 1992 Pivot, 2011, 2014).

It is important to mention that the work of Lehman and Conzemius was the departing point for the later work of Craig’s (later Grinevald) Grammar of Rama (Craig, 1987b). Thus, although the different previous studies focused on other aspects of the Rama people and language, they provided the knowledge about the people, their territory, culture, and language. Hence, my research project takes the previous research stated above as a point of departure, and I have three reasons for doing so. The first is the need

for an understanding of the historical background of the Rama people provided by ethnography. The second has to do with the linguistic information about the language; this is provided by the research to document and describe the language. The third, I needed credible information about the language and its current situation. This information is available in the sociolinguistic study of the Rama, which constitutes a substantial part of Chapter 2 in this dissertation and provides the background information for the present project.

Based on the above, what I have tried to do in this study is to bring together ideas and principles from pedagogy (e.g., Freire, 1970; Montessori, 1918), and social semiotic multimodality (Halliday, 1978; Kress, 2000, 2010; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006; Newfield, 2014; Van Leeuwen, 2005) to implement an approach to promote critical thinking and raise language awareness among Rama young students.

### **7.3 Limitations in of this research**

Although in my opinion, I fulfilled my goals, I consider that three situations limited the outcomes of the present study. The first was the low attendance of students because of the mobility of their families. The second was the integration of only one native speaker and one new speaker, and the third was the implementation of the workshops in just one community.

The low attendance was a problem that I faced many times in the workshops. We had an attendance as low as four people during a session. This low attendance hindered the progress of the absentees, especially, regarding learning more techniques and missing the chance to learn new words and phrases in Rama. Some of these students were not in the school when I visited the village to implement the second series of workshops. That meant months until I came for another visit, which resulted in a rupture of the relationship we had built with them in the previous visit.

Unfortunately, we could not integrate more native speakers and new speakers of the language. It is true that the native speaker and new speaker's support during the implementation of the workshops was invaluable. However, the absence of other speaker represented two shortcomings. The first was that we did not have the richness of different pronunciations of a word. For instance, I learned that Miss Cristina and Mr. Walter Ortiz speak two variants of Rama. The second one is related to the sustainability of the methodology. For instance, in our absence —I mean Javier and me— there is no one who can assist Miss Cristina with the workshops.

Another limitation is the fact that we implemented the workshops only in one community due to the distance between communities. This represents a weakness as we do not know if the Rama Language Workshops can be accepted and implemented in the Rama Territory. So far, we know the level of acceptance and the results of the workshops, but this knowledge concerns only Bangkukuk Taik and has not been validated in the territory.

Those three problems can be mitigated. For instance, about the mobility of the different families, I think that it is possible to plan the workshops during the season where the families are not working on their plantations. Since corn and beans are seasonal crops, it is possible to predict when the families will be in the village. An advantage for this planning is that the workshops must not necessarily follow the school program. Regarding the second limitation, I think that it is possible to recruit and train those students who showed some leadership in the workshops. They could shortly become the assistants during the workshops, and by learning the technique, they could become future facilitators. However, it is necessary to design a strategy to catch their interest in these kind of programs.

## **7.4 Problems during the implementation of this research**

In this section, I explain some of the most relevant situations that I faced during the implementation of this study and the impact these findings represented for my project.

A first problem was the isolation of the fieldwork area which represented a significant challenge because as described in Chapter 2, the geographical location of the area where this study took place lacks roads and transport infrastructure. The isolation of the community represented a significant limitation to get supplies and school materials. The nearest place to buy food and supplies was Bluefields, and that entails a five-hour boat trip depending on the weather conditions. I faced this particular problem in February 2015 when I arrived at Bangkukuk Taik, and many students were not at school because they did not have the school materials they needed. I had bought the elements that I needed for the workshops, but if the children did not have what they needed to attend their regular classes, I would not have them in our workshops. Because of the small population of children in school age, especially third grade and up, I needed to assure the attendance of the few we already had in the school's official list. This situation meant that I needed to provide the necessary materials to guarantee students' participation at the workshops. Without any means of communication or possibilities to order the materials and get them delivered, the only solution was to take a trip to Bluefields. The whole situation and my trip to Bluefield shortened my time in the work site.

A second problem was the nonexistence of means of communication, which represented difficulties to get in touch with the locals to plan and establish an accurate agenda for the work with the locals – this includes children-, logistics (access to supplies and school materials). These situations had an impact on the implementation of this research and of course on the scope of the results. Most of these people are farmers and fishermen; therefore, the way that they plan their daily agenda differs from the system in the rest of the country. I have already mentioned in Chapter 2 that the educational system in this region follows the centralized model established by the

central government. Contrary to this, people in the Rama territory plan their activities according to their immediate need, and long-term planning does not seem to be that common. Hence, I could not make plans in advance for my trips. For instance, during my first trip, I made arrangements with a local leader because I needed a place to eat for my next trip. I told him that I would be back in February 2015; however, when I came to the village in February 2015, the family had moved to a different settlement. Similarly, during my first trip, I had spoken with several young men so that I could get together with them as I needed to collect some information, but these young people were away in February 2015. Later, I learned that the most efficient way to organize a meeting was to show up and send somebody house by house and invite them to come. Likewise, the best way to make arrangements is to talk to any available person.

Equally important is the fact that families organize their plans according to their agricultural activities. I have mentioned earlier that families' mobility represented an inconvenience for the workshops as it meant that many kids could leave the village as their parents move to the areas where they have their farms. This kind of mobility is seasonal, but unfortunately, it coincides with the first school semester and affects students attendance for several weeks<sup>76</sup>. In the rest of Nicaragua, families who live in the countryside usually move near places where there is a school, as I observed while I worked in the countryside of North Nicaragua. This situation, in my opinion, risks children's education, but for people who live in the jungle, they need to ensure the food they will consume during the year. I will return to this issue in my final reflection below.

Likewise, planning a program adapted to the organization of the local school is challenging. In theory, the local school follows the organizational program and academic curriculum of the Ministry of Education of Nicaragua (See Chapter 2). However, because Bangkukuk Taik is located in a remote area of the Caribbean, the school follows an

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<sup>76</sup> The school year in Nicaragua runs from February through December.



irregular program, which means it has fewer hours per week. Furthermore, due to the centralized nature of the Ministry of Education, all the teachers of Nicaragua must attend an obligatory session the last Friday of each month during the school years. For teachers who live in urban areas attending the meetings implies some minutes by bus or walking. For those who live in rural areas, but have a good transportation system, traveling to the location where this mandatory meeting is held is a matter of hours or even staying overnight in the place. However, for the teachers of Bangkukuk Taik, where there is not an established transportation system, attending the meeting can imply a week or two out of their school. Two main factors contribute to this dramatic reduction of the working hours in Bangkukuk local school. The first, teachers depend on the availability of a boat incidentally traveling to Bluefields. Boats going from and to Bangkukuk Taik are private and do not have a schedule. So, if someone needs to travel and there is a boat leaving on Monday, they will go on this day although they need to be in town not until Thursday waiting until a later day could be a risk as nobody guarantees transportation. Hiring a boat could imply up to 70% of a teacher's monthly salary. The second is the availability of teachers' payment in cash. These teachers have to pick up their paycheck (every two months) and cash it at the bank in town before returning to Bangkukuk. Traveling back implies not only paying transportation, but teachers also need to buy supplies for the number of days or weeks they will remain. In other words, they have no choice but to shorten their stay in their school, which means fewer school days per year.

This absence of the teachers affected the implementation of the workshops given that I used the school as the means to get in touch with the children. We also used the space that the Rama language teaching has in the school curriculum. Working with students in the Rama territory is different to working with students in town. In the Rama territory, children help their parents with the house chores. Hence, getting them engaged in a program out of the school time requires further planning with their parents. Additionally, although, the Rama people are not nomadic, in the whole sense of the

word, there is a lot of mobility in the area. Entire families move to their farms in the jungles whenever there is a season (e.g., harvesting corn or beans). In this regard, parents try to respect the school period. Therefore, it is during the school time where more children are available. Unfortunately, I crashed a couple of times with the fact the school was closed and without the teachers, which meant that students were away from the place. This situation resulted in extra work for us since we needed to get around, talk to parents individually asking their permission so that their children could join us in the workshops.

Once again I have to mention the lack of bibliography as a problem, but this time the problem was for me. Finding the literature to support Chapter 2, was quite a challenge. What I mean here, is the literature with credible ethnographic information about the Rama people. For instance, the authors who have documented the Rama people, language, and territory such as Conzemius (Conzemius, 1927, 1930b), Lehmann (1914, 1920), Loveland, (1975, 1976), and (Riverstone, 2008, 2004), are not available in Nicaragua—not even at CIDCA. This literature is available in libraries of different institutions and universities in the United States as I have found out checking the internet. Except for the documentation at [www.turkulka.net](http://www.turkulka.net), the same happens with literature about the Rama language, what I have now, is the courtesy of Colette Grinevald who allowed me to work in her personal library and granted me access to the library of *Laboratoire Dynamique Du Langage*, all of this in Lyon, France. My point here is that although I could sort out the problem, it represented more use of time and resources to get the pieces together.

Not less significant was the problem that I faced with the languages spoken in the area. My poor understanding of Kriol represented a hindrance in my fieldwork. Although I speak English and could establish communication with many of the inhabitants of Bangkukuk Taik, many of these people, in particular, young people, felt uncomfortable when they spoke with me. I have explained in Chapter 2 that they consider Kriol as “broken English,” and imperfect language; therefore, they were ashamed of not

speaking a perfect language. If I consider myself, I am far away from speaking perfect English, and even further when I consider Norwegian, I just try to communicate; however, for the Rama youth not speaking a language correctly is a big deal.

Their feeling was a barrier in our communication although they were friendly and receptive to me and my participation in the workshops. Therefore, I had to request the support of an interpreter. This interpreter used to be the local teacher and is related to many of the local families, which improved the communication with the children given the level of trust between him and the children. However, due to my limitations, part of the information could have been missing in the process. For instance, it would have been more enriching if I had been able to talk directly with the children as they were engaged in the process of drawing or if I had understood their low voice conversations as the process to paint was going on. Those are questions that remain unsolved in my mind whose answers could have been enlightening with respect the multimodal analysis.

Likewise, my limited interaction affected to some extent my capacity to establish a closer relationship with the participants as many times I was dependent of someone to translate. This person was also directing the workshops many times; thus, he was not able to assist me all the time.

Equally important were the socio-political problems and security problems that affect the area. In the international news, it is possible to find some reports about the construction of an interoceanic canal, the biggest in the world if it happens<sup>77</sup>. Although all the socio-political distress that the plans for the construction of this canal have apparently nothing to do with my research project, it has enormously affected my agenda in the area.

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<sup>77</sup> <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-30584559>

First, people are very preoccupied with the future of their territory as the canal would mean the confiscation of their land and the impending relocation of the inhabitants of the area in a different part of the country. Bangkukuk Taik is likely to disappear if the Chinese company and the Nicaraguan government dig the canal. The area is already measured and marked as the initial point of the canal (Field note, 17.08.2014). This situation had an impact on my project as the key people's attention —those who could support my project in the community, for instance, the president of the community— has been diverted to attempt meetings to organize the people of the area to protest in an attempt to protest against this governmental project. Their participation in this movement minimized their attention on the issue of the loss of their ancestral language. Keeping their land has become their priority.

Second, I had to leave the area once (in February 2015) because Nicaragua's general attorney had plans to visit the area to convince the community members to sign the documents where they were supposed to accept the construction of the canal in their territory. The visit of this high-rank government official to the area, usually represents the militarization of the area to be visited. In the particular case of Bangkukuk Taik, it also meant the occupation of the community house to host the military. This house was the place where I used to sleep while doing fieldwork. Also, being an alien from the area my presence in the area would have been interpreted by the military as intrusive in an official activity; thus, following the advice of local friends and leaders, I left the place before the official delegation and the military arrived.

Regarding security, the area had been ravaged by historical conflicts between land settlers from the Pacific and Central Region. Given that the vast territory of the Caribbean had remained uninhabited, these immigrants had moved to the area trying to establish themselves in the land owned by the indigenous communities by force. During my fieldwork, six indigenous people were seriously wounded, four were kidnaped, and one was killed in an ambush as he headed for his farm.

## 7.5 Implications of research findings

About the findings of this investigation, I would like to start with a brief recount of the situation of the teaching of the Rama language in the Rama and Kriol Territory. First of all, I want to mention that there exists a legal frame that supports the teaching of all the indigenous languages in the Autonomous Regions (Ley 162, 1996). The existence of the legal framework facilitates the integration of the teaching of Rama in the school program, which means that teaching the language should be an integral part of the curriculum; however, the institutional support is very scarce. In this regard, the Rama language does not seem to be a priority for the regional authorities. Consequently, the current integration of the Rama language as part curriculum in the local school is mainly the result of the personal initiative of an illiterate Rama speaker.

In the view of this situation, the implementation of a multimodal approach integrating libertarian pedagogic elements to foster children engagement in critical discussions made it possible to work side by side with the teacher of the language. Besides demonstrating the benefits of the integration of pedagogic principles based on the pedagogies of Freire and Montessori in language revitalization, the inclusion of art to create visual composition attracted children's attention as well as that of their parents. The presence of parents in the school was exciting because they came to admire the drawings that their children had produced and to express their satisfaction. This attractiveness of the workshops indicated that the incorporation of an element that was not very common in the area, the integration of creative art as part of a daily lesson might open room for the inclusion of other members of the community.

Here I explain at least three reasons why this study might be of interest for field linguists and people interested in the implementation of revitalization programs. The first is the pragmatism of the approach used in the workshops; the second is the economy of the method, and the third is its progressivity.

Although I presented a multidisciplinary theoretical frame for the approach, it is its pragmatism that makes the method suitable for complex sociolinguistic environments. As said, there is still a high level of analphabetism among native speakers. The technique is straightforward, and an illiterate teacher does not need to comprehend any theory for its implementation. The five steps of the approach can be learned through demonstration. Once children have participated a few times in the workshops, they acquire the logic behind the workshops and might become potential collaborators of the speakers. Creativity to produce drawings inspired in their own reality empowered them to cooperate with their teacher when practicing the Rama language. In the case of using written materials as a source of inspiration for the generative themes, children can provide support to the speaker by reading, for instance, stories or legends.

The approach uses little economic resources for its implementation in comparison to other methods, and this factor is significant. It is true that drawing is part of the regular activities in schools of Nicaragua — and other parts of the world. In the Rama Kriol territory, the situation was different. Poverty and alienation from the rest of the country have resulted in a scarcity of basic school materials (Field note, 15.10.2015). The approach is economical since blank paper, pencils, water-based painting or coloring pencils (if the paint is not available) are the essential materials. Paper is one of the articles that schools can get from the government, and the other materials can be obtained at low cost. Printed materials are costly, mainly when these materials are produced in small amounts and the market is little; thus, the low price represents an advantage.

Another reason why this approach can be of interest is the progressiveness of the method. In my experience in the field, I observed a progression in the complexity of the themes represented by the children. We started by representing concrete single objects such as houses, boats, and animals. Then, as we used more time with the children, they began representing more structured visual composition. Consequently, the more the composition was, the more varied was the language we elicited from

them. So, instead of having isolated words like 'man' and 'house,' something that we experienced at the beginning we got the complete sentences such as 'the man is passing by the house.'" This improvement suggests that it might be possible to structure more elaborate narratives depending on the complexity of the visual themes. This might sound ambitious, but the achievements of each workshop can be limited only by the interest and enthusiasm of the participants in the workshops.

Cooperative work in the workshops was another achievement. As explained earlier, children were not used to talking while they participated in the workshops. However, as they became more engaged in the last week of workshops, I could notice that the cooperation between them had increased as well. For example, they were able to split the work according to their skills creating a synergy along the process. To some extent, they gained certain autonomy as they got involved in those activities that attracted their attention.

All of the factors explained above suggest that this approach can be feasible for language revitalization projects where the teachers of the language lack formal training or had little resources. I must make a disclaimer at this point, it is true that the workshops offer many advantages, but any person who considers the possibility to implement it must think about combining the approach with other artistic forms, for instance, music, theater, craft making. These creative expressions foster imagination, but one must be aware of one crucial thing. The outcomes must not be ambitious as it might take time for the implementation depending on the characteristic of the group and the support of local people.

## **7.6 Recommendations for further action**

So far, in this research project, I could implement workshops using only simple themes; most of these themes were about concrete objects and activities with which the children

had familiarity. The only abstract theme that we included in our discussions was the one that we called the “Future” and which children represented visually

Three things were clear to me, once the final workshop was over. First, there had been a breakthrough regarding the children’s initial silence. Second, these children were eager to learn, and third, it was feasible to talk about complicated themes and develop critical thinking. A student’s integration represents a good point of departure for future projects. Their apparent reluctance to get themselves involved in the different activities in the workshops, especially in a conversation constituted a hindrance for my project. Nevertheless, that was not the case, and indeed, they were willing to learn and be part of the process. Initially, they were not used to interacting with foreign people; therefore, having the chance to talk to them without dealing with their fear to talk opens the opportunities to tackle complex themes in depth. The implementation of the Rama Language Workshops was challenging in its beginnings (a matter that I have explained in Chapter 6) because we had to use time so that these children could get used to a new methodology and the establishment of open communication with us. We intended that the children who attended the workshops could participate freely and speak their mind. Once again, I must say that we took time to foster children’s participation, underscoring that participation was in the center of our interest (cf. Freire, 1970, 1983; Montessori, 1949; Percy-Smith, 2012). For us, the quickest way to implement the workshops was to take control of the group and have the children work following our schedule and instructions. However, this action could have damaged the Freirean inspiration of the workshops limiting their freedom (see also Montessori, 1912, 1918; Brougère, 2012).

On finishing my final week working with the Rama children, I saw the feasibility to talk about complicated themes. If it could be done, it would mean an essential progress in the revitalization of the language. However, the implementation of more workshops in the area will depend on how much motivation the local teachers have to continue using the materials that I left behind for the application of more workshops.



With these ideas in mind, I have thought of some possibilities for further research. For instance, it would be interesting to study how feasible it is to develop sophisticated narratives departing from visual compositions. Investigating this possibility brings along a practical task which is the convenience to improve the artistic techniques, or maybe not.

Another suggestion for further action is to elicit other tenses, for instance, the past or the future. Given that we spent time trying to implement the methodology used in the workshops with these children, we only had time to use children's drawings to elicit sentences in the present tense. Nevertheless, thinking of eliciting tenses might open a question related to the affordance of the visual mode.

A final thought for further research is the joint participation of children and adults. During our workshops, we interacted with the children and learned from each other. However, we were teachers and were there with a purpose; therefore, it would be interesting to investigate what happens when children and adult members of the community interact in these workshops. Such research would be exciting as there is a generational gap between these children and the speakers of the language. It is interesting to mention that these children are the children and grandchildren to fluent speakers or semi-speakers of the language (see Appendix 1); nevertheless, none of these speakers use the language with these children.

## **7.7 My research project as a contribution to the teaching of a post-vernacular language**

I could not have implemented this research project without the support of the RLP. Given that my project has to do with the revitalization of the Rama language, it becomes naturally part of the joint efforts of the RLP. The experience of the team and their network were indispensable to organize my fieldwork and establish the connections with the right people in the territory. The information gathered from previous work by

the RLP was determinant to redirect and plan my work in the field because the intention has been to contribute to the efforts of an illiterate teacher who continues to transmit the ethnic language to the young generation as part of the revitalization of a severely endangered language (see 3.3.2). With these ideas in mind, I structured a project to test out a multimodal approach to language revitalization with inspiration in the Pedagogy of Freire and Montessori. I explain the pedagogical foundation of this approach in Chapter 3 and its implementation in Chapter 4 of this dissertation.

For a year and a half, I have visited the Rama territory, and I have worked with people with a concern for their language and eager to cooperate with those who offer some assistance in their efforts to revitalize the language. What I propose in this dissertation is distant from being the solution to the revitalization of the language. It is a humble contribution compared to the enormous effort done by linguists and local language teachers. Through the implementation of the workshops, I hoped to share the notion of collective work to integrate art into the language class. I expected to introduce the RLW to young Rama students so that they could use creativity as a form to cooperate with their illiterate teacher in the creation of multimodal resources. I expect that they will become more confident and will break the silence to express their ideas, maybe one day will discover a ghost speaker. And finally, my interest in the implementation of the workshops as an alternative in the classroom is not the final product, but the process itself and the enriching reflections we can obtain from it.

*The academic and non-academic practical component of this research*

I would like to begin this part recalling a problem that many indigenous language revitalization programs in the American continent have. I refer here to the low level of literacy among native speakers. This issue was part of the discussion in a series of workshops organized by the DDL-TDR at Lumière Universitet Lyon 2, France in May

2014.<sup>78</sup> In these workshops, many presenters from Colombia, Mexico, Costa Rica, Chile, and France discussed the fact that most research projects produce academic literature for academics, but this literature is of no use for non-academic people.

One of the characteristics of programs of description, documentation, and revitalization of language is that they have to do with languages whose speakers have a high rate of illiteracy. Hence, when linguists write the grammar of a language or make a dictionary, the recipients of these documents are usually other academics. Unfortunately, owing to the complexity of the documentation written for academia, it is of no use for the local people. This gap between academia and lay people is what opens the room for my project, which might be a bridge between these two realms.

For instance, a good understanding of the term post-vernacular is relevant for me as a researcher, but not for an illiterate speaker of Rama. The term post-vernacular (Shandler, 2004) sheds light on the situation of the Rama language for the academic community (Pivot, 2014). In this matter, the elucidation of the term served at least two purposes in my dissertation, in my opinion. First, it helped me to understand the sociolinguistic situation of the Rama language. I have said earlier that I started my research project with many wrong ideas about the Rama people and their language as a result of the existing misleading information available in Nicaragua about this indigenous people. Therefore, reading about the classification of the Rama language by UNESCO's (2003) and the criteria and the evaluation of the work of the Rama Language Project and current state of the Rama language (Grinevald & Pivot, 2013; Pivot, 2010, 2011, 2013, 2014; Pivot & Chevrier, 2013) were crucial to understand that a language teaching project in a context as that of the Rama language cannot be conceived after the model of the teaching of English or Spanish.

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<sup>78</sup> Colette Grinevald was one of the main organizers of the event.

Initially, I thought of the following project “Creating materials to empower Nicaraguan Rama school children to learn and use their ethnic language.” Nevertheless, once I understood that the situation of the Rama language was more complicated than what I thought, I had to restructure my ideas taking into account the following three reasons.

- 1) There is not a literary tradition. As said in Chapter 2, the Rama language was not a written language, and it belongs to the group of languages with oral tradition. So, Lehman’s (1914) written vocabulary of Rama served as the departing point for the first grammar of Rama (Craig, 1987b)
- 2) There are very few speakers of the language.
- 3) The existing materials had been misjudged and of little use for potential learners.

The clear understanding of the situation of the language has helped me to set the guidelines for the approach that I have implemented in Bangkukuk Taik. It has also helped me to set realistic goals when I consider the outcomes of the present project.

Furthermore, academic research has provided me with a fundamental concept, that many people of the Rama community have heard and knew about. This idea is “Treasure Language.” Treasure Language is a metaphor which refers to the treasure like the one pirates used to hide to keep it safe. The term was coined by Colette Grinevald who compare the language of the Ramas with a treasure as the language is a carrier of the identity and culture of the Rama people (C. Grinevald, personal communication, 10.06.2015; See also Pivot, 2011). Grinevald says that the Ramas liked the comparison and now those who favor the revitalization of the language refer to their language as the “treasure language.” Contrasting the use of these terms post-vernacular and treasure language, we can see that they refer to the same issue, regarding the Rama language, but they are valid terms for two different groups of people.

Hence, my humble contribution to the teaching of a post-vernacular language is my adaptation of the approach developed by muralists. A practical method which as

demonstrated in this dissertation, can be implemented by local people with no formal training as teachers. On the other hand, I had presented and argued some ideas regarding epistemological principles that frame this multimodal approach that I have called the Rama Language Workshop.

## 7.8 Final reflection

I would like to close this dissertation with a final observation about my learning as a participant in the workshops. I must underscore my role as a participant in the workshop more than my role as a teacher because I also learned from the children about their culture and their world. This affirmation stems from part of the third principle of the mural workshop which says: “the teacher and the children do everything together, research, planning, painting, and evaluation, exploring” (Pavone & Hopewell, 1999, p. 36). Hence, it is possible to say that learning together is also an outcome of the workshop. The present research project has been a trip to a destination that one assumes —initially— one knows, but the end is full of surprising discoveries. On starting this journey, I took with me Freire’s words: “no one teaches another, nor is anyone self-taught. People teach each other, mediated by the world, by the cognizable objects which in banking education are ‘owned’ by the teacher” (Freire, 1970, p. 80). By then, I was convinced that, even though I was taking with me a method to work with children, I was also beginning a learning process. Indeed, apart from the Rama language, I had many expectations about new things to learn once I arrived at the Rama territory. That is why I told the Rama schoolchildren about my interests and let them know that they could help me in my quest as I have come here, not as a teacher, but as a learner.

I would like to add that another valuable experience, the personal understanding that I gained as a researcher. For instance, when I evaluated a paradigm for my research project I came across many considerations, one of them was the ontological perspective of this research. The understanding of this ontological perspective let me distinguish two critical factors. The first was my perception and the second was the reality in the field.

Recognizing that I had a personal perception was opportune due to the choices that I was to make regarding the implementation of the workshops and the establishment of the goals on the expected achievements.

In this respect, I must say that my perception was wrong and very simple. First, I based my initial impression of the information available to the general public. Information that I later confirmed was biased. For instance, the affirmation that the Rama language was spoken only in Rama Cay (see Chapter 2). I also had the idea that the language was taught on a regular basis there. I discovered that this was false as I read the information available in the academic domain and started my visits to the area. Furthermore, I discovered that the situation was more complicated than what I thought. For example, I found that there were a diversity of ideologies that affected the teaching of the language (Grinevald & Bert, 2014). In the beginning, I believed that the problem that the teachers of the Rama language faced was the scarcity of educational materials. However, after my first trip to the region, I understood that materials books and materials were needed, but the real problem was an ideological one.

On writing these final paragraphs, I must say that during the last two years, I have come to realize that there have been plenty books, booklets, and dictionaries for the teaching of the language. I was told that many people used to hide the grammar and dictionary of the Rama language under their pillow. Thus, these books remain a mystery for many people who are interested in the language (C. Grinevald, personal communication, 05.03.2016). In fact, that was my own experience as well. I visited the Rama Cay several times and let the people know that I was interested in reading about their ethnic language. People told me about the language and explained many things about it. However, I was unable to see a document there. It was not until my two last trips when I started seeing different kinds of books about the language. For instance, in July 2016, Javier gave me an exemplar of *The 2. Grade's Dictionary* and the *Book of songs*. At the beginning of February 2017, during a visit to the URACCAN's library together with Colette Grinevald, she found for me a copy of the complete book for teaching Rama to

2<sup>nd</sup> graders. These books were compiled and published by Juliana Balto back in the 1990s. By writing these details, I mean that it took me almost two and half years to see the materials that were produced in the Rama territory to teach Rama. I did not have access to this source of information while I implemented the workshops. Paradoxically, I had access to similar resources in Lyon, France, but not in the territory.

The above said illustrates how I arrived at the following conclusion: It was true that materials and books were needed, but it was more important to find a right way to let these children know the importance and usage of books and educational materials. The above situation also sheds light on why I moved my goal —with this project— from creating materials for these children to use the materials that we created together in the workshops. Hence, using cheap materials, we implemented a new technique where the children and teachers had the chance to cooperate and reflect on the importance of talking about their community, family, and ethnic language. With this approach, the children had the opportunity to decide and choose from the different possibilities to design their visual text. By doing so, they were participating actively in the process of their education, and not only following the adults' instructions and ideology (Brougère, 2012; Freire, 1979; Halliday, 1978; Montessori, 1914; Percy-Smith, 2012; Percy-Smith & Thomas, 2010; New London Group, 2000).

Furthermore, I believe that two perspectives stem from the implementation of the workshops during this project. The first has to do with the academic interest and the second is about the practical use of the workshops for the people of the community. The theoretical interest is manifested in the fact that the workshops serve to collect data, whether data are verbal, visual and out of the analysis of these data, one can critically analyze and determine the fulfillment of the different theories discussed in Chapter 3.

In my opinion, the implementation of the RLW made possible the active and simultaneous participation of the various participants because of four reasons. First, the

workshops created the setting where we put principles of Freire and Montessori into practice. Second, I was able to observe and document the situation of the teaching of Rama in the communities. Third, I was allowed to introduce and test out a technique in the teaching of the Rama language. Fourth, the local teachers were able to observe, learn and simultaneously implement a new method in the teaching of the Rama language.



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## **Appendixes**

***Appendix 1: Typology of the speakers from (Grinevald & Bert, 2011)***

**Fluent speakers**, also known as traditional speakers (see also Dorian, 2001), are conservative speakers with a better proficiency than others who have lower proficiency, which in plain words means they may not be the best speakers of the language as there exists no standard to measure their proficiency because their language is not documented or is under-documented.

**Semi-speakers** have become emblematic when documenting an endangered language. The key to classify a speaker into this category is the appropriateness of their receptive skills, regardless how good or limited their productive skills might be. Semi-speaker do not have to be fluent in the language, but their proficiency might vary; therefore, identifying who is a semi-speaker can be complicated (see also Dorian, 1977).

**Terminal speakers** are speakers who can understand some of the language, but speak it with limitations.

**Rememberers** are speakers with limited knowledge of the language who could have lost their use of the language because of strong, external, negative factors such as traumatic events or situations in which they had to hide their language.

**Ghost speakers** have some knowledge of the language, but they plainly deny it resulting from rejection and a negative attitude towards the language resulting, many times, from the low prestige associated with the language.

**Neo-speakers** are mostly the result of revitalization projects, who can gain a competence compare to that of a semi-speaker depending on factors such as the quality of the courses, personal interest and learning skills (see also Costa, 2015b).

**Last speakers** are apparently the most known category among the public because its presence in the media. Grinevald and Berth (2011) suggest this category belongs to

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the socio-political realm rather than as one typology as the listed previously. They, however, acknowledge its value in terms of its potential to call people's attention on the issue of language endangerment.

(Tsunoda, 2005, Chapter 9)

***Appendix 1: The Shauda (Translated and taken from (UNESCO & ERC, 2012, p. 119)***

The Shauda was a ritual performed by the first inhabitants of Rama Cay whenever they went hunting an aquatic mammal called manatee, which lived in rivers, estuaries, and coastal waters. This ritual was practiced by many generations until the manatees became scarce. As the manatees were almost extinct in the area, the Rama people decided not to hunt them anymore, but they have kept the story about the ritual that they performed as a preparation to before hunting this animal.

According to legend, among the Rama families, there were men who were specialized in hunting this mammal. However, before leaving their home, the men had to prepare themselves spiritually and physically for this activity. During the rituals, they had dreams in which they could see the places where they could find manatees. Then, at night, they prepared their best weapons (harpoons, spears, arrows and ropes). They spent three days in this ritual of preparation; then they went away to search the animal. After spending a few days, they returned with the manatee, but before reaching the community, the men blew into a conch shell, so a very high sound was heard in the community as a sign that the men had a good hunt. It was a sign for the celebration; thus, the community had to get ready to receive and greet the hunters and their prey. The celebration party lasted three nights.

Another team of men—not the hunters— was in charge to clean and prepare the manatee. The elders were in this team and did the work because they knew the animal's body. The hunter received special pieces such as the flesh, the chest and rib bones of the manatee. It was also believed that if dogs ate bones, the hunters would get bad luck; therefore, each of these parts was taken with special care from the animal's body. Then the elders prepared the meat, and during the three-night party, they handed the meat to the Hunters. The rest of the meat was distributed to the families of the community.

As the elders were preparing the meat, women were preparing a big pot to make soup with the manatee's head. The whole community shared this soup at the party. At the party, the hunters ate only the meat taken from the special parts of manatee's chest as well they got the first soup. The elders also gave the hunters the bone ribs of the manatee.

Keeping the bones, eating the breast meat and drinking the soup was a special ritual for hunters. This would always bring good luck for the next manatee hunting expedition.

Even today when a manatee is hunted by anyone from Rama Cay, the hunter distributes much of the meat among the people of the community, but the head of the manatee is kept to make soup for the hunter for good luck in a future hunt (UNESCO & ERC, 2012).

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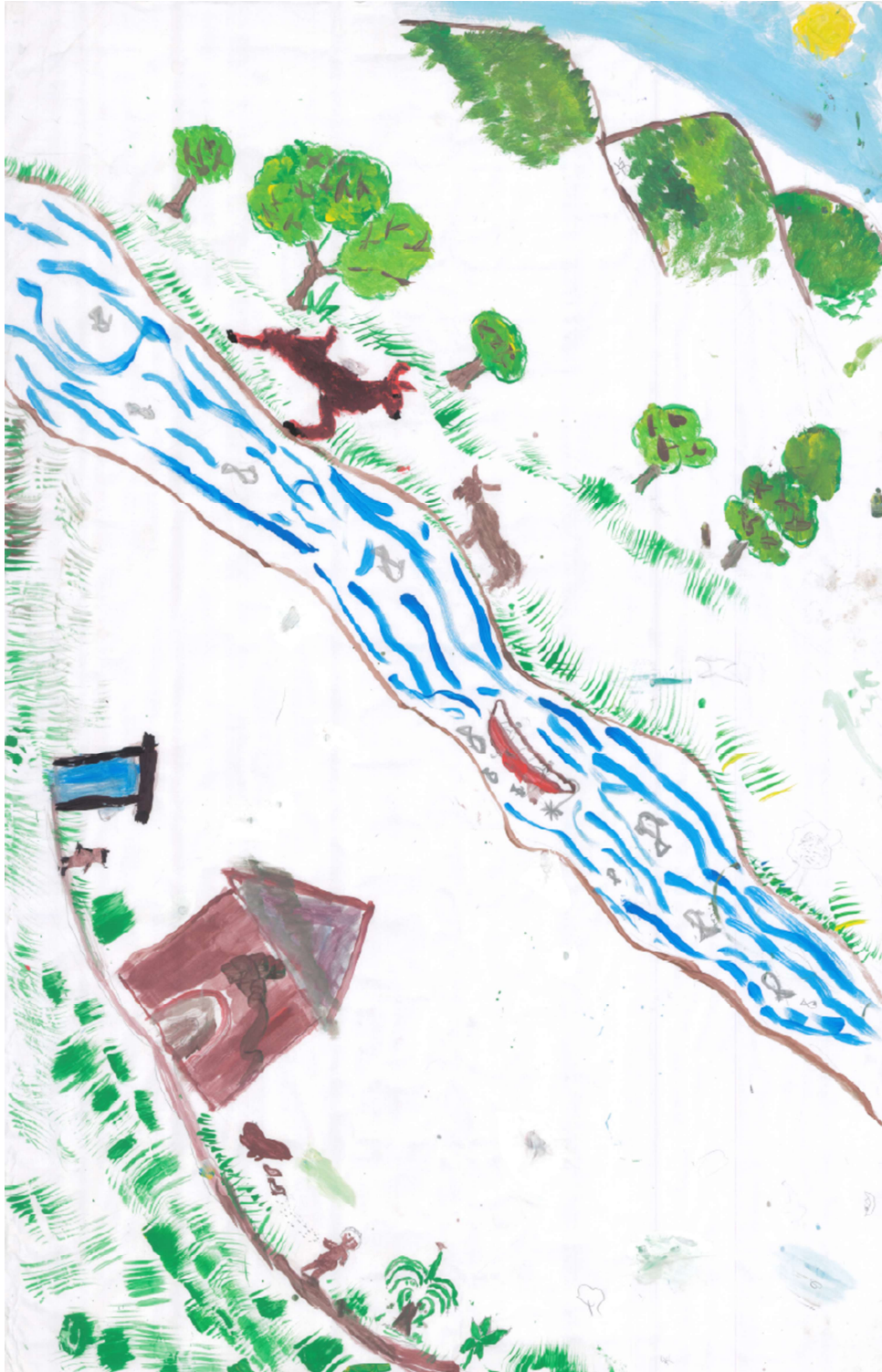
**Appendix 2: First collective composition**



**Appendix 2: Here I live**



**Appendix 3: My community**





**Appendix 4: The Future**



**Appendix 5: Daily Activities in Bangkukuk Taik**



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**Appendix 6: Overview of visits to the Rama Kriol Territory and workshops**

No	Date	Activities	Aims	Outcomes
1	07.01.2014 08.01.2014	Visit Bluefields	To organize transportation for future trips to the Rama territory. To hold a meeting with Colette Grinevald.	I contacted boat owners and quoted prices. I was informed about the Rama socio-cultural and linguistic situation.
2	09.01.2014	First, visit Rama Cay together with Colette Grinevald.	To get in touch with the Rama community. To observe how these people live. To verify that People speak Rama on the island. To hold a meeting with members of the community.	I got to know the Rama leaders. I collected many details about the community and its organization I corroborated that there is only one living native speaker on the island. I learned more about the Rama people and their situation.
3	10.01.2014 11.01.2014	Work at CIDCA's documentation center.	To survey the existent literature on the Rama community and language	I selected the literature for future consultation inside the library.
4	19.02.2014	Visit Bluefields	To meet Colette Grinevald and organize a meeting with the Rama native speakers.	I learned details about the possible people who could cooperate with me in the implementation of the project.
5	20.02.2014	Attend a presentation on Maleku language to the Rama government and speakers.	To learn about the Maleku language, a Chibchan language from Costa Rica. To meet the Rama speakers from Cane Creek and Bangkukuk Taik.	I learned about the Rama Chibchan family and met the Rama, native speakers of the language who approved my visit to their communities and promised their support in the implementation of my project.
6	21.02.2014	Visit Rama Cay	To observe a class at Rama Cay school	I learned about the Rama Chibchan family and met the Rama, native speakers of the language who approved my visit to their communities and promised their support in the

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				implementation of my project.
7	04.08.2014 12.08.2014	Work at CIDCA's documentation center in Bluefields	To review documentation on the Ramas and their language.	I revised books and articles about Caribbean Coast history, especially on the Rama people. I made notes with information for Chapter 2.
8	13.08.2014 19.08.2014	Visit Bangkukuk Taik	To introduce myself to the community. To establish a cooperation network with the local leaders. To observe and learn about the local context.	I held long conversations with the leaders and established a cooperation network for future trips. I got to know Barbara Assadi, a North American researcher who lived among the Ramas in the 1980s. I learned from her about the Rama lifestyle. She also told me about how much of the culture was gone at present.
9	23.08.2014	Focus group in Rama Cay school with youth	To collect data and expand my understanding of the Rama culture.	I held a workshop with young adults in the Saturday course (secondary school). I collected information about what the Rama consider is their culture.
10	13.02.2015	Visit Bangkukuk Taik	To observe daily life in the community.	I learned about the Rama language situation.
11	15.02.2015	Attend a meeting with parents in the local school.	To meet parents and tell them about the project	I informed parents about my stay in the community and my work with their children. I asked permission to document the process.
12	17.02.2015	First Workshop	To introduce myself to the schoolchildren. To draw about their community freely  To observe a Rama lesson	I was allowed to work with the children after the break, from 14.30 until 16.30. This was also my first direct contact with the children of the village, so getting to know each of the children was a good beginning for the rest of

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				the process. Little response from children. I got an insight into the teaching of Rama at present.
13	18.02.2015	Second Workshop	To converse about Rama legends and Rama daily routines.	No response from children. Unable to find an adult who could tell me a legend.
14	19.02.2015	Third Workshop	To introduced a few curiosities briefly about mixing colors and talk about how children could use the chromatic circle to produce secondary colors out of the three primary colors	More integration of children into the exercise. Children drew houses and churches individually. There was no group work.
15	23.03.2015	Fourth Workshop	To use the bilingual (Rama-Spanish) story of the Manatee to practice Rama words with a native speaker. To draw individual interpretations of the story.	I read a line of the story in Spanish and then in Rama. The native speaker corrected my pronunciation while children were reluctant to repeat the words after the speaker. Participants worked better independently, despite our invitation to form a group and negotiate a proposal for a bigger collective drawing.
16	24.03.2015	Fifth Workshop	To talk about and reflect on different activities the children got involved after class: Football, fishing, cooking, rowing	During the previous workshops, one of the girls has been apathetic and reluctant to join the rest of the class. This time she became more interested and integrated. More drawing of houses and churches. One participant 'discovered' how to draw fine line using a pen and watercolor

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17	25.03.2015	Sixth Workshop	<p>To talk about their community: Bangkukuk Taik.</p> <p>To reflect on the technique that one of the participants encountered the previous day and encouraged them to experiment with the materials they were given.</p> <p>To draw a group representation of the community.</p>	<p>The children traced the sketches of houses individually; then, they were asked to put their representations as a single drawing.</p> <p>We worked as a collective for the first time.</p> <p>We use the two collective productions of the day to practice the Rama language with the support of the native speaker.</p>
18	16.10.2015	Seventh Workshop	<p>To review the techniques that we had practice in March.</p> <p>To start a new series of composite drawings.</p>	<p>We organized the process without the support of the local teacher. Nine children attended, although the classes were suspended.</p> <p>We produced fifteen single representations.</p> <p>Children used the techniques</p>
19	17.10.2015	Eighth Workshop	<p>To recruit a former student who was good at drawing.</p> <p>To plan the last collective composition.</p> <p>To draw a collective representation of the local community.</p>	<p>A skilled girl joined us during this workshop and supported the other children in the production of new drawings.</p> <p>We shared ideas for the new large drawing we intended to use in the final Rama Language Workshop.</p> <p>More communication among all the participants in the classroom.</p> <p>Children produced fourteen small drawing with elements for the final composition that were included in the composite drawing representing their community.</p>
20	17.10.2015	Ninth Workshop	<p>To talk about the future of Bangkukuk</p>	<p>Children interacted more freely with each other.</p> <p>More communication in</p>

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			<p>and make a representation of it. To use the drawing to talk about Bangkukuk Taik in Rama.</p>	<p>the classroom. Children interchanged roles: some drew as some others colored the images according to their skills. Children exchanged information and took the initiative to form teams to complete tasks. We use the drawing to learn and practice Rama with the native speaker.</p>
21	18.10.2015	Tenth Workshop	<p>To get feedback from the children about the experience in the workshop. To practice Rama using the drawing we had prepared previously.</p>	<p>Children were proactive and organized themselves to create a composition representing different activities carried out by members of their community Children were directing the process from the beginning to the end. We learned and practiced Rama using the compositions as visual aids. Children were more outgoing interrupting and asking the native speaker whenever they had a personal inquiry about vocabulary and pronunciation.</p>

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***Appendix 7: Children fishing in Bangkukuk Taik***



***Appendix 8: A typical Rama house in Bangkukuk Taik***

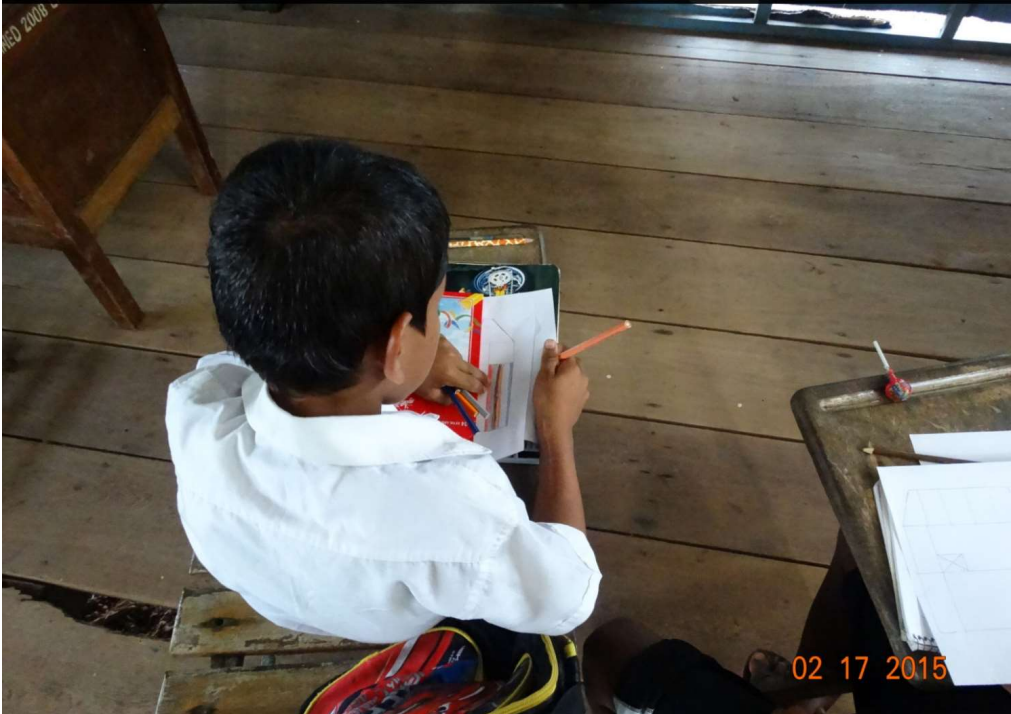




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**Appendix 9: Working individually**



**Appendix 10: Some individual proposal for the first collective composition**



**Appendix 11: Reading the story of the Manatee in Rama**

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***Appendix 12: Working in the first collective composition***



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**Appendix 13: Children drawing their community**



**Appendix 14: Fishing**

