

Survey of the *Cmiique litom* (Seri) Language

DEBORAH PERALES, MEG HARVEY, AND JÉRÉMY PASQUEREAU





Cmiique litom

Language isolate

Two villages:

- El Desemboque (Haxöl lihom)
- Punta Chueca (Socaaix)



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Survey Design: Goals

Conducted as part of an NSF Grant to Robert Henderson and Heidi Harley

1. Find **existing projects** we can support as well as **future** ones
 1. There are already projects underway, and we would like to ensure we can support those as well
 1. Sometimes projects are only accessible to some parts of a community
 2. Other times a project isn't explicitly linguistic and might be overlooked
2. Gather information on **use of Seri**: Who is using it? When? Where?

Survey Design: Hybrid

Hybrid **in-person** and **remote** data collection:

- While the author conducting the interviews lives in the area, the two co-authors are remote
- We needed a survey that could be safely conducted even with fluctuating public health concerns
 - Needs to be able to be comfortably delivered via phone or face-to-face
 - Primarily focused on qualitative data
 - Should encourage respondents to elaborate but still ensure people are speaking on the same broad topics

Survey Design: Questions

7 questions (with prompts/suggestions in case needed). Each was provided in Spanish or Seri depending upon the respondent's preference.

Spanish

¿Hay situaciones en las que nunca habla seri? ¿Cuáles son esas situaciones?

- Sugiérales: ¿Habla seri en el trabajo? ¿Habla Seri con su familia? Con los médicos?
- Sugiérales: ¿Piensa que otras personas hablan seri en estas situaciones?

English

Are there situations in which you never speak Seri? What are they?

- Prompt: At work? With your family? At the doctor's?
- Do you think other people use Seri in these situations?

- 1) What languages do you speak?
- 2) When do you usually speak Seri?
 - a) Prompt them: Do you speak Seri while fishing or weaving? At work? With friends? With your spouse? With your family?
 - b) What language do they respond to you in?
 - c) For example, today when did you use Seri?
- 1) Are there situations in which you never speak Seri? What are they?
 - i) Prompt: At work? With your family? At the doctor's?
 - ii) Do you think other people use Seri in these situations?
- 2) Is speaking Seri important to you and is it important to you that children speak Seri?
- 3) Do you think people use Seri more, less, or about the same as when you were a child?
- 4) Does the way Seri is used now differ from when you were growing up? If yes, what is different about the community and speaking Seri now than when you were growing up?
 - a) Prompt: Is there a type of story that you haven't heard in a while? A game? A song?
- 5) Do you read or write in Seri? If not, would you like to?
- 6) What, if anything, needs to be done to help the language thrive? The culture?
 - a) Prompt: Is there a particular event you'd like to see in Seri?
- 7) What is currently being done to support the language?
 - i) Did you see the movie *Hant Quij Cöipaxi Hac (La creación del mundo)*? Would you like more things like this?

Methods



Methods

Questions were delivered by Deborah face-to-face with recorded conversations in Seri or Spanish

- Transcriptions provided in Spanish and Seri (with Spanish translation)

All responses were oral, not written

Methods: Participants

4 women aged 32—66 years old from El Desemboque recruited by word of mouth
Each filled out demographic questionnaire to assess language background

Results

1. USE OF SERI
2. WHAT IS BEING DONE TO SUPPORT SERI NOW?
3. WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE DONE TO SUPPORT SERI?

Results: Use of Seri

They all speak Seri **every day**, including to their children

Respondents consider it very important to **maintain the use of Seri**, esp. with children

They all comment that there is a lot more **Spanish influence** (words, sentences) now than during their childhood

Only 2/4 participants know how to **read/write** Seri

- one participant indicated wanting to learn

Many people mention that they do not use Seri with doctors

Results: What is done now to **support Seri?**

Much emphasis on **using Seri with young people:**

- One participant reports telling stories to children and teaching how to write particular words
- Some people teach children the names of seashells, birds, and plants

Organizing traditional celebrations

- Especially the new year celebration

Creating materials:

- An animated movie about a Seri creation myth (*Hant Quij Cöipaxi Hac*) was made in collaboration with Seri teenagers...
- **but** none of the participants have seen it

Results: How can we support Seri going forward?

More use of Seri in institutions

- Have teachers who speak Seri, doctors, etc
- Essentially any institution that people have to interact with having more support for the language community

Create/use pedagogical materials in Seri

Raise awareness among parents

Support traditional celebrations

- perhaps have a culture officer who organizes/promotes them

Discussion: Results

- Spanish is more prevalent now than in their childhood
- Not all children are fluent in Seri (confirms results in O'Meara et al. 2022)
- Desire for language and culture to be supported/revived
 - Instructors who speak the language
 - Writing/reading (would also help with documentation by speakers themselves)

Discussion: Survey Design

Carrying out the survey in a hybrid way was harder than we anticipated

We are going back to the field soon and we'll finish it!

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References

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