

Prescriptivism as a nation-building tool in the Upper Amazon: the case of Shiwiar

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The Shiwiar are an indigenous nation of Ecuador and Peru, and they are one of the five ethnic groups which are collectively known as the Jivaroan people. In stark contrast to the other Jivaroan groups, the Shiwiar have largely been overlooked by local governments until recently and are still popularly considered to be an offshoot of their closely-related neighbours, the Achuar. This has led to a strong desire within the Shiwiar community to be recognised as an independent group. In order to achieve this, the Shiwiar leaders have made use of linguistic prescriptivism as a tool to emphasise the distinction between the Shiwiar language and the other Jivaroan languages. A slightly modified orthography was advocated and the use of particular lexical items was encouraged. However, this strategy has proven to be unsuccessful. Instead of generating a sense of union and independence among the Shiwiar nation, it has resulted in uncertainty and confusion regarding language use and identity. It is argued here that although prescriptive language planning has been successful in nation-building initiatives around the world, the sociolinguistic situation of Shiwiar does not allow for the necessary conditions for a prescriptive campaign to be effective.

Keywords: word; Shiwiar; prescriptivism; language planning; Jivaroan; orthography; indigenous politics

1 Introduction

The Shiwiar people live in the Amazonian lowlands of eastern Ecuador and northern Peru. They are closely related, both culturally and linguistically, to four neighbouring ethnic groups, and the five groups are collectively known as the Jivaroan people (Gnerre 1999, 29). The Shiwiar are by far the smallest Jivaroan group, and they have always been overshadowed by the other Jivaroan nations in both Ecuadorean and Peruvian indigenous politics. However, since the height of the indigenous rights movement in the 1990s, and especially since their official recognition as one of the fourteen indigenous nationalities of Ecuador in 2005, the Shiwiar have strived to

emphasise that they have a separate ethnic identity from that of the other Jivaroan nations. One of the ways in which this has been implemented is through prescriptive language planning.

A decade ago, a group of Shiwiar *dirigentes*¹ decided to use linguistic prescriptivism as a tool to differentiate Shiwiar from the other Jivaroan languages. New orthographic rules were proposed and the use of particular lexical items was encouraged. This is a common strategy which has been used, in many cases successfully, in emerging nations worldwide. However, in the case of Shiwiar, the prescriptive campaign has been largely unsuccessful. This can be attributed to two main reasons: (1) the relative isolation and dispersion of the Shiwiar population coupled with the lack of a mass communication infrastructure, and (2) the low literacy rate amongst Shiwiar speakers.

This paper will explore the role that prescriptivism has played in the process of nation-building amongst the Shiwiar and it will assess its outcome by examining the resulting attitude of educated Shiwiar speakers towards the proposed reforms. First, in section 2, the history and internal relations of the five Jivaroan groups will be presented. Section 3 will describe the emergence of the Shiwiar people as a separate Jivaroan nation from a historical and ethnographic perspective. This is complemented by section 4, which will explain the rise of the Shiwiar nation on the Ecuadorean political stage in order to account for the popular view held by the Ecuadorean intelligentsia that the Shiwiar are a politically-motivated offshoot of the Achuar nation. Section 5 lays out how orthographies were developed for Jivaroan languages by missionaries in the middle of the twentieth century, followed by section 6 which lists the prescriptive changes introduced by a group of Shiwiar *dirigentes* in 2002. In section 7, the success of the prescriptivism movement will be assessed on the basis of the current attitudes of

Shiwiar speakers towards the campaign. Finally, section 8 will elucidate what generalisations can be drawn from the case of Shiwiar regarding the conditions necessary for successful prescriptive language planning.

2 The Jivaroan peoples and languages

There are five Jivaroan ethnic groups: the Shuar, the Aguaruna, the Huambisa, the Achuar and the Shiwiar (Seymour-Smith 1984, 5-6; Gnerre 1999, 29). Figure 1 is a map of the areas inhabited by each group. As the map shows, the Aguaruna and the Huambisa live in modern-day Peru whereas the Shuar live in modern-day Ecuador. The Achuar and Shiwiar territories straddle the Ecuador-Peru border, but in both cases the majority of the population can be found on the Ecuadorean side. In Table 1, all Jivaroan ethnic groups are listed, together with an estimate of their population taken from the latest Ecuadorean and Peruvian national censuses (INEI 2009; INEC 2010).

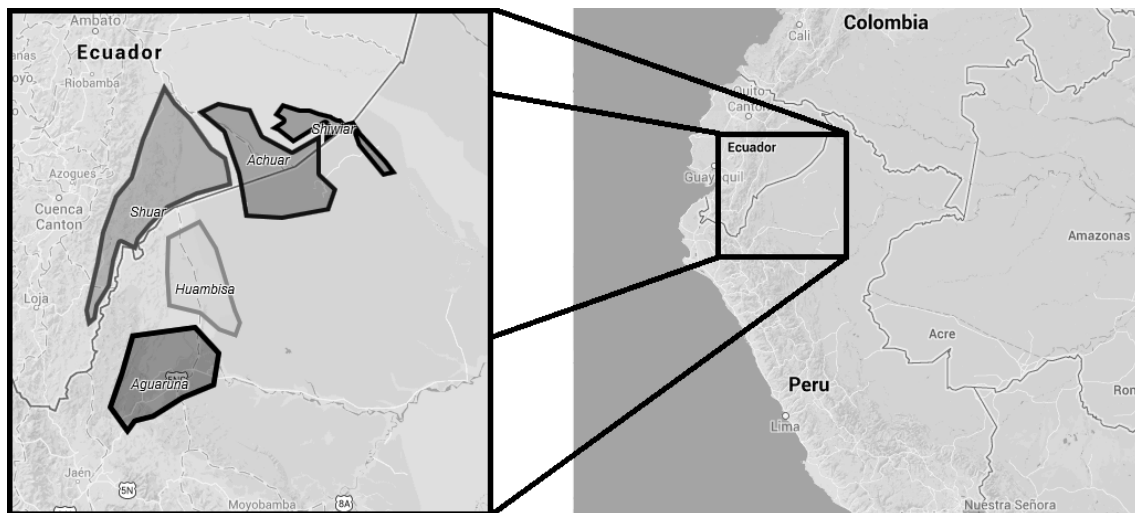


Figure 1. Map of Jivaroan groups (based on other maps in Harner 1984, 11; Seymour-Smith 1984, 8; Gnerre 1999, 19)

Table 1. Population estimates of Jivaroan groups (INEI 2009; INEC 2010)

Ethnic Group	Country	Population Estimate
Achuar	Ecuador	13,500
	Peru	10,900
Aguaruna	Peru	55,400
Huambisa	Peru	10,200
Shiwiar	Ecuador	1,000
	Peru	200
Shuar	Ecuador	62,000

The division of the Jivaroan people into these five distinct groups is a fairly recent phenomenon. In the past, Jivaroans did not have well-defined permanent population divisions (Seymour-Smith 1984: 6). Consequently, it is not surprising that until the eighteenth century Jivaroans were referred to by outsiders exclusively by their collective ethnonym or by the name of the river on which they lived (Stirling 1938, 2; Gnerre 1999, 34). Ethnographers and linguists only started to mention the ethnic/linguistic subdivisions that we know today in the late nineteenth century. Nevertheless, Jivaroan people nowadays strongly identify only with their specific ethnic subgroup and do not feel any particular link or association to the other four groups. One well-known cultural characteristic of Jivaroan people is their political involvement and their ‘fiercely independent nature’ (Overall 2007, 10), which motivates them to clearly distinguish each of the five subgroups as separate ethnic and political units.

The languages spoken by each of the Jivaroan nations are closely related and can be said to form a tight dialect continuum, with Aguaruna being the most divergent. All five languages are to some extent mutually intelligible (Gnerre 1999, 33), but by far the two most similar varieties are Shiwiar and Achuar. In fact, unless kinship or village of origin is overtly mentioned, Shiwiar and Achuar speakers can barely be distinguished

by other native speakers. Although there are some lexical and phonological differences between the two languages, the main reason to consider them different is on ethnic grounds: speakers clearly self-identify as members of either community, and both groups feel that they speak their own language. Nevertheless, speakers are aware that their languages and cultures are closely related. In order to understand this relationship between the Shiwiar and Achuar languages, the historical development of the Shiwiar people must be examined.

3 The emergence of the Shiwiar people

The first contact between Europeans and Jivaroan people dates back to the mid-sixteenth century when Spanish colonisation and missionisation of the Jivaroan areas began (Harner 1984, 17-30). However, this endeavour failed due to the heavy and organised resistance of the new Jivaroan subjects which culminated in the destruction of all Spanish colonial settlements in the area in 1599. Because of this, no further large-scale attempts to colonise the Jivaroan tribes were made until the late nineteenth century. With the advent of the rubber boom in 1890, large sections of the jungle which had previously remained isolated from Western contact were taken over by Spanish-speaking patrons who displaced and enslaved most of the local population for the extraction of rubber (Seymour-Smith 1984, 38-39). This quickly resulted in the extermination of those local populations, which in turn led the rubber patrons to replace them by moving large numbers of Quechua-speaking natives from other regions into the jungle lowlands.

Although most of the area inhabited by Jivaroan groups was not taken over by rubber patrons, Jivaroans were indirectly influenced by the sweeping demographic changes in their surrounding regions (Seymour-Smith 1984, 38-39). Two of the effects of the rubber boom are particularly relevant for this discussion. First, the displacement

and extermination of previously neighbouring tribes meant that, once the rubber boom ended around 1915, there was ample new territory available for Jivaroans to migrate into. Specifically, some Jivaroan groups are thought to have expanded southwards and eastwards in the first half of the twentieth century.² Second, the Quechua-speaking population brought in by the rubber patrons remained in the region and settled on the banks of the rivers Pastaza, Tigre and Corrientes, to the east and south of the Jivaroan homeland.

The Jivaroan groups that inhabited the western half of the territory (including the basins of the Pastaza River and its upper tributaries) are the groups that currently self-identify as Achuar. However, the groups that migrated further east seem to have come into much closer contact with Quechua-speaking communities, resulting in widespread intermarriage. The descendants of the eastern Jivaroan groups are the Shiwiar people who currently inhabit the basins of the rivers Tigre and Corrientes (Seymour-Smith 1984, 9-10). It becomes clear upon considering this historical context why the variety of Jivaroan spoken by the Shiwiar is very close to that of the Achuar (with additional Quechua influence).

4 The rise of the Shiwiar nation

As a consequence of the ever-growing indigenous political movement in Ecuador, in 1992 the Ecuadorean government officially recognised the rights of a number of indigenous groups, amongst them the Shiwiar, by transferring land ownership to native communities. For the first time, the Shiwiar were formally recognised in legal documents as a distinct indigenous nation, separate from the other Jivaroan groups. This had wide-ranging political and financial implications. Almost 90,000 hectares of land were handed over to the Shiwiar for autonomous administration. Furthermore, it entitled the Shiwiar to receive state funding destined to developing indigenous populations and

improving their quality of life. The status of the Shiwiar nation was additionally reinforced when it was recognised as a one of the 14 indigenous nationalities of Ecuador in 2005.

Before this series of events took place, the wider Ecuadorean population had not been aware of the existence of the Shiwiar. In contrast, the other two Jivaroan groups resident in Ecuador, the Shuar and the Achuar, had already been engaging in local and national politics since the 1970s, and had therefore long had a visible presence in the public discourse. For this reason, the Shiwiar leaders strove to differentiate themselves from the Achuar and the Shuar as a separate Jivaroan ethnic group from the moment they entered the national political stage. However, this campaign has not been very successful. Over two decades later, there is still a widely-held belief amongst the Ecuadorean intelligentsia, including local anthropologists and linguists, that the Shiwiar people emerged as a separate ethnic group only to reap in the political and financial benefits of being considered a separate nationality by the state. In educated circles it is widely claimed that until the indigenous political movement of the 1990s, the Shiwiar did not exist as a group separate from the Achuar. Naturally, this attitude has only fuelled the motivation of the Shiwiar *dirigentes* to legitimise their cultural identity and independence from other groups.

Realising that language is a salient marker of identity, some *dirigentes* began to advocate that Shiwiar should be differentiated orthographically from the very similar Shuar and Achuar languages. Although this idea was never explicitly stated as a goal of the Shiwiar leaders, their attitudes towards having a separate Shiwiar orthography were clearly reflected in their discourse: they argued that Shiwiar should be written differently because it is an independent language. As the following section will demonstrate, the timing for an orthography-based prescriptive campaign was perfect.

5 Orthography development for Jivaroan languages

From 1949 onwards, missionaries from the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) established themselves in Aguaruna, Huambisa, Shuar and Achuar communities. Orthographies for the four varieties of Jivaroan spoken by those communities were quickly developed. Shiwiar, however, was largely ignored for two reasons. First, the Shiwiar people inhabit a particularly isolated part of the jungle which is not easily accessible from either the Ecuadorean or the Peruvian side. This meant that the SIL missionaries did not arrive in Shiwiar villages until the late 1950s. Second, the Shiwiar were largely considered a subgroup of the Achuar, both culturally and linguistically, so only one orthography for Achuar-Shiwiar (as SIL designates the language) was developed (Fast Mowitz, Warkentin de Fast, and Fast Warkentin 2008, 11-12). Additionally, it is probable that less attention was devoted to the Shiwiar simply because of their much smaller population size.

The Achuar-Shiwiar orthography developed by SIL is phonemic and uses a version of the Latin alphabet. Table 2 shows a list of all graphemes and their phonemic values. Phonemic nasalisation is marked by underlining nasal vowels and accent is marked by an acute diacritic on the accented vowel (Fast Mowitz, Warkentin de Fast, and Fast Warkentin 2008, 15-16).

Table 2. Grapheme-phoneme correspondences in the SIL Achuar-Shiwiar orthography (Fast Mowitz, Warkentin de Fast, and Fast Warkentin 2008, 15-16)

Grapheme	Phoneme	Grapheme	Phoneme
a	a	p	p
ch	tʃ	r	r
e	i	s	s
i	i	sh	ʃ
j	h	t	t
k	k	ts	ts
m	m	u	u
n	n	w	w
ng	ŋ	y	j

At the time, the fact that Achuar and Shiwiar had been considered one language by the missionaries was not contested because the orthography is perfectly suitable for both languages. In fact, for many decades, the Shiwiar continued to live in almost complete isolation from the Spanish-speaking world and during those years the vast majority of the Shiwiar population remained illiterate. In other words, the community was not concerned with the orthographic identity of Achuar and Shiwiar.

However, as a result of the indigenous movement in the 1990s, more resources became available for indigenous education and in the first decade of the twenty-first century an increasing number of Shiwiar people were learning how to read and write. At first sight, this would have been a perfect time to implement a prescriptive orthographic reform directed toward newly literate speakers of Shiwiar. However, as section 7 will show, the reform would nonetheless prove to be unsuccessful.

6 Shiwiar prescriptivism

In 2002, the Shiwiar political organisation ONSHIPAE³ published a small dictionary

prescribing new rules for Shiwiar spelling (Vargas Canus and Tsetsekip 2002, henceforth abbreviated as VC&T). Although the publication is not explicit about its prescriptivist goal, the reformed orthography used in the dictionary can be interpreted as an attempt to establish new prescriptive rules for Shiwiar which would distinguish the language from Achuar. In this section I will first explain all the orthographic modifications that can be found in the dictionary, together with a brief explanation of their relevance with regards to Shiwiar phonology. I will then illustrate – based on my own fieldwork experience – how the Shiwiar *dirigentes* attempted to enforce the new orthography and even, in some cases, prescribe the acceptability of lexical items.

The new spelling proposed in VC&T is often based on more phonetic criteria than the traditional SIL orthography. Shiwiar and Achuar, like all the Jivaroan languages, do not distinguish voicing phonemically for stops. All stop consonants are underlyingly voiceless. However, some speakers of Achuar and most speakers of Shiwiar voice stops when they occur after a nasal.⁴ Compare example (1), where the underlying velar stop surfaces as voiceless, and example (2), where the same underlying stop surfaces as voiced.

(1)	[núka]	(2)	[núŋga]
	<i>nuka</i>		<i>nunka</i>
	‘this’		‘earth’

In the Achuar-Shiwiar orthography developed by SIL, stops are written phonemically, i.e. only the voiceless versions are used (<p, t, k>). However, VC&T states that in the Shiwiar alphabet <p, b, t, d, k, g> are used, and words are spelt “as they are pronounced” (Vargas Canus and Tsetsekip 2002, 16-17).

(3)	‘ocelot’	[undútʃam]
	SIL:	<untúcham>

VC&T: <unducham>

Furthermore, VC&T advocates writing a silent orthographic <u> after <g> if it is followed by <e> or <i>, mirroring Spanish spelling rules.⁵ Note that this convention is not found in the SIL orthography because it does not have the grapheme <g> except for in the digraph <ng> to represent [ŋ] (see Table 2).

(4)	‘sweet potato’	[kɪŋgɪ]
	SIL:	<kengké>
	VC&T:	<kengué>

Both the SIL and the VC&T orthographies convey the glide [w] as <u>. This means that spelling the phonetic sequence [ŋgwi] is problematic for VC&T because the previously mentioned rule would dictate that <ngui> should be pronounced as [ŋgi], thereby ignoring the glide completely. In order to resolve this, VC&T needs to use another Spanish convention, namely diaeresis, in order for the glide to be pronounced.

(5)	‘turtle’	[kʊŋgwím]
	SIL:	<kungkuím>
	VC&T:	<kungüim>

In both Achuar and Shiwiar, all consonants become palatalised when they follow /i/. As this phonological process is always predictable, the palatalisation is not marked in the SIL orthography. In VC&T, palatalisation is explicitly marked by adding an <i> after the palatalised consonant. Compare both conventions in example (6).

(6)	‘hair’	[indjáʃ]
	SIL:	<intásh>
	VC&T:	<indiash>

The velar nasal has a quasi-phonemic status in Shiwiar. All nasals undergo place assimilation to immediately following stops. In this sense, the velar nasal allophone is

always predictable when it precedes a velar stop. However, in word-final position, the place of articulation of a nasal is not predictable. While SIL proposed using the diagraph <ng> to represent [ŋ] regardless of where it occurs in a word, VC&T prescribes using <n> word internally (where its velar realisation is predictable), but <nk> word-finally. Note that when [ŋ] occurs word-internally, it is always followed by a velar stop. In the SIL orthography, this post-nasal velar stop is represented by a <k>, whereas VC&T writes it as a <g>.

(7)	‘only he/she’	[níŋgi]	‘meat’	[namáŋ]
	SIL:	<níngki>		<namáng>
	VC&T:	<ningui>		<namank>

Nasalisation in Shiwiar is distinctive in two ways. First, there are lexical minimal pairs, such as /hii/ *fire* and /hĩĩ/ *eye*. Additionally, nasalisation is used grammatically, for example to mark possession: /nawi/ *feet* vs. /nawĩ/ *his feet, our feet*. The SIL orthography underlines nasal vowels, whereas VC&T does not (see example (8)). The fact that VC&T does not mark nasalisation at all implies that some minimal pairs, such as the ones mentioned above, cannot be distinguished formally in this orthography.

(8)	‘wind’	[nasí]
	SIL:	<nasé>
	VC&T:	<nase>

Finally, the SIL and the VC&T orthographies differ in the way they mark accent.⁶ Shiwiar words have one high-pitched accent in every phonological word. The position of the accent is non-predictable and contrastive (e.g. [kútʃí] *pig* vs. [kutʃí] *knife*). Accented vowels are always marked with an acute accent in the SIL orthography. By contrast, VC&T only marks accent when it falls on a word-final vowel.

(9)	‘manioc’	[máma]	‘tapir’	[pamá]
	SIL:	<máma>		<pamá>
	VC&T:	<mama>		<pamá>

The Shiwiar *dirigentes* who were involved in the creation of this new standard currently envision their publication as a step forward in the development of the Shiwiar language. They have frequently affirmed to me in conversation that the orthography used in VC&T not only reflects the reality of Shiwiar pronunciation better, but that it is also more intuitive and easier to write than the SIL orthography.

While this claim has not been tested empirically, either orthography can be argued to have advantages over the other. The SIL proposal represents a more abstract level of the phonology and only distinguishes contrastive phonemes. It does not reflect allophonic realisations such as postnasal voicing or palatalisation. In this sense, it is more economical because it requires fewer graphemes. Secondly, because it relies less on Spanish orthography, it does not have to introduce idiosyncratic spelling conventions such as the use of a silent letter <u>. Finally, it is consistent with respect to marking of nasalisation and accent, leaving no ambiguity for a reader.

It should be noted however that the SIL orthography was developed by missionaries who, although clearly aware of the contrastive distinctions in the Achuar-Shiwiar phonological system, were not native speakers of the language. It is possible that the consistency to mark phonemic distinctions in the orthography is more of a benefit for a learner of Shiwiar than for a proficient speaker. In fact, the aspects of the VC&T orthography that might seem inconsistent at first glance might simply be a reflection of what native speakers find relevant in their phonology. During transcription sessions with Shiwiar consultants it became clear to me that certain surface alternations like voiced stops and palatalised consonants are very salient to native speakers. Consequently, it may be counterintuitive for them to spell those realisations as voiceless

and unpalatalised, even if they are a result of predictable phonological processes. In a similar vein, the fact that the VC&T orthography makes use of Spanish conventions might not be a hindrance for Shiwiar speakers, given that they usually become literate in Spanish first. Moreover, as many Shiwiar speakers have limited exposure to literacy in the first place, it might actually be an advantage for them not to have to learn new spelling conventions for Shiwiar. Lastly, the fact that the VC&T orthography does not mark nasalisation and accent (with a few exceptions) might be an indication that the functional load of those contrasts are quite low and that native speakers of Shiwiar can resolve ambiguous minimal pairs easily through context. If this is the case, marking nasalisation and accent might not be necessary. Given those considerations, it could very well be that the orthography proposed in Vargas Canus and Tsetsekip (2002) is an improvement on the SIL orthography for Shiwiar speakers. Nevertheless, the introduction of this new orthography had clear political overtones because it was a move to differentiate Shiwiar writing from the established Achuar conventions.

In addition to what is written in VC&T, during my fieldwork visits to the Shiwiar political headquarters and the Shiwiar radio station in 2011 and 2012, I frequently overheard *dirigentes* explaining the correct spelling of words to other Shiwiar speakers, using the VC&T orthography. This was most apparent during the summer of 2012, when the Shiwiar officials were preparing a comprehensive document for the Ecuadorean government about the Shiwiar way of life. This document contained a large number of words in the Shiwiar language referring to place names, traditional practices, food, animals, plants, and other cultural terms. There were frequent debates about the spelling of many of those words, and certain *dirigentes* insisted on using the new orthography which differentiated Shiwiar from other Jivaroan languages.

Furthermore, there were discussions about not using certain lexical items which purportedly were of Achuar origin. One example of this is the use of the word *yuminsajme* for “thank you”. I witnessed a *dirigente* telling a visiting Shiwiar man to use the word *maketai* instead, ‘because only the Achuar say *yuminsajme*’. However, this claim was purely prescriptive in nature: a quick survey of the two words in a 10-hour corpus of naturally spoken Shiwiar collected in 2011 and 2012 shows that both are used spontaneously and with comparable frequency by Shiwiar speakers.

7 The effects of the campaign

Over ten years after the publication of the spelling system used in VC&T, it is clear that the prescriptivist efforts of some leaders to change Shiwiar orthography and language use have not been successful. During my fieldwork in 2011 and 2012, I worked extensively with native Shiwiar consultants to compile, translate and transcribe a naturalistic corpus. Literate consultants by and large preferred an SIL-based orthography for the transcription of the text. The only effect of the prescriptive campaign that I encountered was a palpable concern amongst some consultants that they would misrepresent the Shiwiar language (and, by extension, the Shiwiar nation) if they made any spelling mistakes.

The failure of the prescriptive effort can be attributed to two crucial observations regarding the sociolinguistic context in which Shiwiar is spoken. First and foremost, it should be noted that, although most Shiwiar speakers (especially men under the age of 30) are now literate in Spanish, the vast majority of them do not actually read or write regularly in their own language. Partially, this is because most Shiwiar people still live in isolated villages with limited access to writing materials. More importantly though, the hunter-gathering and semi-agricultural lifestyle that most Shiwiar people lead leaves little time and interest for reading and writing. Day to day village interactions have no

need for written language. This means that there is little generalised concern amongst the Shiwiar population for orthography, and even less for orthographic reform.

The isolation of Shiwiar villages poses a second crucial problem for a prescriptive campaign. Although the Shiwiar people are very mobile and often visit family members and friends in other settlements, most Shiwiar villages are only in regular contact with neighbouring villages on the same river. Additionally, some Shiwiar families do not live in one of the 14 villages but rather on their own and dispersed throughout Shiwiar territory. All these factors complicate the diffusion of precise information that would be required for systematic language reform.

The only controlled mode of communication available between all Shiwiar villages and the outside world is in the form of short-wave radio broadcasts. Every village has a solar-powered radio transmitter which is set to the same frequency as the main transmitter at the Shiwiar political headquarters in the provincial capital, Puyo. Although this allows in theory for daily communication between the villages and Puyo, in practice the signal is often poor and it is cumbersome to relay a message. Furthermore, the radio transmitters are not always monitored (usually only a couple of times a day), so it is easy for messages to be missed. This means that radio transmissions are only used for urgent messages and emergencies. Short letters or notes are sometimes attached to parcels but they are often in Spanish. Everything else is conveyed by word of mouth when visitors arrive in a village from somewhere else. In other words, the Shiwiar *dirigentes* have little way of systematically communicating a new standard for Shiwiar.

Given these two issues, it is unsurprising that the prescriptive campaign was destined to be unsuccessful on the whole: the Shiwiar population have not been thoroughly informed of the prescriptive reforms and there has been no widespread

interest to enact them. Nevertheless, there is a small group of Shiwiar speakers who reside in the city of Puyo, the provincial capital, and who are employed by the Shiwiar political organisation NASHIE.⁷ As such, they are constantly surrounded by the precise political discourse of indigenous and national identity that led to the prescriptive campaign in the first place. Additionally, these speakers often use written Shiwiar for their work. Therefore, they constitute the primary target audience of the VC&T publication. In this sense, perhaps the campaign could be said to have had a greater effect on this particular group of speakers than on the Shiwiar population as a whole, most of whom live in small villages.

It is quite clear that the Shiwiar people who reside in Puyo are much more aware of Shiwiar orthography than the village inhabitants. This could well be a result of the publication of the VC&T orthography. However, for this group of Shiwiar speakers, the new standard seems to have had the opposite effect to what was intended. During my fieldwork visits to Puyo, many of these people acted as consultants for phonetic and orthographic transcription of the corpus I collected. It was clear from their hesitant behaviour during these transcription sessions that instead of strengthening the language community by adding a sense of ownership of the language and of its uniqueness, most speakers who have encountered the new standard just seem confused. Many feel upset because they have been led to think that they have been speaking and writing Shiwiar badly all along, and this has caused them to feel uncomfortable and uncertain about their language use. Many end up thinking that they are not ‘proper speakers’ of the language. When trying to find new consultants amongst Shiwiar staff members of the NASHIE office, I often encountered unwillingness and reluctance specifically because the potential consultants were worried that they might not be able to use the Shiwiar language ‘correctly’, even though all of them spoke it natively and on a daily basis.

At first sight, it may seem surprising that urban Shiwiar speakers would be so affected by a mere spelling reform. However, it is a completely understandable reaction if we recall their broader socio-political situation. As discussed in section 4, the Shiwiar people have only been recognised by the Ecuadorean state since the early 1990s. Their authenticity as an independent ethnic group is vocally questioned by the Ecuadorean intelligentsia: it is not uncommon to hear in academic circles that the Shiwiar people only emerged as a separate group in order to be granted territory and autonomy by the state. This leaves urban Shiwiar people in a vulnerable situation where many feel a constant external pressure to justify their ethnic identity. One result of this is that the urban Shiwiar community is tightly knit and has a very acceptant attitude towards decisions taken by *dirigentes* which aim to legitimise their status as an indigenous nationality. Therefore, when officials began to push for a clearer differentiation of Shiwiar and the other Jivaroan languages, it added additional pressure – this time from within the community – for Shiwiar people to portray themselves as a distinct nation. Evidently, Shiwiar people residing in Puyo were influenced the most because the prescriptive reform was being advocated by Shiwiar officials based in that city.

These observations show that the sociolinguistic situation of Shiwiar provides less than optimal conditions for a prescriptive campaign to take hold. Furthermore, the effects that this campaign has had on educated Shiwiar people also indicate that prescriptivism can have a negative effect, quite the opposite of strengthening and uniting a language community.

8 Prescriptivism as a nation-building tool?

The use of standardisation and prescriptivism to strengthen nationalism is certainly not a new one. There are many cases of closely related language varieties or dialect continua being divided up into two or more standardised varieties, each associated with

a different emerging political state. Two of the most well-known examples are the development and standardisation of Hindi and Urdu (Rai 1991, 226-284) and that of Bosnian, Croatian, Serbian and Montenegrin (Šipka 2003, Gröschel 2009). In most cases, the different standards diverge somewhat in orthography and lexicon, as is the case with what was previously described for Achuar and Shiwiar.

Although the strategy of prescriptive language planning has successfully been used in nation-building before, it is certainly not the case for the Shiwiar. There is a strong cultural drive for the Shiwiar to differentiate themselves from their closely-related Jivaroan neighbours, but it is clear that in the context of a semi-literate and dispersed rural population of only 1,200 speakers, linguistic prescriptivism (especially if it is based on orthographic reforms) cannot be effective. Additionally, without the means to implement the new standard, the creation of prescriptive spelling rules seems to have a damaging and fragmentary rather than unifying effect on a language community.

In a more general sense, what the Shiwiar case illustrates is that while prescriptive ideology might be useful in the establishment of a nation-state with an emerging linguistic identity, it is a counterproductive position to adopt for emerging indigenous nations in a similar setting to that of the Shiwiar. Without widespread interest from within a speech community and without the infrastructure necessary for a community to deliberate over the proposed rules, prescriptivism does not act as a nation-building tool. At best it has very little effect, and at worst it can turn out to be a harmful initiative.

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Notes

- ¹ *Dirigente* (plural: *dirigentes*) is the Spanish word for leader. The term is often used to refer to political representatives of indigenous nations in the Ecuadorean political scene.
- ² According to Shiwiar people consulted, this migration was also in part due to population displacement caused by a subsequent war between Ecuador and Peru in 1941.
- ³ ONSHIPAE stands for Organización de la Nacionalidad Shiwiar de Pastaza de la Amazonía Ecuatoriana (Organisation of the Shiwiar Nationality of Pastaza in the Ecuadorean Amazon). It was renamed as NASHIE (Nacionalidad Shiwiar del Ecuador – Shiwiar Nationality of Ecuador) in 2005. It is a political organisation which represents the Shiwiar people in Ecuador.
- ⁴ It is interesting to note that stops are also voiced after nasals in Ecuadorean and northern Peruvian varieties of Quechua (Adelaar and Muysken 2004, 198). In fact, the very existence of this phenomenon in Shiwiar might be the result of close contact with Quechua.
- ⁵ In Spanish, <g> corresponds to [g ~ γ] only when followed by another consonant or by the vowels <a, o, u>. If followed by the vowels <e, i>, it is pronounced as [χ ~ x ~ h]. In order to retain its former phonetic value before <e, i>, an orthographic <u> is added, so that <gue> and <gui> are pronounced as [ge ~ γe] and [gi ~ γi] respectively. To convey [gue ~ yue] and [gui ~ yui], a diaeresis is used: <güe> and <güi>.

⁶ It is unclear whether high pitch marking in Shiwiar should be analysed as tone, stress or pitch-accent. To remain neutral to this discussion, the term ‘accent’ is used in this paper to mean high pitch marking.

⁷ The number of Shiwiar people in Puyo is constantly fluctuating, but it never exceeds more than a few dozen. Shiwiar people tend to go there for health care or short-term labour and then return to their village after a few weeks or months. See note 3 for an explanation of the political organisations.