

# GOVERNANCE AND THE REVITALIZATION OF THE GUARANÍ LANGUAGE IN PARAGUAY

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*Abstract: This article takes a governance perspective to examine the contemporary revitalization of Guaraní, a “repressed” language that is spoken by a majority of the population in Paraguay. A historical overview highlights the striking endurance of the language in spite of two centuries of official subjugation. The article traces the positive impact of political democratization since 1989 on the revitalization of Guaraní by examining four interrelated areas that are closely linked to the governance agenda: the education system, the media, the political system, and popular culture. However, the absence of a comprehensive language policy continues to limit progress in improving governance, as the weak impact of the official poverty reduction program exemplifies. The case of Guaraní demonstrates the need for wider recognition of the importance of language policy in promoting good governance through citizen empowerment and accountability of the state.*

In many and perhaps most low-income countries, the poor and powerless speak a language different from that of the rich and powerful. The resulting inability to understand and communicate with officialdom fundamentally limits the extent of poor and powerless people’s participation in development and the extent of the state’s downward accountability. The state’s greater employment of the household language of the poor in the political system, the judicial system, and the public administration system (especially with respect to education and health) therefore seems to be an essential prerequisite to ensure that the voice of the poor is heard.

This sociolinguistic situation is known as diglossia, in which one high-status language is dominant over another low-status language (Ferguson 1959). Diglossia leads to extensive use of code switching (i.e., switching between languages), which depends on the context of the conversation and the respective social status of the individuals involved. Diglossia can occur in societies characterized by the presence or by the absence of bilingualism (Fishman 1967). In either case, diglossia poses profound obstacles to promoting good governance by limiting the voice of the low-status language of the poor and the accountability of the rich.

However, within the general field of governance, language policy (LP) in general and diglossia in particular remain surprisingly neglected ar-

eas of study (Mazrui and Mazrui 1998; Oommen 2002). Language policy has a direct bearing on most of the seven key governance abilities that governments need to develop in order to meet the Millennium Development Goals, and on one of the abilities in particular, namely the ability “to operate political systems which provide opportunities for all the people, including the poor and disadvantaged, to influence government policy and practice” (Department for International Development 2001). Yet a governance assessment framework methodology prepared to assess the quality of each of the seven governance abilities in individual countries makes no mention at all of language as an obstacle to the empowerment of poor people (Beetham 2000). Language policy is also absent from the strategy to strengthen voice and accountability outlined in the 2004 World Development Report *Making Services Work for Poor People* (World Bank 2003a), and it does not appear under “voice and accountability” or any of the other five dimensions of governance promoted by the World Bank’s worldwide governance indicators database (Kaufmann, Kraay, and Mas-truzzi 2006).

This article explores the relationship between governance and LP by examining the revitalization of Guaraní, a “repressed” language that is spoken by virtually all poor people in Paraguay. It seeks to understand the historical origins of this seismic change in attitude to the language, traces the emergence of an embryonic LP, and analyzes the impact that this is already having on four key aspects of the life of the country: the education system, the media, the political system, and the expression of popular culture. The article also explores the link between LP and poverty reduction, which is a major concern of the governance agenda.

#### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Standard textbooks on sociolinguistics often single out Paraguay as the sole example in Latin America, and one of the few examples in the world, of stable bilingualism, in which a majority of the population is fluent in two languages (Romaine 1995; Trudgill 1995). The country differs from other bilingual nations in which the two languages are linguistically similar (e.g., Catalan and Spanish in the autonomous region of Catalonia) or in which there is a marked territorial preference for one or another language (e.g., English and French in Canada). In contrast to such cases, together with the Central Asian republics of Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, Paraguay is one of the most genuinely bilingual countries in the world where most people throughout the country speak two unrelated languages.

The origins of the linguistic profile of Paraguay can be traced to the very limited European immigration associated with the Spanish Conquest because of the absence of any significant known mineral wealth. Unlike

elsewhere in the Americas, the major indigenous language, Guaraní, rapidly became the language of the mestizo population that evolved from the miscegenation of conquistadores and indigenous women. In eastern Paraguay, Guaraní was strongly promoted from 1610 to 1767 in the Jesuit missions, known as *reducciones*, where the first dictionary and printed works in the language appeared. A Jesuit missionary, Antonio Ruiz de Montoya, produced a standardized form of Guaraní from a multiplicity of dialects. His *Arte vocabulario de la lengua guaraní* (1640) is a classic text on the language.

The isolationist policies of Dr. José Gaspar de Francia, founding father of Paraguayan independence in 1811 and the country's first president (1814–1840), reduced the spread of Spanish at a critical juncture in the nation's early history. Strict control over foreign trade and the requirement of his personal approval for foreign nationals to enter or leave the country discouraged the arrival of Spanish-speaking traders. His prohibition on marriages among Spanish-born foreigners also reduced the spread of the Spanish language.<sup>1</sup>

This policy was reversed under the governments of Carlos Antonio López (1840–1862) and his son Francisco Solano López (1862–1870), and Guaraní was banned in the few schools that existed.<sup>2</sup> Although few books were published in Paraguay during the nationalist period (1811–1865), some print works did appear in Guaraní.<sup>3</sup> During the War of the Triple Alliance (1865–1870), fought against the combined forces of Argentina, Brazil, and Uruguay, the state published *Cacique Lambaré*, a broadsheet entirely in Guaraní. Distributed among the Paraguayan troops as a morale booster, the paper used satire and caricature to mock the invading Brazilian and Argentine forces and to extol the courage of the Paraguayans.<sup>4</sup>

Official antipathy to the language hardened markedly following Paraguay's defeat in the war. An economic elite, composed largely of former collaborators who returned from exile with the victorious allied forces, rapidly dominated the political system. The elite had been strongly influenced by the racist views of the Argentine Domingo Sarmiento (b. 1811–d. 1888), which he expressed most clearly in his seminal work, *Civilización y barbarie* (1845). Implicit in this worldview was the notion that Guaraní was the linguistic expression of the so-called backwardness and lack of civili-

1. Anastacio Rolón wrote the first national anthem, "Teta Purahef" (Song for the Motherland), in Guaraní, but it was discarded after the death of Francia.

2. One of the first Paraguayans to study in Europe recounts that speaking Guaraní at the Asunción school he attended in 1851 was punished by "four or five lashes" (Centurión 1948).

3. Sir W. Gore Ouseley obtained a collection of Guaraní love poems in the 1850s; the unpublished manuscript is held at the British Museum (Schuller 1913).

4. *Cacique Lambaré* was published biweekly in Asunción from July 1867 to September 1868.

zation that epitomized the despised regime of President Francisco Solano López, the Paraguayan war leader. One of the first actions taken by the Triumvirate of 1869, a puppet government set up in Asunción by the occupying Brazilian forces, was to prohibit the speaking of Guaraní in all state schools, a policy that would remain in force for more than one hundred years (*Registro oficial* . . . 1887). The language was regarded with official disdain throughout the ensuing liberal period (1870–1936), with Education Minister Manuel Domínguez even referring to Guaraní in 1894 as “the great enemy of the cultural progress of Paraguay” (Cardozo 1959, 82).<sup>5</sup>

Elite contempt toward Guaraní reflected an underlying racism toward the Guaraní-speaking population, an attitude not dissimilar from that of contemporary elites in Peru and Bolivia. The attitudes were predominant within the two political groupings, later known as the Partido Liberal (Liberal Party) and Partido Colorado (Colorado Party), formed by elite members in 1887. Both pursued laissez-faire policies that involved the sale of enormous tracts of state lands inherited from the prewar period. This soon led to the creation of foreign-owned enclaves in tannin production, yerba mate, and cattle ranching. Such policies led to the rapid emergence of a highly unequal structure of land ownership that continues to the present day.

In the first decade of the twentieth century, young intellectuals known as the *Generación del 900* began to question the prevailing liberal perception of the War of the Triple Alliance and to reassess the figure of Francisco Solano López (foremost among these were Juan O’Leary, Manuel Domínguez, and Ignacio Pane). This provided the ideological bedrock for questioning the liberal economic order in general and the enclave economy in particular. Since the 1920s, there had been growing calls for land reform and social improvement in favor of Paraguay’s poor population (González 1931; Rivarola 1993). This reawakening of Paraguayan nationalism was closely associated with revived interest in the Guaraní language. Signs of this changing attitude toward the language included the music of José Asunción Flores, Paraguay’s foremost composer and inventor of the *Guarania* melody; the first plays written and performed in Guaraní, by Julio Correa; the Guaraní-language poetry magazine *Okára Poty Kue-mí*, which circulated among Paraguayan troops from 1932 to 1935 during the

5. A striking example of this elite disdain appears in the postscript to a major commemorative album sponsored by the Paraguayan government on the first centenary of independence in 1911: “As for the removal from the national education system of Guaraní, that dialect or archaic indigenous language which serves no purpose whatsoever, it only remains to carry this out, as a crucial first step in our enormous campaign. Yes, sir! To completely de-Guaranize ‘in order to ensure that the roots of that primitive forest do not regain their control in the open furrows’ and then to crisscross the land everywhere with railway lines, in order to spill out European immigration in every direction, in the struggle for its expansion” (Monte Domecq’ 1911, author’s translation).

Chaco War against Bolivia; and the establishment in the 1920s of two organizations to promote Guaraní, the Sociedad de Cultura Guaraní (Society of Guaraní Culture) and the Academia de la Lengua y Cultura Guaraní (Academy of Guaraní Language and Culture).

Although the developments were largely confined to intellectuals, and their resonance among the general population initially remained limited, the political expression of this discontent began to manifest itself inside the Colorado Party. This party had long sought to differentiate itself from the dominant Liberal Party, which ruled almost without a break from 1904 to 1936. As the enclave economy came under increasing criticism, the Colorado Party gradually distanced itself from the foreign-oriented policies that it had pursued in the past.<sup>6</sup> Encouraged by the Generación del 900, which flocked to join the party, the Colorado Party now began to portray López as the personification of Paraguayan patriotism. In so doing, it projected itself as the party of Paraguayan nationalism in contrast to the *legionarios* (traitors) of the Liberal Party.<sup>7</sup>

Although still a party that represented elite interests, in its effort to garner support, the Colorado Party increasingly projected a socially inclusive, one-nation discourse. Pride in Guaraní became an increasingly important element of this rhetoric, symbolizing the unity of the Paraguayan nation in contrast to the disdain that Liberals showed toward the language. The foremost exponent of this pseudonationalist discourse was Natalicio González (b. 1897–d. 1966), a Colorado ideologue who exalted the *raza paraguaya* (Paraguayan race) as a superior race that synthesized all that was best in the indigenous and Spanish traditions (González 1998).

In a subtle crossover, the political discourse of the Colorado Party gradually conflated an assumed linguistic homogeneity with a purported social homogeneity in Paraguay. The spurious argument “Rich and poor alike, we are all the same as we all speak Guaraní” became an enduring myth propagated through the Colorado Party, which projected a demobilizing discourse of implied equality that sought to insulate the privileges of the economic elite from social criticism. This rhetoric became particularly powerful during the early decades of the autocratic regime of Alfredo Stroessner (who was president from 1954 to 1989), when the party virtually monopolized political power and many elite members made fortunes from corrupt rent-seeking activities inside the state apparatus (Borda 1993). The exaltation of the Guaraní language in its political discourse served as a unifying factor that reinforced patron-client relations, thereby masking the rapidly emerging inequalities in income and wealth.

6. The major sales of public land in 1885 and 1886 actually took place under a Colorado Party president, Bernardino Caballero (1880–1886).

7. *Legionario* is a term of abuse that refers to the Paraguayans who fought with the allied troops during the War of the Triple Alliance.

This instrumental attitude toward Guaraní was evident in the new 1967 constitution. At the preceding National Constitutional Convention, whose deliberations the dictatorship closely controlled, a motion to make Guaraní an official language was rejected unanimously (Zarratea 1995). Instead, the new constitution for the first time recognized Paraguay as a bilingual country and granted Guaraní the status of a national language, while Spanish was designated the language for official business. This language discrimination was congruent with the socially exclusive development model that the regime pursued. In practice, it meant that Guaraní continued to be regarded with disdain as the language of the poor majority. A telling example of the underlying attitude of the regime toward Guaraní was its reaction to a literacy program that the incipient small farmer movement Ligas Agrarias Cristianas (Christian Agrarian League, LAC) launched in 1972. The program had set up its own Guaraní-speaking schools, with its *pytyvohára* (helpers) using the *conscientização* literacy methods pioneered by the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire. The regime denounced the program as subversive, and on February 8, 1975, the army destroyed the pilot community at San Isidro de Jejuí in the department of San Pedro (Telesca 2004).

As the foregoing discussion suggests, the role of Guaraní in Paraguay has remained extremely contradictory until recently, a reflection of elites' long-standing and sophisticated manipulation of its complex association with ethnicity, social status, and national identity. The linguistic profile has long posed psychosocial confusion for elite members. On the one hand, they are keen to associate themselves through Spanish with their peers in neighboring countries and to distance themselves from the cultural and racial implications of association with an indigenous language. On the other hand, they are mindful of the role of Guaraní as a symbol of national unity that is capable of dulling the perception of social inequality by subaltern groups. An extreme measure of that confusion was the extraordinary view, prevalent among many elite Paraguayans, that Guaraní was not an indigenous language at all but one that had emerged from the miscegenation that gave rise to the mestizo population after the Spanish Conquest (Rona 1966).

Although that view had disappeared by the 1960s, a much more persuasive and enduring myth continues: Paraguay has always been a bilingual country in which the overwhelming majority of the population is fluent in both Guaraní and Spanish. By enhancing the linguistic significance of Spanish on a par with Guaraní, the fallacy serves the convenient function for elite interests of situating the nation and its people among the rest of the Spanish-speaking Latin American countries, with the added value of subtly implying a higher degree of sociocultural cohesion than that found elsewhere in the region. Ironically, it is an elite belief pattern that sits quite comfortably with contempt for Guaraní itself because of its function as a

constant reminder of the indigenous ethnic and cultural heritage of the country. The legacy of association with backwardness and lack of civilization, which derived from the official campaign against Guaraní during the liberal period, also permeated popular discourse.<sup>8</sup> The negative stigma generated a sense of shame among urban Guaraní speakers, many of whom spoke the language only in the confines of the home and preferred to switch into Spanish when in a public setting.

#### THE MYTH OF THE BILINGUAL NATION

Throughout the country's entire history, Guaraní has been the predominant language in the linguistic profile of Paraguay. This is in sharp contrast to the rest of Latin America, where the Spanish language gradually assumed linguistic dominance. Paraguay was almost completely monolingual in Guaraní at least until the beginning of the twentieth century (Melià 1994). The first serious study of its linguistic profile, carried out from 1961 to 1963, estimated that less than half of the population knew any Spanish at all and concluded, "Paraguay is not really a bilingual nation, but a Guaraní-speaking country where, on the higher levels of administration, education and wholesale trade, Spanish is used out of necessity. . . . Only a small elite uses it even in everyday private life" (Rona 1966, 286).

Modern census data confirms the persistence of monolingualism in Guaraní rather than the prevalence of bilingualism. Despite the combination of the factors referred to earlier—elite disdain, rejection by the state education system, and inhibition among speakers themselves—the use of Guaraní remained high throughout the second half of the twentieth century (Table 1). Most significantly, there is little evidence of a decline in Guaraní usage despite the rapid rural-to-urban migration that has taken place since the 1980s (the 1992 census showed for the first time that a slight majority of the population lived in urban areas). The 2002 census showed that Guaraní is still the more favored language in Paraguay, preferred by 59.2 percent of households compared with 35.7 percent of households that preferred Spanish (Dirección General de Estadística, Encuestas y Censos [DGEEC] 2003). A further 5 percent of households spoke other languages, mainly Portuguese, German, and Korean. In rural areas, Guaraní remained by far the predominant language, preferred by 83 percent of the population, and more households there spoke other languages (8.9%) than spoke Spanish (8.4%). Even so, as in earlier censuses, the 2002 census still overestimated usage of Spanish because it simply asked respondents:

8. The literal meaning of *guarango*, a derogatory word used to refer to an ignorant person, was "someone who speaks Guaraní." Similarly, in Asunción, rural Guaraní-speaking farmers were called *koguá*, a deformation of a Guaraní word that suggests timidity at best and stupidity at worst.

Table 1 *Language Use in Paraguay According to Census Data, 1950–1992*

	Guaraní only	Guaraní and Spanish	Spanish only	Other	Guaraní (total)	Spanish (total)
1950	37.3	57.0	4.4	1.4	94.3	61.4
1962	43.1	50.6	4.1	2.2	93.7	54.7
1982	40.1	48.6	6.5	4.8	88.7	55.1
1992	38.4	49.6	6.5	5.6	88.0	56.1

Note: The 1972 census contained no question on language. Data derived from Gynan (2001).

“What is the language most commonly used in the household?” Many households in which Guaraní predominated are likely to have answered “Spanish” for reasons associated with the prevailing cultural prejudice against Guaraní. In summary, as a recent major study of language planning and sociolinguistics in Paraguay has forecast, Spanish monolingualism “will be confined to a very small minority of the population” and “Guaraní vitality will remain high” (Gynan 2001, 108).

#### LANGUAGE AND DEMOCRATIZATION

When the transition to democracy began in 1989, indicators of access to primary health care and basic education were among the lowest in the Americas, and in 1991, the Gini coefficient for land inequality was the highest recorded in the world (World Bank 2005, Table A2). Despite the promulgation of a new democratic constitution in 1992 and the introduction of free elections, the legacy of the past weighed heavily on efforts to improve governance. Under a succession of venal and inept presidencies—Andrés Rodríguez (1989–1993), Juan Carlos Wasmosy (1993–1998), and Luis González Macchi (1999–2003)—Paraguay earned the reputation of being one of the most corrupt countries in Latin America. Powerful elite groups that had emerged during the dictatorship jostled to retain their power in the new democratic environment, often through buying congressional votes. Three bouts of military instability (in April 1996, March 1999, and May 2000) provided additional obstacles to the institutionalization of democracy. As ill-gotten fortunes were rapidly amassed through the narcotics trade, counterfeiting, and flagrant misuse of foreign aid inflows, by 2001 income inequality had risen to become the fourth most pronounced in Latin America (World Bank 2005, Table A2).

During the 1990s, growth barely kept pace with the increase in population as a combination of declining world prices for cotton, periodic droughts and floods, and domestic political instability buffeted the economy. Paraguay was severely affected by the Argentine crisis in 2001, and in 2002, it suffered the worst recession in the preceding twenty years, with



gross domestic product falling by 2.3 percent. The presidency of Nicanor Duarte Frutos (2003–2008) saw a period of sustained improvement in the growth rate, which was largely the result of rapid expansion of soybean and meat production for export in response to soaring world prices. By 2007, Paraguay ranked as the fifth-largest producer and the fourth-largest exporter of soybeans in the world. However, the faster economic growth was built on one of the most unequal structures of land tenure in the Americas, and its benefits were concentrated on a small elite of soybean farmers, cattle ranchers, politicians, and urban professionals. As a result, growing inequality and poverty accompanied democratization. In 2007, 35.6 percent of the population of 6.2 million was living in poverty, and the share of those living in extreme poverty had increased from 15.5 percent in 2005 to 19.4 percent in 2007 (DGEEC 2008). Yet it was at a time when the value of exports had trebled in just three years, from around US\$1 billion in 2005 to \$3 billion in 2007. Growing frustration at the failure of the transition to deliver improved living standards was evidenced in the annual public opinion surveys by *Latinobarómetro*. Paraguayans consistently expressed the lowest commitment to democracy in Latin America, and by 2005 Paraguay was the only country where support for authoritarianism rivaled that for democracy (Corporación *Latinobarómetro* 2006).

Within this bleak panorama, one major feature of the democratization process has received minimal attention: the revitalization of the Guaraní language. I now examine how democratization has affected its revitalization from four distinct but interrelated perspectives that are closely linked to the governance agenda: the education system, the media, the political system, and the expression of popular culture.

#### THE EMERGENCE OF GUARANÍ IN THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

Despite the predominance of Guaraní as the major language of Paraguay, Spanish remained the sole language in the education system for a century, from 1870 to 1970. Nevertheless, throughout the whole of its history, the overwhelming majority of children entering the education system have spoken little or no Spanish. As late as 1998, an official evaluation of the quality improvement program for secondary education noted that many students were bilingual in name only and were in fact confident only speaking in Guaraní (Ministerio de Educación y Culto [MEC] 1998). And in 2002, no less than 88 percent of children at onset of schooling were either “monolingual Guaraní” (37.2%) or “Guaraní dominant with a little bit of Spanish” (50.2%) (Valadez 2002, 1096).

There is widespread evidence of the importance of mother tongue-based schooling for educational quality (Benson 2004). In 1953, UNESCO produced its landmark statement that the recommended medium for teaching literacy to a child is his or her first language. Yet its first external

review of the Paraguayan education system carried out four years later made no mention at all of Guaraní or the issue of bilingual education (Uzcategui 1957). A growing body of studies from the 1960s, however, began to demonstrate that the monolingual (Spanish) system of instruction was a major cause of the continuing high rates of absenteeism, early drop-out, and functional illiteracy in rural areas (MEC 1978; Corvalán 1985). Foremost among these was a 1965 study that showed that 77 percent of monolingual Guaraní speakers in Luque, near Asunción, had never been to school and that 92 percent had not progressed further than the first grade (Rubin 1974).

In the 1980s, the Ministry of Education began a pilot project in bilingual education that was originally conceived as a means of using Guaraní solely as an oral language to teach Spanish. All subject matter and instructional materials were in Spanish, and Guaraní was used only as the language of instruction. Critics charged that because Guaraní was not taught as a written language, the program simply “Hispanicized” Guaraní-speaking children (Englebrecht and Ortiz 1983, 63). In response to such criticism, the pilot project gradually evolved into teaching rural children to read and write in their mother tongue, Guaraní, during the first three years of primary education, with Spanish introduced gradually as a second language.

As a major component of the democratization process, a wide-ranging education reform program was introduced in the early 1990s in which bilingual education figured prominently. Unlike the 1994 bilingual education reform in Bolivia, a response to the perceived danger of the extinction of Aymara due to language shift (Stockton 2005), language extinction was not a major concern because the vitality of Guaraní was evident from the previously mentioned census data. The reform’s mandate derived from the democratic constitution of 1992, which stated, “Primary education will be carried out in the mother tongue of the child” (Article 77). Within months of its promulgation, Law 28 of September 10, 1992, made the teaching of Spanish and Guaraní compulsory at all levels of the public education system. A twenty-five-year program of maintenance bilingual education, Plan de Educación Bilingüe (Bilingual Education Program, PEB), was initiated in March 1994, and the Comisión Nacional de Educación Bilingüe y Políticas Lingüísticas (National Commission of Bilingual Education and Language Policies) was created to monitor its implementation. The strategy of the PEB was a balanced two-way system based on Cummins’s linguistic interdependence hypothesis (Cummins 1979), which states that literacy in the first language is essential in order to develop linguistic proficiency in the second language. Each child would be taught basic literacy in the mother tongue, with the second language being taught 15 percent of the time in first grade, and increasing by 5 percent a year so that, by the end

of the nine-year cycle of elementary education, students would become coordinate bilinguals (i.e., fluent in both languages).

From 1994, the Guaraní mother-tongue modality was piloted in 118 elementary schools covering seven thousand children, and financed by the World Bank as part of a wider education reform project. The increase in coverage since then has been limited, and targeting of those parts of the country where the program is most needed has been weak. Forty of the selected schools were in the Central Department around Asunción, and few were in the three departments of San Pedro, Concepción, and Caazapá, where monolingualism in Guaraní is highest (Gynan 2001). By 1998, an estimated 62,000 children were entering the school system with little or no ability in Spanish (50,000 in rural areas and 12,000 in urban areas). Yet in that year, enrollment in the Guaraní modality increased to 10,561 children, equivalent to only 17 percent of the children from monolingual Guaraní households who were entering the school system every year. Surprisingly, in the predominantly monolingual departments of Caazapá and San Pedro, the coverage was far below the national average, at only 2 percent and 8 percent, respectively (Gynan 2001).

Clearly, the PEB itself is not being implemented in accordance with the constitutional provision requiring that primary education be carried out in the mother tongue of the child, a stipulation that was reiterated in the 1998 Education Law.<sup>9</sup> Under the current arrangement, primary schools can opt to follow either the Spanish-speaking modality or the Guaraní-speaking modality, a decision ostensibly taken according to the predominant mother tongue of the students. Given the language predominance of Guaraní among the pre-school-age population, at least two-thirds of elementary schools should be using the Guaraní-speaking modality. Yet by 2006, only 280 schools, equivalent to 5 percent of the total of about 1,400 primary schools, were following the Guaraní-speaking modality, while 95 percent were following the Spanish-speaking modality.<sup>10</sup> The reason for this imbalance, which is diametrically opposed to the linguistic profile of the country, is disputed. Government sources suggest that it reflects the preference of the vast majority of Guaraní-speaking households, as expressed by parent associations in favor of the Spanish-speaking modality.

9. "La enseñanza se realizará en la lengua materna del educando desde los comienzos del proceso escolar o desde el primer grado. La otra lengua oficial se enseñará desde el inicio de la educación escolar con el tratamiento propio de una segunda lengua" ("Teaching will be carried out in the mother tongue of the student from the start of the educational process or from the first grade. The other official language will be taught from the start of the educational process in a manner appropriate for a second language") (Article 31).

10. Personal communication from Olga Galeano de Cardozo, member of the Comisión Nacional de Bilingüismo.

Another explanatory factor is that the commitment of the Ministry of Education to the PEB remains lukewarm, which means that the expansion of the Guaraní modality remains dependent on donor aid and voluntary initiatives to cover the extra costs of teacher training and textbooks. The Ateneo de Lengua y Cultura Guaraní (Academy of Guaraní Language and Culture), a private foundation created in 1985, had trained more than 22,000 teachers of Guaraní by 2007 and had awarded 750 undergraduate degrees in Guaraní-language studies since being awarded university status in 2005.<sup>11</sup> The reputation of the Guaraní modality itself has suffered from parental reaction against the introduction of Ministry of Education textbooks that are considered artificial and divorced from everyday life. A 2001 study showed that 30 percent of school principals reported resistance from parents and teachers to the introduction of the Guaraní modality. Much of this resistance was explained by confusion and disagreement concerning the overly academic form of Guaraní and the wealth of neologisms used in the language instruction manuals (Muñoz Cruz 2001).

Nevertheless, despite the deficiencies in its implementation, there is evidence that the PEB has produced both greater linguistic skills and positive attitudinal change toward Guaraní. A comparative survey of education professionals between 1995 and 2001 showed a slight improvement in the belief that Guaraní is a deeper indicator of national authenticity than Spanish. There was a significant decrease in the acceptability of monolingualism in both Spanish and Guaraní. Among Spanish-speaking parents, of whom in 1995 the majority were raising children in Spanish, 80 percent were raising children bilingually by 2001. There was also a dramatic decline in the exclusive use of Spanish by bilingual parents in their contact with teachers, falling from 60.1 percent to only 4.1 percent. The study concluded, "The stigma of Guaraní has certainly not been erased, but public use of the language and a pride that had been much more sublimated earlier, have risen" (Gynan 2005, 36). This progress was confirmed by a 2006 evaluation of the education reform program, which was based on 4,240 interviews with directors, teachers, students, and parents from 199 schools. Some 39 percent of the 1,917 students interviewed could write a letter to a friend in both Spanish and Guaraní, with little difference between urban (40.5 percent) and rural areas (35.7 percent). Furthermore, more than 90 percent of the 1,670 parents interviewed approved of bilingual education, with little difference between urban areas (93.5 percent) and rural areas (94.2 percent) (Martin and Marchesi 2007).

A recent study of the performance of the Paraguayan education system detected very low quality, as evidenced in very high repetition rates and

11. The Ateneo also organizes a range of nationwide cultural events that promote Guaraní (see <http://www.ateneoguarani.edu.py>).

poor functional literacy of adults. It noted that the low quality of education "is not constrained by the amount of expenditure because the country is spending a larger share of GDP than other Latin American countries and teachers' salary levels and expenditure per student are also above the Latin American average" (Schiefelbein and Brunstein 2003, 1). The study blamed this low performance on poor teacher training but did not address the causal relationship between language repression and educational quality in Paraguay, which has long been known as a result of the work of Rubin (1974) and Corvalán (1985). Yet only 21 percent of children who entered primary school in 1993, on the eve of the introduction of the PEB, actually completed secondary education in 2004. There was a marked disparity in the dropout rate, with a much lower completion rate in rural areas (10 percent) than in urban areas (38 percent) (Lafuente 2006). This is a dramatic indication of the enormous challenge that the PEB still faces in combating the language repression that continues to be a major factor explaining the continuing high dropout rate in rural areas and the associated poor quality of educational outcomes.

#### THE EMERGENCE OF GUARANÍ IN THE MEDIA

Until the mid-1990s, Guaraní was almost completely absent in print media.<sup>12</sup> In 1995, a new daily tabloid, *Diario Popular*, marked a striking departure from the rest of the local press. Aimed specifically at a lower-income readership, it is written in *jopará*, a mixture of colloquial Spanish and Guaraní, and boasts that it is the most widely read newspaper in the country. Since 1998, the newspaper *La Nación* has published the "Teach Yourself Guaraní" course in the form of weekly supplements, and in September 2001 *ABC Color*, the highest-circulation newspaper, introduced *Marandú*, a daily news summary in Guaraní. By 2006, all four daily newspapers, including *Diario Popular*, regularly published color supplements for children in Guaraní. The use of Guaraní on Paraguay's five television channels has also increased somewhat. In addition to regular early-morning broadcasts targeted at farmers, news reporters and talk-show hosts now regularly communicate with viewers in Guaraní.

But the most noticeable advance in the use of Guaraní in the media is found on the airwaves. Radio stations had been strictly controlled during the Stroessner dictatorship. In 1961 Guaraní was limited to a fifteen-minute daily news broadcast on Radio Paraguay, a thirty-minute cultural program twice weekly (*Ha'e tape ñane ñe'e*) on Radio Guaraní, and a thirty-minute advice program thrice weekly to farmers on Radio Nacional

12. The exception was *Patria* (1917–1989), the mouthpiece of the Colorado Party, which carried a daily column in Guaraní.

(Kloss and McConnell 1978, 447).<sup>13</sup> By 1986, there were still only eleven private radio stations in the country, and all were required to relay the daily news bulletins of the state-owned Radio Nacional, the mouthpiece of the Colorado Party.

Since democratization began in 1989, there has been a rapid growth in the number of independent radio stations. Many evolved from the long-standing tradition in poor communities of using *bocinas* (loudspeakers) to advertise social events and spread important news. The community radio stations began to broadcast on FM in 1994, with coverage restricted to 50 kilometers. A new telecommunications law (No. 642) in 1995 provided for the regulation of such not-for-profit radio stations (Brunetti 1997). By 2006 there were an estimated 130 community radios in operation, supported by two national networks, the Red de Radios Populares del Paraguay (Network of Popular Radios of Paraguay) and the Asociación Paraguaya de Radiodifusión (Paraguayan Radio Broadcasting Association).<sup>14</sup>

There is a growing literature on the contribution of local radio to citizenship empowerment and participation in Latin America and sub-Saharan Africa (López Vigil 1997; Gumucio-Dagron 2001). The fact that Guaraní rather than Spanish has emerged as the prime language on the airwaves is striking testimony to the role that community radio plays in giving voice to the poor. Most FM stations in rural areas now broadcast overwhelmingly in Guaraní, and major radio stations in the capital city also broadcast programs in Guaraní. The dramatic growth in household ownership and usage of radio receivers during the 1990s is intimately associated with the opportunity that community radio stations provide to convert the language of communication from Spanish to Guaraní. Building on the earlier *bocina* tradition, local radio stations have become the voices of communities, now able to express themselves publicly in their household language.

#### THE EMERGENCE OF GUARANÍ IN THE POLITICAL SYSTEM

Until the 1990s, Spanish was by far the dominant language of political discourse in Paraguay. During his long thirty-five-year dictatorial rule, Stroessner never made a speech in Guaraní, and most of the Colorado caudillos who served as his ministers similarly addressed the party's peasant supporters in Spanish during their brief forays into rural areas and relied on local leaders to harangue the crowd in Guaraní in warm-up speeches. Luis María Argaña, ideologue and doyen of the Colorado Party establish-

13. The notable exceptions were the daily broadcasts in Guaraní by Radio Havana and Radio Moscow. Listening to them was considered subversive behavior by the Stroessner regime, a factor that heightened the political nature of the language.

14. Personal communication from Vicente Brunetti, September 21, 2006.

ment, who served under Stroessner for decades until conspiring in the February 1989 plot to overthrow him, also never addressed a public meeting in Guaraní.

The introduction of Guaraní on the national political scene began in the mid-1990s, when the controversial former army general Lino Oviedo became the first politician of national significance to deliver speeches primarily in Guaraní.<sup>15</sup> There is general agreement among observers that his ability to deliver speeches in a fluent and often poetic Guaraní was a major contributing factor to his political appeal, particularly among the rural poor. Such was the impact of the language factor in contributing to Oviedo's popularity that the leading politicians of all major parties subsequently used Guaraní in their own political campaigning to a much greater extent than they had in the past. A striking example was the televised debate during the presidential election campaign in April 2003, when, for the first time, all three leading contenders sought to demonstrate their fluency in Guaraní. Nicanor Duarte Frutos, candidate of the Colorado Party for the 2003–2008 presidential term, displayed a notably greater fluency than his two opponents, and this was a factor that contributed to his election victory.

Subtle negative attitudes toward Guaraní still persist in the political system. They are often expressed indirectly by mocking political opponents because of their "poor Spanish."<sup>16</sup> But these views have become far less common as a result of the revitalization of Guaraní and have been replaced by a more positive attitude toward the language. It would be no exaggeration to say that, post-Oviedo, fluency in Guaraní has become a prerequisite for anyone who aspires to high political office in the country. For example, in December 2003, it was announced that Senator Nelson Argaña, the scion of a leading Colorado elite family who was contesting the 2005 internal party elections for membership in the Junta de Gobierno, the

15. Oviedo achieved fame as an army colonel for his involvement in the 1989 overthrow of Stroessner and became head of the army in 1993. Following an alleged coup attempt in April 1996, he retired from the army in exchange for indemnity from prosecution. In September 1997 he won the Colorado Party primary for presidential candidate, but a military court found him guilty of treason for the 1996 incident and sentenced him to ten years' imprisonment. Raúl Cubas, his former running mate, became the party's new presidential candidate and won the May 1998 election. On taking office in August 1998, Cubas released Oviedo and refused to comply with a Supreme Court ruling that Oviedo be returned to prison. On March 23, 1999, Vice President Argaña was shot dead in mysterious circumstances, and the media accused Oviedo of being behind the killing. After his supporters were alleged to have shot dead eight protestors outside the Congress building, Oviedo fled into exile in Argentina. He returned to Paraguay from Brazil on June 29, 2004, and was held in detention until September 2007.

16. On December 13, 2003, *ABC Color* mocked Senator Enrique González Quintana of the opposition Partido Unión Nacional de Ciudadanos Éticos (PUNACE) for a speech "that he read with some difficulty in Spanish."

ruling body of the Colorado Party, would be studying Guaraní to enable him to “have better communication with the Colorado electorate” (ABC Color 2003). The report added that he would not commit the mistake of some political leaders who did not speak Guaraní.

#### THE EMERGENCE OF GUARANÍ AND THE EXPRESSION OF POPULAR CULTURE

It would be a mistake to suggest that the recent revitalization of the Guaraní language has somehow brought about the language’s prominence within the popular culture of Paraguay. In fact, Guaraní has long been at the heart of the expression of popular culture in the country, even though its expression remained repressed for centuries.<sup>17</sup> By contrast, the current revitalization is leading to a much greater acceptance of the public expression of that culture. This is evidenced by four best-selling books published during the 1990s, each of which reflects on the idiosyncrasies of the Paraguayan character, often in a self-deprecatory and amusing manner.

*En busca del hueso perdido* (In search of the lost bone) by Helio Vera (2003, first published in 1990), became one of the biggest selling books by a Paraguayan author in recent decades.<sup>18</sup> Through an ironic rereading of famous Paraguayan writers of the past, Vera demolishes many national myths about the alleged uniqueness of the *raza paraguaya*. *El paraguayo: Un hombre fuera de su mundo* (The Paraguayan: A man outside his own world) by Saro Vera (1997) provides a comprehensive survey of Paraguayan attitudes and shows how the Guaraní language is essential to the country’s oral tradition. *Más paraguayo que la mandioca* (More Paraguayan than mandioca) by Aníbal Romero Sanabria (1996) is a collection of fifty short articles that provide an assessment of the virtues and vices of the Paraguayan *teko* (way of doing things), plus one hundred phrases in Guaraní that encapsulate what it means to be Paraguayan. *Arriero porte* (How a man behaves) by Miguel Ángel Pangrazio (1996) stresses the link between Guaraní and Paraguayan identity. He pays homage to popular wisdom with a long list of common sayings in Guaraní. All four books combine a frank and often highly self-critical assessment of Paraguayan culture with an insistence on the intimate relationship between the Paraguayan psyche and the Guaraní language. In a country with a deep-rooted oral tradition, a backward education system, and the virtual absence of public libraries, readership remains extremely limited. Nevertheless, the suc-

17. A striking example is that of Luís Osmer Meza, better known as Luis Alberto del Paraná, the world-famous Paraguayan harpist from the 1950s, and until his death in 1974, who performed and recorded almost exclusively in Spanish with his group Los Paraguayos.

18. By 2006 eleven editions had appeared, with estimated total sales of ten thousand (personal communication from Helio Vera, July 4, 2006).



cess of these books is evidence of a growing self-confidence and pride in Paraguayan popular culture and in the Guaraní language that provides its foundation.

The PEB has also contributed to the emergence of written Guaraní on a scale unparalleled in the history of Paraguay. Initially this took the form of language textbooks but has now spread to poetry and short stories. The enhanced role of the language has been reflected in the selection of awards for literary and cultural endeavor. In 2003, the annual national prize for literature was awarded for the first time for a ballad in Guaraní, the epic sixteen-thousand-verse *Ñorairõ ñemombe'u gérra guasúrõ guare, guarani ñe'ëpu pjoapyé* (Ballad of battles of the War of the Triple Alliance) by Carlos Martínez Gamba. In 2005, a national prize, the Medalla Presidencial Guaraní, was established for outstanding contribution to Paraguayan music, popular culture, and the Guaraní language.

Further evidence of the revitalization of Guaraní in popular culture is provided by the greater visibility of the language in everyday life. From the mid-1990s, there has been a noticeable increase in the use of Guaraní on billboard advertisements as well as for the names of shops and commercial companies. There has also been a marked increase in the use of Guaraní names for municipalities. In 2002, 75 of the 224 municipalities in the country already had Guaraní names (DGEEC 2004). But these were all granted long ago, and municipalities created in the twentieth century were not given Guaraní names. Yet of the five new municipalities created from 2002 to 2006, four were given Guaraní names: Itapúa Poty, Jasy Kañy, Santa Rosa del Aguaray, and Yryvukuá. A most dramatic example of this new visibility occurred in July 1999, when Paraguay hosted the Latin America football championship. In a marked departure from previous international events held in Paraguay, in the opening ceremony President González Macchi welcomed foreign visitors in Guaraní.

#### THE REVITALIZATION OF GUARANÍ AND POVERTY REDUCTION

The revitalization of Guaraní has major implications for a crucial area of governance—poverty reduction. Poverty remains widespread in Paraguay and is more prevalent in rural areas. In 2007, 24.4 percent of the rural population lived in extreme poverty, compared to 15.7 percent of the urban population. As a result, despite rapid urbanization in recent decades, 52 percent of the 1,174,665 people in extreme poverty lived in rural areas (DGEEC 2008).

The close correlation between monolingualism in Guaraní and levels of relative and absolute poverty in Paraguay is well known. Some 94 percent of the rural population in extreme poverty and 68 percent of the urban population in extreme poverty live in households where Guaraní is the primary language (World Bank 2001, 47). The two departments in

which poverty levels are highest, San Pedro and Caazapá, are also the ones in which monolingualism in Guaraní is highest. Furthermore, "The very bottom of the income pyramid is comprised almost entirely of Guaraní speakers" (Morley 2001, 8). In 2007, Guaraní was the main language spoken in 66 percent of households in the lowest income quintile, compared with 23 percent for Guaraní and Spanish, and only 10 percent for Spanish (DGEEC 2008, Table 6). Education and health data confirm this association between poverty incidence and Guaraní. An education ministry study in 2000 revealed that Guaraní-speaking children are less active in school. Teachers reported that they were 50 percent more likely than Spanish-speaking children to come to school hungry, to be tired and to fall asleep, to have to work outside the home, to not have schoolbooks, and to not have a place to do homework (MEC 2000). The infant mortality rate among the Guaraní-speaking population is three times higher than the national average (Programa Naciones Unidas para el Desarrollo 2002, 43). In 2004, mothers living in households where Guaraní was the main language were more than five times more likely to receive no medical attention during their pregnancy than those living in households where Spanish was the main language (Centro Paraguayo de Estudios de Población 2005, 214).

In such a sociolinguistic context, a poverty reduction strategy clearly needs to place emphasis on Guaraní both as a targeting mechanism and as the prime means of communication in order to empower civil society and "give voice to the poor."<sup>19</sup> But there is little sign that the state is incorporating the need to communicate in Guaraní in its limited poverty reduction efforts to date. This absence reflects the wider failure to develop a bilingual communication strategy across the public administration as a whole. Despite the statement in the 1992 Constitution that Paraguay is a bilingual nation and the designation of Guaraní as an official language (Article 140), no enabling legislation has yet been passed in the form of a language law. As a result, the state has done little to enforce the fundamental language rights of its citizens by enhancing the visibility of Guaraní. With the exception of a few departments of public health, neither central government ministries nor municipalities provide bilingual information to citizens in the form of notices and leaflets for accessing basic public services (Pic-Gillard 2003).<sup>20</sup> The Paraguayan judicial system re-

19. Several writers have pointed to an alleged weakness of civil society as an explanatory factor for the slow consolidation of democracy in Paraguay (Rivarola 1994; Ocampos and Rodríguez 1999; Carrizosa 2003). However, this assertion is very questionable. The voice of the poor is indeed weak, but this is because the prevailing political and social order discriminates so strongly against the use of Guaraní by civil society in its communication with the state.

20. The National Statistical Office is the only central government body that requires its staff to demonstrate fluency in both Guaraní and Spanish.

mains weighted enormously against the poor. In the absence of any state provision of legal aid, poor defendants remain at the mercy of venal lawyers and corrupt prosecutors. Democratization saw the construction of a swath of costly new court buildings in rural areas in the 1990s. Yet there are no moves to introduce the Guaraní language into court proceedings, and witness statements are not permitted in Guaraní.<sup>21</sup> Farmers who are monolingual in Guaraní also suffer from the absence of a bilingual communication strategy by the state toward its citizens. "That puts them at a significant disadvantage in marketing their crops, making applications for credit from the banking system, or considering new crops or new techniques of cultivation. This is one of the factors that has to be kept in mind by anyone wishing to help the poor or introduce more modern technology into the farming sector" (Morley 2001, 8).

The failure of the state to address the language question has also reduced the pro-poor impact of the limited decentralization process that has accompanied democratization since 1989. Municipal mayors were directly elected for the first time in 1991, and a new elected tier of government was created at the departmental level in 1993. Yet there is widespread disillusionment with the performance of local government, which displays a low level of efficiency in service delivery, weak citizen participation, and the absence of any explicit focus on poverty reduction. A major reason for the failure of decentralization to usher in greater social inclusion by giving expression to local voice has been the absence of any obligation of municipal authorities to introduce a bilingual communication strategy. Instead, decentralization has tended to strengthen the power of local elites who reside in the urban municipal headquarters (*cabecera municipal*). As one perceptive researcher has noted: "The traveller to the rural interior is struck by the preponderance of Guaraní and the need to rely on bilingual interpreters. The interior is dotted with small urban areas, and the close correlation between incidence of bilingualism and urban development is everywhere obvious. The schools, businesses, churches and administrative offices of rural towns are havens for Spanish, but a stroll down a dirt road leading from the centre square takes one into the monolingual Guaraní world" (Gynan 2001, 66).

## CONCLUSION

A 2003 World Bank report on inequality in Latin America concluded that only "deep reforms of political, social and economic institutions" could both produce better growth rates and reduce poverty and inequality. Any such reforms (including land reform) would need to enhance

21. Personal communication from Tadeo Zarratea, lawyer and campaigner for the introduction of Guaraní into the judicial system, February 22, 2008.

access not only to education and opportunities but also to political influence and power, thereby correcting a long historical process in the region (World Bank 2003b). The current revitalization of Guaraní is a crucial mechanism for the poor to begin to exert such political influence and power in one of the most unequal societies in Latin America. Guaraní speakers from small-farmer backgrounds currently remain extremely underrepresented at all levels of the political system. In mid-2008, only one member of Congress, Senator Sixto Pereira, was a small-farmer activist by background. This gross underrepresentation of subaltern classes in the formal political system is a striking feature of contemporary governance and is closely associated with the extremely high inequalities in income and land distribution.

In response to these growing inequalities, a social movement comprising small farmers and the rural landless has grown rapidly since the early 1990s. Its key demand is for reform of Paraguay's highly inequitable distribution of land ownership, a structural reform that has long been identified as crucial to poverty reduction and sustainable development (González 1931; Pastore 1972; Fogel 1989; Galeano and Rivarola 1999). The two organizations that provide the backbone of the movement, the Mesa Coordinadora de Organizaciones Campesinas (MCNOC, or Coordinating Board of Small Farmer Organizations) and the Federación Nacional Campesina (FNC, or National Small Farmer Federation), are both fervent advocates of the use of Guaraní in their campaigning and in their negotiations with the state. In March 2007, seventeen small-farmer organizations, including the MCNOC and FNC, sent an open letter to candidates for the 2008 presidential elections, calling on them to *guaranizar* the Paraguayan state.<sup>22</sup> As the invisible barriers to entry posed by the perceived shame of Guaraní are gradually challenged by a growing pride in the national language, powerful new drivers of change are beginning to penetrate the political system. In late 2006, a new left-wing political movement, Tekojoja, emerged around the figure of Fernando Lugo, the former bishop of San Pedro (1994–2005), one of the poorest departments of Paraguay and the one with the highest rate of Guaraní monolingualism. In August 2007, MCNOC entered its first-ever alliance with a political movement when it agreed to support Lugo's successful campaign for the presidency. At Lugo's August 15 swearing-in ceremony for the 2008–2013 term of office, the national anthem was sung in Guaraní for the first time ever at an official presidential inauguration, a move that dramatically symbolized the current revitalization of the language.

Language policy remains a hidden aspect of the governance agenda. Yet, as this article suggests, it exerts a strong underlying influence on

22. *Chokokue atykuéra ñe'ê umi oñekuaove'êva paraguái 2008-pe* (Message from the farmers' organizations to the 2008 presidential candidates), March 23, 2007.

many of the governance indicators promoted by the World Bank. Pride in and respect for the language of the poor is a crucial ingredient in the recipe for empowerment, accountability of the state, and citizen participation in development. Indeed, the catalyst for the current language revitalization in Paraguay has not been the state. Despite the rhetoric of the 1992 constitution, by 2008 the Guaraní modality of the bilingual education program remained stifled, and the state had yet to pass a law that would make Guaraní a language of the public administration system on a par with Spanish. The advances that nevertheless have been made in language revitalization despite this official indifference are a striking testimony to the deep currents of social change now welling to the surface in Paraguayan society.

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