

# ***Cabeceras Aid Project***

## **Iquito Language Documentation Project**

Phase One, Summer 2002

During the summer of 2002, Cabeceras fieldworkers will carry out the first phase of a three-year plan to document and revitalize Iquito, a highly endangered language spoken in northeastern Peru. This phase of research is a collaborative effort among a team of four graduate students at the University of Texas at Austin and is affiliated with UT's Center for the Indigenous Languages of Latin America and the Archive of the Indigenous Languages of Latin America, also based at UT.

This field project will include basic language documentation work; the training of Iquito individuals to carry out independent language documentation work in their community; the creation of language materials that can be used to teach members of the Iquito community – both adults and children in the bilingual primary school – to speak their own heritage language.

This project is the result of preliminary investigations carried out by Cabeceras fieldworkers in July 2001 in San Antonio, the last thriving Iquito community in the Amazon Basin of Peru. In May 2000, Cabeceras learned through contacts in Peru that Iquito individuals were seeking outside resources for revitalizing their heritage language. We were deeply intrigued to learn of a community actively seeking outside collaborators, so in 2001 we traveled to San Antonio to begin language documentation research and to offer our organization's assistance in developing a long-term language revitalization project.

Those intensive initial investigations last summer led us to two conclusions: the community has a serious interest in developing a language revitalization project; and they both desire and require material resources and outside assistance to make this project a reality. In order to bring together the community's interests and the resources Cabeceras Aid Project has to offer, we worked with community members to design an intensive revitalization project. Our discussions led to the approval of a *convenio* (agreement) among the Iquito community directorship, the municipal government, local Peruvian NGOs specializing in indigenous bilingual education, and Cabeceras Aid Project to collaborate intensively between 2002 and 2004 toward revitalizing Iquito.

As part of the *convenio*, Cabeceras Aid Project agreed to recruit and supervise small teams of linguists to carry out intensive language work and training in San Antonio during each summer. All agreed that after the term of this *convenio*, Cabeceras Aid Project would take an advisory role to the local linguists we train. Cabeceras Aid Project will provide salaries for these linguists and community consultants for at least the first three years of the *convenio*, and beyond that to the best of the organization's ability.

A profound change in perspective has taken place in San Antonio in the last five years that has made this exciting project possible. San Antonio, located about 120 kilometers from the city of Iquitos, currently has a population of approximately 400 individuals, most of whom are ethnically Iquito. At the time of their initial contacts with Jesuit missionaries in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, some 10,000 Iquitos are thought to have lived in the region; now there are fewer than 500. Four

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centuries of contact with outsiders has nearly erased Iquito language and culture. At present, only 26 fluent Iquito speakers remain – 15 live in San Antonio and 11 live in the surrounding area. The youngest fluent Iquito speaker is about 52 years old.

And yet, after four centuries of tremendous pressure – both explicit pressure from powerful local mestizos and implicit pressure from the Spanish-only and anti-indigenous attitudes long held by representatives of the Peruvian government – and the near-extinction of their language, the residents of San Antonio recently have begun to express their opinions that the Iquito language *is* valuable and important, and should be kept alive. Many older people commented to us last summer that ‘one must no longer be ashamed to speak’ Iquito. Clearly, the social stigma associated with indigenous identity is disappearing in San Antonio.

In addition to the immediate and tangible results that this project will have for the Iquitos themselves, Cabeceras hopes that the results of our research will provide a body of data, analyses, and insights that can be used by others engaged in indigenous language revitalization work. While in the Iquitos region in 2001, Cabeceras established relationships with representatives of the municipal government and with members of the regional bilingual education community. We believe that by developing these regional connections, our three years of work with Iquito will help to strengthen other indigenous language revitalization projects in the region.

100% of the contributions made to Cabeceras Aid Project for this project will be used to generate language materials in and on the Iquito language, and to build a small language center in San Antonio that will serve as a place to do research and to hold Iquito language classes over the years.

*Thank you for your support of this innovative collaborative project!*