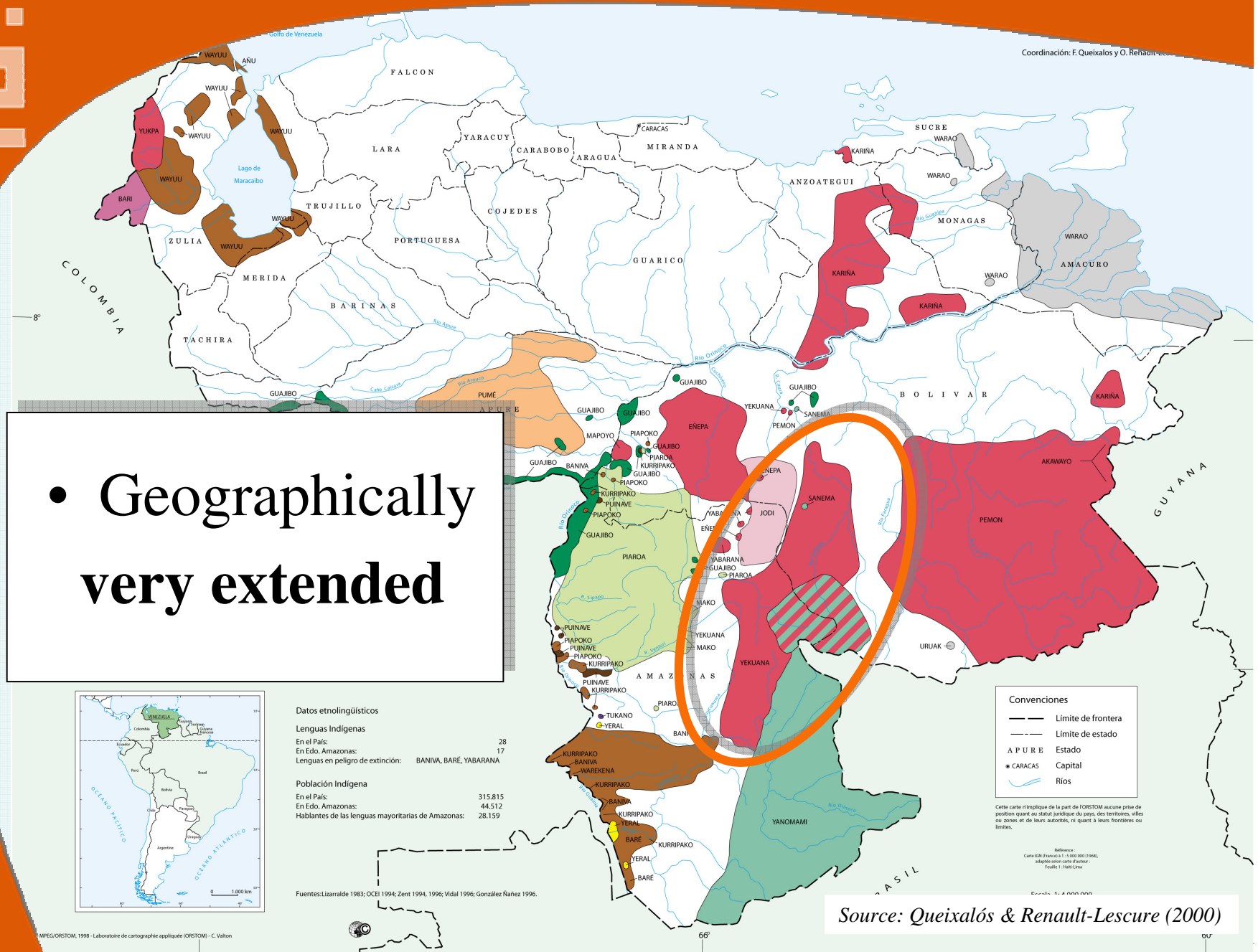




Fieldwork
among the
Ye'kwana
of Venezuela.

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Université Lyon 2

The Ye'kwana: a Carib speaking group



• Geographically very extended



Datos etnolingüísticos

Lenguas Indígenas	28
En el País:	17
En Edo. Amazonas:	
Lenguas en peligro de extinción:	BANIVA, BARÉ, YABARANA
Población Indígena	
En el País:	315.815
En Edo. Amazonas:	44.512
Habltantes de las lenguas mayoritarias de Amazonas:	28.159

Fuentes: Lizarralde 1983; OCEI 1994; Zent 1994, 1996; Vidal 1996; González Nañez 1996.

Convenciones

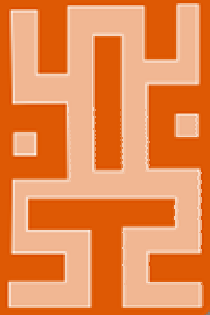
—	Limite de frontera
- - -	Limite de estado
A P U R E	Estado
●	CARACAS Capital
~	Ríos

Cette carte n'implique de la part de l'ORSTOM aucune prise de position quant au statut juridique des pays, des territoires, villes ou zones et de leurs autorités, ni quant à leurs frontières ou limites.

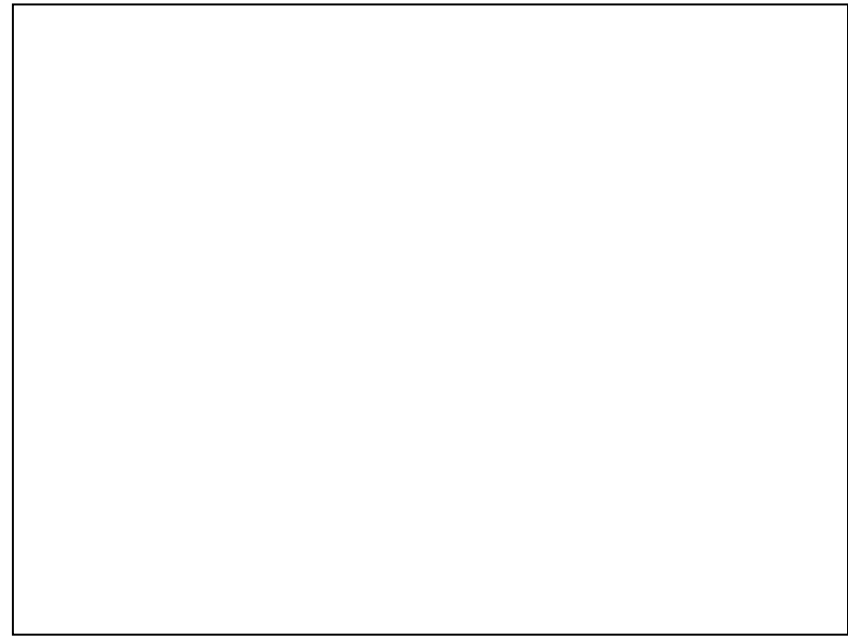
Bibliografía
Carta IGN (Francia) 2:1 5 000 000 (1946), adaptada del cartógrafo Paulin - Foulet 1:1 000 000

Escala: 1:4 000 000

Source: Queixalós & Renault-Lescure (2000)



- Hunter-gatherers located along rivers
 - About **5.000 speakers** (more than 4.000 in two states of Venezuela, less than 500 in Brazil)



1. What makes the field context seem ideal for documentation
2. Field experience
3. The other side of the story
4. Proposed strategy

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**What makes
the field context seem
ideal for documentation**



1. What makes the field context seem ideal for documentation

National context

- National political context apparently favourable towards indigenous rights
 - Indigenous rights included in the 1998 Constitution
 - Organic Law of Indigenous Peoples in 2006
 - Ministry of Indigenous Peoples and a specific program Misión Guacaipuro intendend for indigenous populations
- Being from the country makes it easier to work in it



1. What makes the field context seem ideal for documentation

Academic context

- Trained and supervised by senior linguists specialists of Amerindian languages in Lyon, France and a Cariban specialist in Eugene, USA (Spike Gildea)
- Sponsored by a French linguist in Venezuela (Marie Claude Mattei Muller) and acquainted with other linguists in the country (José Alvarez, Luis Oquendo)
- Existing and ongoing work on the Cariban family with a network of linguists



1. What makes the field context seem ideal for documentation

Community context

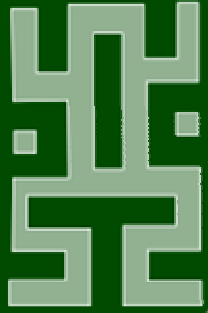
- Around 75% of the Ye'kwana population is monolingual
- A small part educated in Spanish, thus capable of helping with transcription and translation work
- Some Ye'kwana adults have engaged in some kind of cultural documentation (writing down traditional stories and chants, filming ceremonies)
- Ye'kwana organization created as interface with non-ye'kwana. Tries to coordinate the work with different partners for the development of the community

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**Field
experience**

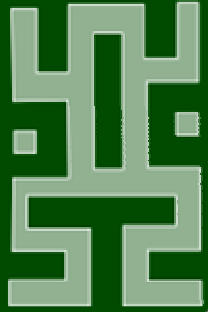
First field trip

- “Pilot project”, self funded, conducted during July-August 2006 among the ye’kwana population in urban (Ciudad Bolívar) and rural (Maripa) non-traditional areas
- Work on the phonetics and phonology with word lists
- Very small sample of spontaneous recordings (2 texts) translated in a sketchy way
- Approval from the community representatives for a larger project for a complete description of the grammar



A longer visit

- Longer stay in Venezuela from November 2007 to April 2008 funded by AALLED.
- Two months in a village in the forest and two and a half months in Ciudad Bolívar (at first supposed to be only an institutional visit)
- Data collection for morphological description and for the expression of space
 - 28 texts recorded (2h30) including tales, personal stories, conversations, a radio communication, parts of a class
 - 12 recorded sessions of video elicitation for path (research team Trajectoire video material)
 - Half of the texts transcribed, translated and elicited. Only 4 sessions of videos completely transcribed and translated

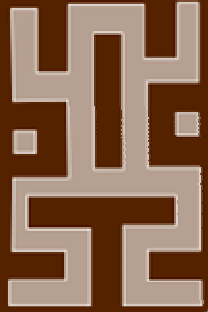


A longer visit

- Most of the analysis had to be done after the forest visit
 - Few bilinguals in the village: mainly those with a job (teachers, nurses)
 - Too many community activities during December through February (multiple day parties, hunting trips, ceremonies)
 - Only able to do a first transcription and translation of the 2 longest texts
- Stay in Ciudad Bolívar became part of the field trip
 - Hosted in the Ye'kwana organization headquarters with all the Ye'kwana families on transit
 - Work with language consultants instead of a research visit to an institution
- If I had not had the extra time (and extra money) in the field, I would have had little material to work on the morphological analyses

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**The other side
of the story**

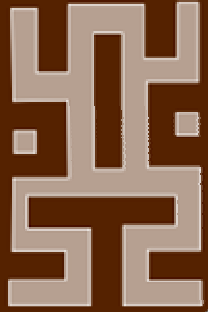


Downside 1: ineffectual political measures

- Many measures in the direction of the indigenous population are carried out by recent structures that are still defining their area of action
 - often the origin power conflicts that prevent actions of been undertaken
- Government invests a lot of money in the population but for the Ye'kwana:
 - it is a factor creating an unknown situation of “poor” and “rich” families
 - it facilitates urbanization of families having a member with a salary (kids are sent to the city schools earlier, people go to the city for no specific reason or just to buy consumables...)

*Downside 2:
Education and Nationality,
a double-edged sword*

- Apparent tendency among linguists and anthropologists in Venezuela to be over-protective of “their group”
- Hostility precedings of local researchers toward foreign researchers
 - even though I was born and raised in Venezuela I’ve done all my theoretical training in linguistics abroad

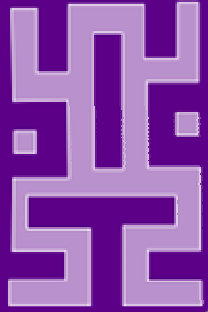


*Downside 3:
signs of decay in language use*

- Although women and children are for the most part monolinguals, men also hold an important role in language transmission
 - 40-50 year-old men that usually would be learning from older men are busy with new activities, and sometimes are even away from the village
- The community has coined terms that express new concepts coming from outside but Spanish terms usually take over even for those that do not speak Spanish

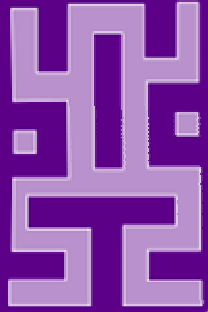
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**Proposed
strategy**



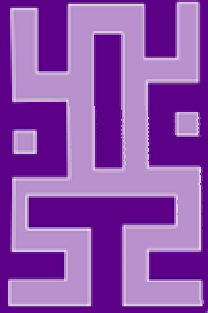
Some things that need fixing before starting a documentation project

- Members of the community that actively worry about preserving their cultural knowledge don't necessarily like working with each other
 - Few attempts have been made to coordinate efforts
- Most of the time, community members get involved in a project while there is a salary coming from a collaborative project but won't take over when it becomes an only-
Ye'kwana thing
- Projects *à la occidentale* do not take into account cultural time constraints
 - Men and women have tasks to do in their respective villages and can't always leave their hometowns
 - It is not easy to engage in long-term commitments because culturally Ye'kwana do not plan in the long term



Prioritizing and finding a middle ground

- Documentation needs previous description and this is almost non-existent in the case of Ye'kwana
- People that are willing to document cultural practices are not necessarily the best technicians
 - Need to get other people interested and involved too
- Documentation aims at more than just traditional cultural practices
 - Ground work for explaining in what way everyday activities are also important in documentation



Adapted fieldwork

- Taking community members along on trips to the villages
- Different kind of trips for different kind of purposes
 - A short verification trip with one main consultant to a known village that concentrates on linguistic description
 - A longer trip with a team with stops in different villages where community members have identified a person they want to document
- Workshops for training in linguistics, technical skills, practical issues
 - Both while in the villages and when there is an opportunity in the city



Thank you...