Preserving the unheard, promoting the unspoken:
The challenges of documenting, preserving, and promoting Kibiri,
a critically endangered isolate

Moisés Velasquez
PhD candidate
Université Sorbonne Nouvelle – Paris 3
moises.velasquez-perez@sorbonne-nouvelle.fr

Paper presented at the 2022 Conference of the Linguistic Society of Papua New Guinea:
Preserving and Promoting the Indigenous Languages of the South Pacific in IDIL 2022-2032

University of Papua New Guinea and National Research Institute
Port Moresby, September 21st-22nd, 2022

1. Introduction

Kibiri [prm][1] is an underresearched isolate language known by 32 people living at Kikori and other villages around the Kikori river, at Kikori district in the Gulf province of Papua New Guinea. The actual number of tribal members is probably 300. The tribal members as well as L1 speakers live scattered throughout Kikori and the surrounding villages and with members of non-Kibiri tribes: Kerewo, Porome, Kope, etc. The only remaining speakers are people above 40 years old and they mostly communicate in Hiri Motu (henceforth HM) among them and with family members. Others fully master Kerewo [kxz]. This paper presents ungoing research and is the very first introduction to Kibiri's sociolinguistic situation with an accent on how lack of language use and linguistic ideologies affect language documentation and description and the researcher's work. A brief description of verbal number in Kibiri is also outlined to exemplify how complexity can be found in moribund languages in the world.

The data and information presented in this paper were obtained through direct participant observation, interviews, and fieldwork methods during my field trip in the area from January 2022 to late November 2022. I have obtained about 70 hours of first-hand recordings on Kibiri which are currently being processed. The results presented in this paper are therefore preliminary and might change as my research and analysis on Kibiri continues.

2. The Kibiri

The Kibiri are a tribe of about 300 people[2] that live at Kikori (-7.411888, 144.2477457), Doibo (-7.457422, 144.2712164), Veiru/Babeio (-7.4726236, 144.2534816), Kekea 1 and Kekea 2. Others are in Kerema (-7.9596229, 145.7724355), Port Moresby and the youngest speaker (40 years old) spends some time in Veraibari (-7.6792013, 144.5176577) and in

---

[1] Kibiri does not have its own ISO code. This one is for Porome, Kibiri's sister language. Due to the poor knowledge there has always been about Kibiri, previous research have considered Kibiri and Porome as the very same language.

[2] This information was unofficially provided by the United Church pastor and tribe leader that hosted me in his house during the field trip in 2022, Kimuri Kaini, a Kibiri-Kerewo man himself. It has been difficult to find official numbers for tribal members, as the Kibiri are to my sense, a somehow invisible group among other groups like Kerewo, Porome and Kope who have more visibility at the administrative and political levels.

Babeio[3]. Kikori village is currently a commercial centre where different tribes meet and trade. The biggest tribe in the area are the Kerewo (Kenneth Korokai, tribal leader, p.c), and members of other groups can also be found: Porome, Koriki, Kope, Rumu, and others due to the commercial importance of Kikori. There is currently not a specific Kibiri village, but oral historical accounts by the speakers themselves highlight the fact that the Kibiri originated from Doibo village.

The name *Kibiri* is of unclear origin; the speakers relate the name to the *Kitouri* tree. I have not been able to identify a derivational pattern that can explain this. The exact species name of the tree is yet to be identified, see Image 1 for a picture).
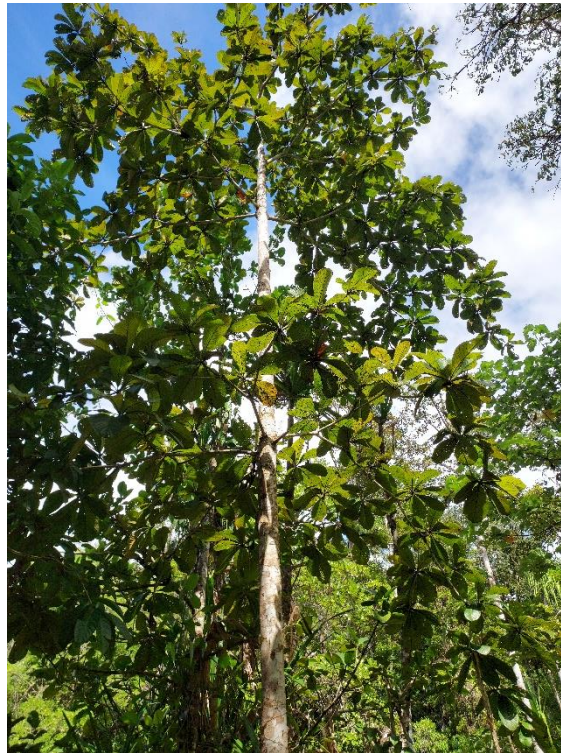

Image 1. Kitouri tree at Uro Creek, by Moisés Velasquez, June 4th, 2022

An alternative endonym is *Kibiri moro* (lit. Kibiri people.of). After discussion with other tribes at Kikori, there is no exonym for the Kibiri apart from just *Kibiri.* However, the Kibiri do have exonyms for other tribes: *Kuramiri* for the Kerewo, *Barai moro* for the Porome, *Kairi moro* for the Rumu, and *Morigi moro* for the Turama.

Just like the other Kikori groups, the Kibiri rely heavily on fishing, hunting, and cropping. They do their fishing on the Kikori river up towards Babaguna and beyond. They grow banana, pineapple, etc. at Uro Creek. Some of the Kibiri possess ancestral lands which are used by Total and other companies for oil extraction, and thus are landowners that have a higher economic

---

[3] It should be noted that Veiru is the old missionary station that closed in 1968 and today there is a small group of Kibiri people (non-speakers) living there. The only speaker there is Irinare Iairi (about 60). I could not obtain the exact GPS location data for Babeio, where I spent 3 months of my field trip, but it is rather close to Veiru, only 3 minutes away by foot. It was impossible to obtain data for Kekea 1 and Kekea 2, which are villages very close to the Kikori Hospital, about 10 minutes away by foot. Kekea 1 and 2 have recently become home of some Omati groups like Barikewa and Mouwase.

position. Other Kibiri are carpenters. The wives are housewives and sellers at the Kikori market, but they also engage heavily in shellfish fishing.

The Kibiri are Christians, either from the United Church, Baptist, or Seventh Day Adventist confession. They also retain a few traditional ancestral beliefs, namely the ones related to health.

The Kibiri are organized in clans. Clans are usually named after an ancestor, animal or natural entity. Some of them are: *Oatara moro* (F ancestor), *Iriba moro* (M ancestor), *Neuri moro* (name of a mountain), *Doibo moro* (name of a river).

As it has been said, a very small proportion of the tribal population knows Kibiri (but they do not use on a regular basis, at it will be explained later). All the Kibiri, including the speakers, use HM on a regular basis and in all contexts of communication, from the oldest members to the kids. At least the people in their 40's and up may also master Kerewo, a Kiwaian language (not the teens and kids, as far as I am aware). They also know Tok Pisin but they rarely use it. The few speakers left are also able to understand Porome, as it is Kibiri's sister language. Knowledge of English will depend on how much schooling the Kibiri have had: usually Kibiri teens do not speak English, it is only the adults who have had contact with English-speakers that can communicate in this language, including the Kibiri speakers.

I could hardly see the few Kibiri speakers using the language among themselves spontaneously. They do not usually pay visits to each other but when they meet HM is preferred and, sometimes, they include a few Kibiri utterances in their HM speech. I also noticed it is rather common for the children generation (fluent in HM and Kerewo, 30 to 50 years old) to include specific Kibiri utterances (1) – (2) and referential NP's in their HM speech.

(1) (bateri   tere)   pou-are!
    white   man   come-IPFV
    'The white man is coming!' (Me usually going to meet Kibiri people somewhere)

(2) i   wai=ba
    sago.ABST   NEG=DECL
    'There is no sago (in the house) (Observed)'

(3) Moses **ia** **ura**   **di**   **uburo**
    Moses **3SG** **like**   **coconut.ABST**   **water.CSTR**
    'Moses likes coconut water' (Observed)[4]

Among the speakers with whom I worked, three claim to be able to write in Kibiri "by following the phonics". Lenny Waime has written four Kibiri songs and he has got the lyrics written in a notebook, and I could also communicate remotely with Gary Bissuee through Whatsapp and he provides Kibiri data in written form.

---

[4] The blue corresponds to HM and the red to Kibiri

3. The language

The Kibiri call their language *Kibiri moro dara* 'Kibiri people.of language.of' or simply *Kibiri*. It is considered an isolate (Hammarström 2017 : 297) altogether with Porome [prm], its sister language, and which is in a healthier state[5] [6].The earliest comparative study that was carried out on Porome is Franklin (1973, 1975), which revealed that only 5-8% of the lexicon under study was similar to Purari [iar], whose genetic affiliation remains undetermined too (Pawley & Hammarström 2018:79, 81). Ross (2005) considered Porome to be linked to Kiwai, though Pawley & Hammarström (2018) refuted the claim since Ross based his argument on pronouns comparison only. Pawley & Hammarström (2018) add that there is not enough evidence to state that Porome is linked to Trans New Guinea.

Before my fieldwork on Kibiri, all previous research was done only on Porome: The aforementioned references; Franklin (1973), Z'graggen (1975) for wordlists; one recording of 47 min made by Thomas Dutton (1980?) on PARADISEC and more recently Robert Petterson from SIL published a series of documents: a picture dictionary (2010) and a paper on phonology and morphosyntax (2019). The only available data on Kibiri was Franklin (1973) where he compares the personal pronouns and six sentences (to distinguish tense) between Kibiri and Porome.

Although my research is focused on Kibiri, during my work in Kikori I was able to record 1000 isolated words in Porome[7]. On phonological grounds, so far, the most common difference I have found between Kibiri and Porome is that Porome retains a /g/ in intervocalic position, where Kibiri does not; this happens in a systematic way, see Table 1 below. Other cases concern differences in pronunciation, like 'Rain'.

Porome	Kibiri	Gloss
/ki**gi**mi ^{HHH}/	/ki:mi ^{HH}/[8]	'Head'
/pa**g**ai ^{HH}/	/pai ^{H}/	'Forehead, face'
/ka**ga**pu ^{HHL}/	/ka:pui ^{HH}/	'Leg, foot'
/vi**gi** ^{HH}/	/vi: ^{LH}/	'Paddle'
/**n**ei ^{LH}/	/**d**ei ^{LH}/	'Rain'

Table 1. Comparison of words between Porome and Kibiri

Kibiri and Porome display lexical differences; so far I have identified a few like *Uperepi* (K) vs *Timuri* (P) 'Prawn'; *aparo* (K) vs *maina* (P) 'Good'.

---

[5] Porome was first studied by Thomas Dutton in the 80's, then by Martin Steer from ANU at the time, and more recently by Robert Petterson from SIL, for Bible translation purposes. The Porome territories are Ero (-7.449860417713396, 144.36554790135614) and Wowou (7.415668035557914, 44.3166530890694), around Aird Hills. The Porome living in Kikori all use Porome as a means of communication. I was also told by the Porome themselves that everybody speaks Porome in the aforementioned territories, including kids.

[6] Actually, in a few references the language is called Kibiri-Porome (e.g Hammarström 2017) due to the lack of research on the two languages. During my fieldwork, it became clear to me that Kibiri and Porome are related and they are mutually intelligible; the Kibiri and Porome are aware of the fact that their languages display differences and they consider themselves as separate groups from each other.

[7] Many thanks to Wendy Dik, Porome speaker, for her availability to record the words.

[8] Note that on 'Head', 'Leg, foot' and 'Paddle', Kibiri has a vowel length where Porome has a full /g/-initial syllable. One can suggest a process of consonant lenition and then elision: [k] > [g] > ø, then a full dropping of the syllable and a lengthening of the previous syllable's vowel as a result. But at the moment I cannot provide a full conclusion of this as the work is in process.

The Kibiri also mention there are two dialects within Kibiri: Coastal Kibiri and Inland Kibiri, of which little I can say, as the number of Kibiri speakers is so slow. Eramiri Nauku gave me one example: *ikeri* (Coastal) vs *ipori* (Inland) 'go across'.

4. Language contact and language loss

In sections 1 and 2 above I already outlined the sociolinguistic situation of Kibiri in terms of language use. In the following lines I give more details on Kibiri's attrition status and the reasons for this.

During my interviews with the Kibiri speakers, they all individually agreed that there are two reasons for language loss.

The first and more important reason is intermarriage with Kerewo members. I am unable to give the time on which intermarriage started but according to the age and language proficiency of the current remaining speakers and their families, I am inclined to say language transmission started decaying most probably in 1970's. A typical Kibiri family in the 1970's was composed of a Kibiri and a Kerewo parent and Kerewo and/or HM took over daily communication in the house; this triggered the process of lack of transmission. An example of this is the case of the Orovi brothers and the Bibi brothers.

The Orovi brothers are Ereke†, Matthew, Randy, Ouri†, Segera, Samuel, Eva†, Daniel†, Alice, Donald, and Dovi†. They are Orovi† and Kaiti†'s children and they both were speakers. The oldest living brother is Matthew (73), with whom I worked. I also could work one time with Samuel (about 55) and could directly observe his interactions in his house with his wife Bakoi (another Kibiri speaker). Both Matthew and Samuel are fluent speakers. I met Donald (about in his late 40's) a few times in social settings, and he reportedly has a passive knowledge of the language. I often heard of Segera and Alice, but they were in Port Moresby for almost the entire year and could never work with them. However, Matthew stated they could speak Kibiri. The older children have a solid knowledge of Kibiri, whereas the youngest have a passive one. One could suggest that at some point in the family history, the parents stopped passing on the language to the youngest children.

The Bibi brothers are Baunu, Kakoro, Peri, Wabi, Ibabu, Kewo, Duogi, Able, Yabari and June. They are the children of Bibi† and Tarubei†. I was only able to work with Baunu (57) and Kakoro (55). Baunu said Bibi and Tarubei never spoked to him in Kibiri and that he learned the language by hearing his parents talking with other people. Kakoro said that their parents spoke to him in HM and sometimes in Kibiri in the house when he was a kid. What is true is that nowadays Baunu has a passive knowledge of Kibiri but Kakoro is a fluent speaker. I met Peri (about in his mid-40's), Wabi, Ibabu and Duogi in social settings (all in their early to mid 40's) and they all have passive knowledge of Kibiri: they recall words and can form a few sentences. All this confirms my observation that the transmission started decaying in the house most probably in the 1970's or even a little later.

Nowadays, the current Kibiri household is composed of a Kibiri grandparent and a Kerewo (or another tribe) grandparent. The children generation have enough knowledge of the

language to be able to understand what their parents are saying but are not able to speak. The grandchildren generation (kids, teens and young adults in their 20's) understand only a few words or sentences. Usually, the children and grandchildren generation have continued marrying Kerewo and thus have more solid knowledge of Kerewo. The Kibiri use terms like *Pure Kibiri* (the parents are or were both Kibiri, a rare situation) and *Mixed Kibiri* (one parent is Kibiri and the other is not, a more common case)[9].

Kibiri's structure shows evidence of the prolonged contact with Kerewo, mainly in the lexicon, see (4) – (6) below. The Kerewo items are in bold. In (6) the speaker introduced *totonai* from HM.

(4) **epato** kabiro
    ear   big
    '(My) ears are big' (< [**h**ɛpatɔ])

(5) opoi   **gido**-da   do-me   pi-me
    today **song**-DEF.SG AUX-NON3.HODFUT   AUX-1SG
    'I am going to sing it' (< [gidɔ])

(6) amo **koati**-abo kakaniawo totonai   pe-me   pi-me
    1SG   **job**-DEF.PL many   for (HM) go-NON3.HODFUT   AUX-1SG
    'I am going to go for these jobs' (< [kɔvaʔati])

Kibiri has then borrowed Kerewo words and these have been integrated into the Kibiri morphological treatment of nouns with the addition of the determiner suffixes -*da* 'DEF.SG' and -*abo* 'DEF.PL'. Note also, on the phonological front, that Kibiri has not integrated the glotals [h] and [ʔ]. These data above have been provided by Baunu and Kakoro Bibi, who have seldom been in contact with Kerewo. The more conservative speakers like Gary Bissuee and Lenny Waime use the original Kibiri words *eboi* 'ear', *arawui dara* 'mouth word.of' and *koi ieme* 'thing do', respectively for each example.

The only explanation for this that I can advance is simply the fact that Kerewo has been a socially imponent tribe with their presence in this area of the Gulf, and somehow when the transmission started to decline it was because the chosen language for the household interactions was Kerewo, apart from HM. The gender of the Kerewo-speaking parent did not have any influence, because the speakers stated that the Kerewo parent was the mother or the father.

I witnessed a few instances of lexicon forgetfulness among the speakers. In one of our sessions, Kaiti Kamaia did not know the words for 'bump (v)' and 'clay pot', so we had to call Gary Bissuee, who was in Port Moresby and who also had to call us back 10 minutes later because he needed time to remember the words. Eramiri Nauku did not know any other word for 'song' than *gido* (5) above. Other speakers replace Kibiri words with English loanwords: *kawabu > botoro* 'bottle'; *arori > konteina* 'clay pot'. Animal species names are for the most part forgotten and only the hyperonyms remain. Certain social practices are held in Kerewo:

---

[9] During my conversations with the Porome, they told me they are less likely to marry a non-Porome partner.

people say goodbye with *kamaubo!* and it is common to chase dogs away by saying *Obo!* 'water' in this language. What remains well preserved today is several botanical terms and ancestral villages' names in Kibiri.

There is also a certain degree of abandonment of cultural practices. The rainmaking rituals or beliefs are still known by older people; the kundu-making tradition is no longer practised; songs and legends are also being forgotten.

The second reason the speakers themselves gave to explain the loss of Kibiri is the missionary work. During the 1970's, when the speakers were kids or teens, Papuan missionaries from the National Capital District came to carry out their work at Veiru station, and started speaking HM with them. What remained unclear after my interviews is if the use of Kibiri was banned by these missionaries, as some speakers said it was and others said it was not.

I could meet a few Kerewo wives of Kibiri men that know Kibiri as L2. Among these, Manema Agoai, Matthew Orovi's wife, and Kimuri Kaini's mother Esther, who taught me my first words in Kibiri.

After all these observations and following the Expanded Graded Intergenerational Distruption Scale (EGIDS) by Lewis and Simons (2010), I can safely say that Kibiri is somewhere between 8a Moribund and 8b Nearly extinct. The only remaining "active" speakers of Kibiri are from the grandparent generation[10], and they have little opportunity to use the language. The term *active* should be taken with caution in the case of Kibiri, I believe, as the last remaining speakers do not use it daily, because nobody in their families speaks it fluently or even knows it, and they do not socialize very frequently with other speakers. From a strict language use perspective, it could be claimed that Kibiri speakers are not active speakers.

Kibiri is clearly an endangered language: For years it has been in contact with other languages, like Kerewo, due to intermarriage, and with HM, due to the influence of missionary work and its extensive use in the area. Beyond language contact, the Kibiri have gone through a process of prolonged social contact with the Kerewo, to the point that nowadays some people of the children generation identify themselves as Kerewo or claim "that Kerewo is their language". Today, the transmission is long gone, and the current speakers seem to have given up on Kibiri[11].

This situation is parallel to another one: the perception the Kikori villagers have about the Kibiri and their language. According to what I was told by members of other tribes, it is well known in Kikori that the Kibiri do not speak their language, with one Porome woman even telling me that "the Kibiri are Motuans and they do not have a language".

The Kibiri are fully aware of the loss of their language, and unfortunately, commitment with the language work was declining towards the end of my field trip. They claim they want

---

[10] The youngest Kibiri speaker is Auna Aumiri, 40 at the time of the fieldwork, but I never managed to work with him. He is childless. His life story is rather different as he was adopted by Kibiri parents who made the effort to speak to him in Kibiri.

[11] There is some hope too in the case of Eramiri Nauku, who, after my weekly work at her house in Kekea 1, started speaking Kibiri to his grandson Tasi (2).

their language to live again, but there are no efforts to pass it on to the new generations. There is indeed a dissociation between tribal identity and language.

5. Is Kibiri dead?

Given the complex sociolinguistic situation of Kibiri, I wondered if Kibiri is actually a dead language. Tsunoda (2005) outlines a series of definitions of language death. I applied these to the Kibiri case and this is summarized in Table 2 below.

Definitions of language death	Applies for Kibiri: Yes/No
Cessation of development	Yes
Cessation of transmission in the community as a whole	Yes
Disuse of the language in the community as a whole	Yes
Cessation of transmission in all families	Yes
Disuse in all families	Yes
Death of native/fluent speakers	No
Absence of rememberers[12]	No
Absence of L2 speakers	No
Fluency by researchers	Yes
Absence of records	No
Substratum (lexicon)	?

Table 2. Tsunoda (2005)'s definitions of language death with their application to the case of Kibiri

The social function of Kibiri is dead: there is very little use of Kibiri in the community and there is no transmission at all. This considerably slows down the development of the language. Tsunoda (2005) claims that it can be said that a language is alive if there is one person that can master the language, and in the case of languages whose last native speaker has died, it is the case of the researcher. In this respect, I must say I do not speak Kibiri in a fluent way; this is because I had low exposure to the language in natural contexts, since Kibiri is an unused and unheard language. Tsunoda also points out that a language can be said to be alive if there are place names that survive. In the very case of Kibiri, I could only document a handful of place names that only the Kibiri know, so I cannot say much about this now.

However, the linguistic competence of Kibiri is alive since there are still a few competent native speakers, L2 speakers and rememberers; I have also carried out the documentation of the language, so there are records of it.

---

[12] Tsunoda (2005) makes reference to the term *rememberers* by Tim Knab (1980:232). The latter defines it as a person *"who passively remembers fragments of the language"*. In the very case of Kibiri, I consider the children and grandchildren generation as rememberers. After Auna Aumiri (youngest speaker and potentially the future last speaker) dies, these generations would be the last people to know fragments of Kibiri.

Kibiri is then a socially dead language, but its linguistic structure is still alive in the minds of the native speakers, supplemented by the proficiency of a few L2 speakers, and the bits of knowledge of the rememberers.

6. Kibiri's social death: documentation and revitalization perspectives

I claim that Kibiri as a linguistic system is alive but its social function is dead. This has several implications for documentation, preservation and revitalization.

In the current state of disuse of Kibiri, it is impossible to document it in a natural way: even if swear words do exist, they are almost never used; no kid speaks the language, so it is irrelevant to try to document child-adult conversations; there is not a context in which a proper speech register can be used and documented. This obviously has a negative impact on the diversity of the corpus and in our knowledge of linguistic social practices of the Kibiri. This implies that, if teaching materials were created for revitalization, they will only be made out of a single dialect, a single register, etc.

Given the advanced transmission disruption of Kibiri, a potential revitalization programme that could be designed is Language restoration, following Tsunoda (2005). Language restoration has the purpose of *"Restore [Kibiri] to such a state that it is spoken, by a reasonable number of people, reasonably fluently, and in a reasonably intact form "*(ibid: 171). However, the current state of Kibiri makes it impossible to restore it to an intact form.

This programme would face certain problems in the case of Kibiri: The geographical distribution and the low number of the speakers and the general attitude of the speakers towards language and language revitalization. The methods to be used in the very case of Kibiri, again following Tsunoda (2005) would be Master-apprentice since there are a few speakers left that could take on a single or a handful of apprentices, and also the multimedia method.

Kibiri is an example of how disuse of a language alters its structure, namely the lexicon (so far), and how it reduces the diversity of the corpus and the revitalization perspectives.

7. Verbal number

The morphosyntax of Kibiri is exemplified here with verbal number. Taking Corbett (2000)'s definition of verbal number as a basis, I consider there is an event number distinction when the language formally expresses a difference between the performing of an action one time and several times, regardless of the number of participants involved. I consider there is a participant number distinction when the number of entities involved in the action trigger a formal distinction.

Kibiri exhibits both event and participant number. Event number concerns a few intransitive dynamic verbs like *jump, roll* (on the ground), *spin* (around), etc. and participant number marks number of the single argument of an intransitive verb (which can be stative or dynamic), and the object of a transitive verb. The number values of each category are singular

and plural[13]. Both categories make use of the same morphological means, namely stem alternation, partial reduplication and suffixation on the verbs. Also, a verb like *break* is sensitive to both categories simultaneously, that is, breaking one or many objects one or several times.

7.1. Participant number

Participant number marks singular or plural of the single argument of an intransitive verb and the object of a transitive verb. The morphological means are stem alternation, partial reduplication and suffixation of the verb.

a. Intransitive statives - Stem alternation

In the pairs of examples (7) – (8); (9) – (10) and (11) – (12) below, the intransitive stative verbs *lie, stand* and *hang* display a stem alternation to distinguish a single entity from more than one.

(7) Myriam da=ba e-a
  myriam 3SG=EMPH lie.S.SG-3.PRS
  'Myriam is lying (on the floor)'

(8) mi   buai da=ba teri-a
  daughter.ABST two 3SG=EMPH lie.S.PL-3.PRS
  '(My daughters) are lying on the floor'

(9) mi   ewa da=ba ete-a
  daughter.ABST big 3SG=EMPH stand.S.SG-3.PRS
  '(My) big daughter is standing'

(10) Miryam Umo aboai=ba uri-a
  myriam umo 3D=EMPH stand.S.PL-3.PRS
  'Myriam and Umo are both standing'

(11) ukukuro da=ba tete-a
  rope.ABST 3SG=EMPH hang.S.SG-3.PRS
  'The rope is hanging'

(12) ukukuro buai da=ba kaiw-a
  rope.ABST two 3SG=EMPH hang.S.PL-3.PRS
  'The two ropes are hanging'

b. Intransitive statives - Partial reduplication

For intransitive stative verbs like *float* and *sit*, the same happens but in this case the verb is partially reduplicated, see the pairs (13) – (14) and (15) – (16) below.

---

[13] Kibiri exhibits dual value only in S and O pronouns, but not in verbal number

(13) kubi   kere   da=ba   ubi-neika   bai-a
      stick.ABST   part   3SG=EMPH   water.ABST-in float.S.SG-3.PRS
      'The stick is floating in the water'

(14) kubi   kere buai   ubi-neika   ba~bai-are
      stick.ABST   part two   water.ASBT-in   S.PL~float-IPFV
      'The two sticks are floating in the water'

(15) borimi   iti~timaro-a   koribi-neika
      big.fly   S.PL~sit-3.PRS   fish.ABST-in
      'The big flies are sitting on the fish'

(16) borimi   wawa itimaro-a   koribi-neika
      big.fly   one   sit.S.SG-3.PRS fish.ABST-in
      'The big fly is sitting on the fish'

c. Intransitive dynamics - Suffixation

I have a few examples of intransitive verbs that make use of the suffix –*(s)to* to mark participant number. In (17) - (18) the distinction is made by the use of the suffix in the case of the verb *fall.*

(17) kubi   okoire-ra-bu
      tree.ABST   fall-PRF-3
      '(The) tree has fallen'

(18) kubi-abo   okoire-sto-ra-bu
      tree.ABST-DEF.PL   fall-S.PL-PRF-3
      'The trees have fallen'

d. Transitives, marking of O – Partial reduplication

In the case of the transitive verb *carry*, the verb is partially reduplicated to distinguish a singular and a plural object (19) – (20).

(19) moi-da=nei   kubi   kere   mairi-are
      man-DEF.SG=AGT   tree.ABST   part   carry.O.SG-IPFV
      'The man is carrying one log'

(20) moi-da=nei   kubi   kere   ma~mairi-are
      man-DEF.SG=AGT   tree.ABST   part   O.PL~carry-IPFV
      'The man is carrying many logs'

7.2. Event number

Event number deals with the number of times an event takes place. In Kibiri it typically concerns intransitive verbs. However, in certain cases of transitive verbs, it can be combined

with participant number. The morphological means of event number are partial reduplication and stem alternation.

a. Intransitive dynamic verbs – Partial reduplication

A few intransitive dynamic verbs partially reduplicate when the action is performed more than once. See (21) – (22) for an example with the verb *jump*.

(21) Myriam da=ba   paruo-bu
     myriam 3SG=EMPH jump.SG-3.HODPST
     'Myriam jumped (once)'

(22) Myriam da=ba   pa~paru-a
     myriam 3SG=EMPH   PL~jump-3.PRS
     'Myriam jumps (many times)'

It should be noted that, in order to disambiguate certain situations, I introduced the parameters "one by one" (= the action is performed individually by more than one participant) and "at the same time" (= the action is perfomed simultaneously by more than one participant). Part of the methodology to obtain the verbal number data involved exposing the speakers to several stimuli videos in order to elicit the verbal forms (many videos per verb: one person performing the action one time, one person performing the action many times, two persons performing the action one time at the same time, two persons performing the action many times at the same time, two persons performing the action one time one by one, etc.). The purpose of this was to explore how the speakers conceive the event. The results for the verb *jump* came with partial reduplication in the following four scenarios:

Scenario A: Myriam and Umo jump <u>once one by one</u>: pa~paru-a

The partial reduplication of the verb in Scenario A can be explained by the fact that the speaker conceives the event as several instances of jumping, even if each participant jumps once. In this case, event number primes over participant.

Scenario C: Myriam and Kakoro jump <u>many times one by one</u>: pa~paru-a

Scenario C can be explained by the fact that the multiple instances of jumping of each participant separately trigger the event number marking. In this case event number primes over participant, too.

Scenario D: Myriam and Kakoro jump <u>many times at the same time</u>: pa~paru-a

In Scenario D, partial reduplication is expected to happen because the action is repeated many times by the participants. Again, event number primes over participant.

Scenario B: Myriam and Umo jump <u>once at the same time</u>: pa~paru-a

A question arises for Scenario B, in which partial reduplication happens even if the action is performed once (at the same time) by more than one participant. This type of situation happens for other verbs. The only explanation I can provide is that participant number primes over event number, contrary to the previous scenarios. Event number then is obliterated when participant number has plural as value.

b. Transitives verbs – Event + participant number of O

There are cases in which event and participant number are combined. One such case is with the *break*. Event number is indicated through the partial reduplication of the verb, while participant number of O is marked with the suffix *–(s)to*. See the examples in (23) – (26) below.

(23) karera   etere-mi=nei   kubi   kere   **kevo**-are
     kid   small-DIM=AGT   tree.ABST   PART **break.SG**-IPFV
     'The small kid is breaking **one stick once**'

(24) karera   etere-mi=nei   kubi   kere   **ke~kevo**-are
     kid   small-DIM=AGT   tree.ABST   PART **PL~break**-IPFV
     'The small kid is breaking **one stick many times**'

(25) karera etere-mi=nei kubi   kere   buakei   **kevo**-**sto**-are
     kid   small-DIM=AGT tree   PART   two   **break.SG**-**O.PL**-IPFV
     'The small kid is breaking **two sticks once**'

(26) karera   etere-mi=nei   kubi   kere   buakei **ke~kevo**-**sto**-are
     kid   small-DIM=AGT tree.ABST   PART two   **PL~break**-**O.PL**-IPFV
     'The small kid is breaking **two sticks many times**'

The examples above show a clear distinction between event and participant number. However, during my sessions, the verbal form in (25), *kevo-sto* was unattested: the speaker did not produce such a verbal form and he explicitly said that only the verbal forms in (23), (24) and (26) were possible to express the idea in (25). This could be explained by the following proposals: if *kevo* in (23) were to be used to express *kevo-sto* in (25), it is because the marking of participant number on the verb is unnecessary, what matters is event number; and the meaning of plurality of object is already indicated on the NP in (25) *kubi kere buakei*; if *ke~kevo* in (24) is used to express the verbal form in (25), it is because, again, participant number on the verb is unnecessary, what matters is event number because if there are many stick-breaking events, that means there are many sticks (and also the NP in 25 gives object number information); if *ke~kevo-sto* in (26) is used to express the verbal form in (25), it is because the participant number marking on the verb is necessary; if there are many sticks being broken, that implies many breaking events.

The complexity of event and participant number marking can be summarised in the following table, see Table 3.

	Participant		Event
	S	O	
Intransitive statives	St. Alt / Part. Red.		
Intransitive dynamics	Suffix -(s)to		Part. Red.
Transitives		Suffix -(s)to / Part. Red.	Part. Red.

Table 3. Marking of event and participant number in Kibiri

As a conclusion, it can be said that Kibiri has a verbal number category, namely both participant and event number, as posited by Corbett (2000). Indeed, one of the diagnostics to state that a language has verbal number is an ergative behaviour, which can be seen here: S of the intransitives is marked in the same way of the object in transitives. Note that partial reduplication is pervasive in the system.

I claim that introducing the parameters "one by one" and "at the same time" can help to disambiguate situations in Kibiri and probably in other languages as well. By doing so, one can notice that it seems like event and participant number interact in the system and one of them primes over the other, or one can imply the other.

8. Conclusions

Kibiri is a dying language, above all at his social level, but not a completely dead one. I do think Kibiri is alive as a linguistic system in the minds of the speakers. I am currently carrying out a documentation and description project. The work has been challenged by the difficulty of documenting Kibiri in a natural context due to disuse, and this has a negative impact in the diversity of the documentation, for the linguist himself (lack of exposure), and revitalization possibilities. However, it is not impossible to describe a moribund language like Kibiri.

If Kibiri were to be restored in the community in the case of a revitalization programme, it will be impossible to restore it in an intact form. Grammatical change and language contact have found their way in the language. If Kibiri were to be restored too, its social function would revive and it would be reshaped by new social practices for the new generations of speakers. As Tsunoda (2005) clearly suggests in the case of highly endangered languages, the best revitalization strategy to be adopted, specially in Kibiri's case, is the Master-apprentice strategy.

Nevertheless, the question to be addressed is if the community does want the language to revive. It is not easy to answer that question for Kibiri: on the one hand, the tribe does know they have a language, but almost nobody uses it and they are aware of that. The remaining speakers do not make efforts to passe the language on. This linguistic attitude will have a negative impact on the revitalization possibilities. I do not think it is our place as linguists to try to change the community's linguistic attitude towards their language; but it might be possible to create some awareness through fieldwork and documentation (particularly the cultural practices).

I claim thus that for highly endangered languages, documentation is obviously needed, but it should be done with as many fluent speakers as possible (this increases variation, so more diversity in the corpus), with rememberers and L2 speakers in controlled situations, and in the current state of the language.

Finally, it has been shown that verbal number in Kibiri is complex in terms of marking and how event number and participant number can interact with each other, with one priming over the other.

References

Corbett, G. (2000) *Number* (Cambridge Textbooks in Linguistics). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Franklin, K.J. (1973). Other Language Groups in the Gulf District and Adjacent Areas. In K. J. Franklin (Ed.), *The Linguistic Situation in the Gulf District and Adjacent Areas, Papua New Guinea* (Vol. 26, pp. 263–277). Canberra: Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, Australian National University.

_____. (1975). Isolates: Gulf District. In S. A. Wurm (Ed.), *New Guinea Area Languages and Language Study Vol 1: Papuan Languages and the New Guinea linguistic scene* (pp. 891–896). Canberra: Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, Australian National University.

Hammarström, H. (2017). Language Isolates in the New Guinea Region. In L. Campbell (Ed.) *Language Isolates* (1st Edition, pp. 287-322). Abingdon: Routledge.

Knab, T. (1980). When Is a Language Really Dead: The Case of Pochutec. *International Journal of American Linguistics*, *46*(3), 230-233.

Lewis, M.; Simons, G. (2010) Assessing endangerment: Expanding Fishman's GIDS. In *Revue Roumaine de Linguistique, 55*.

Pawley, A., & Hammarström, H. (2018). The Trans New Guinea Family. In B. Palmer (Ed.) *The Languages and Linguistics of The New Guinea Area: A Comprehensive Guide.* (Vol. 4, pp. 21-196). Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton

Petterson, R. (2010). *Porome Daporo Avea Buka—Porome Language Picture Dictionary*. Ukarumpa: SIL Press.

_____. (2019). *Preliminary Notes on the Phonology and Morphology of the Porome Language of Papua New Guinea.*

Ross, M. D. (2005). Pronouns As a Preliminary Diagnostic for Grouping Papuan Languages. In A. Pawley, R. Attenborough, J. Golson, R. Hide (Eds.) *Papuan Pasts: Studies in the Cultural, Linguistic and Biological Histories of Papuan-speaking Peoples* (pp. 15-66). Camberra : Pacific Linguistics, Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, Australian National University.

Tsunoda, T. (2005) *Language Endangerment and Language Revitalization.* Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

Z'graggen, J. (1975). Comparative Wordlists of the Gulf District and Adjacent Areas. In R. Loving (Ed.), *Comparative Wordlists I* (Vol. 14, pp. 5-116). Ukarumpa: Summer Institute of Linguistics.