

Whose Language Is It Anyway? Historical Fetishism and the Construction of Expertise in Bolivian Language Planning

*Aurolyn Luykx
School of Education Research, University of Miami, Florida*

Introduction

In recent years, increased scholarly attention has focused on language ideologies, examining the connections between language use and broader political questions of diversity, governability, and socialization/acculturation (González & Melis, 2000; Jaffe, 1999; Schieffelin, Woolard, & Kroskrity, 1998, among others). This theoretically oriented, critical scholarship contrasts with more pragmatic, policy-oriented research[1], which is typically based on Likert-scale assessments of the target population's "attitudes" about the use of particular languages in different social contexts, or the association of particular speech varieties with qualities such as refinement or backwardness. While the latter type of research is often used to gauge the feasibility of proposed language policies (e.g., Zúñiga, Sánchez, & Zacharías, 2000), critical analyses of language ideologies are less easily translated into concrete policy recommendations, since they often have social implications that go beyond language planning per se. Furthermore, policy-oriented research rarely examines the language ideologies of planners and policymakers themselves, perhaps because such analysis would call into question governmental actors' underlying agendas with regard to minority populations. Nevertheless, sociolinguists and language planners alike are increasingly aware of the importance of language ideologies to the success or failure of language planning initiatives. It is in this context that I wish to examine some of the ideologies driving recent language policies in the Andes, with an eye to those policies' likelihood of success, and to what sort of future sociolinguistic scenario such success would imply.

In response to popular demands from ethnic minorities and a growing global awareness of language loss, numerous nations are currently supporting efforts to strengthen and preserve minority languages. In South America, these efforts have focused mainly on developing writing systems for indigenous languages and promoting their use within formal education. In Bolivia, where more than half the population speaks an indigenous language, bilingual education and the associated standardization of indigenous languages are among the most visible and controversial elements of the recent nationwide educational reform. Corpus planning[2] for Quechua, Aymara, and Guaraní, Bolivia's most widely-spoken indigenous languages, has provoked considerable debate among indigenous speakers, even as state agencies strive to bring debate to a close and move ahead with the promotion of the newly standardized varieties, via the incorporation and training of key educational actors.[3]

Language ideology plays an important role in shaping language policy, and policy in turn shapes the social and institutional conditions that encourage certain kinds of language use and discourage others. The nearly exclusive focus on school-based literacy as the site of language planning suggests that the underlying, perhaps unconscious aim is to expand Bolivia's indigenous languages into the standard set of western academic genres, rather than to encourage the persistence and development of culturally distinct,

indigenous discourse practices. In this sense, current language policies are reminiscent of missionary efforts to translate the Bible into a multitude of languages, while replacing local indigenous cosmologies with a standardized Christianity (Arnold & Yapita, 2000). Despite their ideological appeals to historical virtue, the policies being implemented in the name of indigenous language "revitalization" promote patterns of use that are not only unprecedented, but modeled on the dominant language. If "orthographic choice is really about 'imagining' the past and the future of a community" (Shieffelin & Doucet, 1998: p. 285), the future imagined in Bolivia would seem to be one in which indigenous languages are used in ways that are more and more like Spanish.

Below, I analyze the language ideologies of Andean language planners, and the preliminary effects of those ideologies - how they "transform the material reality they comment on" (Shieffelin & Doucet, 1998:p. 11) - focusing specifically on the ideological criteria guiding corpus planning decisions associated with linguistic standardization.[4] Given that these language ideologies and their corresponding policies are not limited to Bolivia, the analysis has implications for other Latin American countries (and languages) as well.

Historical Fetishism in Corpus Planning

One often reads of governments or language planners "choosing" a standard variety, as if it were simply a question of selecting one variety from the set of existing dialects. In contrast, the standard variety of Bolivian Quechua was not so much selected as created.[5] Etymological or historical criteria have dominated this process, inasmuch as the standard is largely based on the reconstructed pronunciations of centuries past. As a result, standard Quechua differs more from contemporary Bolivian dialects than most of these do from each other.[6] Correspondingly, standardization efforts have provoked concern among some Quechua speakers for the future survival of regional dialects. Furthermore, etymological orthographies, which bear the traces of the language's historical evolution, frequently give rise to spellings that do not reflect contemporary speech and thus are frequently confusing for new readers.

Recent Quechua corpus planning debates center mainly on lexicon (discussed below) and on spellings of certain frequently-used words and suffixes. In most cases, the standardized orthography is based upon archaic forms, or on conservative regional pronunciations that may be unfamiliar to most speakers. The example below highlights the continuative (present progressive) verb suffix. Contemporary (non-standard) oral varieties of Bolivian Quechua display the following variants:

"s/he is working"
/llank'asan/
/llank'ašan/
/llank'asqan/
/llank'ajan/

The standardized spelling, "llank'achkan," reflects an earlier form of the suffix, still used in some areas but not generally recognized by most speakers. (The switch from /m/ to /n/ reflects another historical sound shift.) Not only do most Quechua speakers, including many schoolteachers, have no idea why the suffix should be written this way,

it is often unclear to them that replacement of /-s-/ (or /-š-/) by /-chk-/ in the standard is restricted to this suffix. Thus, for example, some end up writing /khuska/ ("half") as "khuchka," which does not occur in any dialect.

Spelling in Aymara is even more complicated, since a pervasive feature in Aymara speech is vocal elision, or vowel dropping. Aymara is an agglutinative language in which multiple suffixes may combine to create words that are quite long and semantically complex. Most suffixes end in a vowel, and in some cases the final vowel is dropped when another suffix is added (this often leads to clusters of three or four consonants in a row, which non-Aymara speakers are hard-pressed to pronounce). Some pairs of suffixes that are semantically distinct sound alike, except for the fact that one suppresses the preceding vowel, whereas the other does not.[7] Additionally, noun roots always end in a vowel, which is dropped when the noun is the direct object of a verb.

The new Aymara standard retains in writing many of the vowels that are dropped in speech, the logic being that the written code should show words and suffixes in their "complete" form. But the result is that important grammatical markers are nullified in the written code. Standardized Quechua, if pronounced as written, just sounds strange; standardized Aymara, pronounced as written, produces speech that is ungrammatical or ambiguous (See Yapita, 1994). To complicate things further, not all the dropped vowels are retained in the written standard, but only those which are "predictably" dropped (such as the final vowel of object nouns). While this would seem to put rather a heavy analytical burden on the reader, language planners claim that native speakers' "unconscious grammatical knowledge" will tell them which vowels should be pronounced and which are silent. Nevertheless, there are already reports of Aymara schoolchildren reading standardized Aymara "as written," pronouncing all the vowels, and consequently having trouble understanding what they are reading.

I have heard government functionaries defend this policy as analogous to the custom of writing standard Spanish as "he venido," even when many speakers say [e veniw]. However, the non-standard Spanish pronunciation has no semantic or grammatical implications and is easily understood by speakers, so the analogy is misleading at best. Evidently, many of those charged with training others in the use of the new standards themselves lack the linguistic training necessary to decipher the logic of the language planners, and are thus ill-equipped to resolve trainees' uncertainties. In practice, many trainees eventually put aside their confusion and agree to accept the standardized forms on the trainers' authority. But this is an unenviable position for trainees who are expected to subsequently promote use of the standard among schoolteachers and indigenous communities, and will likely face similar questions as trainers themselves. Certainly, speakers of many other languages (such as English) readily accept non-intuitive spellings with little idea as to how they arose; but the Bolivian case underscores the difficulty of gaining popular acceptance for new orthographies, as opposed to those with decades (if not centuries) of widespread use behind them.

In addition to difficult orthography, unfamiliar words are another obstacle to popular acceptance of the new standard varieties. In standardized Quechua and Aymara, Spanish borrowings are purged when possible, and those not easily expunged are rephonologized (for example, ministiryu for the Spanish "Ministerio"). Lexical "gaps"

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(such as school-related and scientific terminology) are filled by archaic terms recovered from conservative dialects or historical documents, metaphorical extension of existing words (like the standardized Quechua *ñawiri* ["to look at"] for "read", or *p'anqa* ["leaf"] for "book"), or neologisms based on combinations of existing words (e.g., *qillqana pirqqa* ["writing wall"] for "blackboard"). Language planners maintain that such novel usages, like unfamiliar spellings, can be understood in context; that is, semantic clues in the text will allow readers to interpret the unfamiliar bits. This is a common strategy used by both beginning and advanced readers the world over. But what is that "context" made up of, but other linguistic forms? If familiar words do not greatly outnumber unfamiliar ones, there are not enough contextual clues to assure comprehension, and reading quickly becomes a difficult guessing game, instead of the fluid apprehension of meaning it should be. Furthermore, the problem is not limited to children, or to those acquiring literacy for the first time; some Bolivian schoolteachers say that the standardized school texts are at times so puzzling that they skip over parts of lessons because they cannot understand the instructions (Siles, 2001: pp. 78, 95-97).

The official response to such difficulties is that "the norm must be taught and learned"; spelling in most world languages is not consistent or intuitive, and schooling always involves the learning of unfamiliar terminology (though usually it is at least familiar to the teacher). Recent approaches to literacy emphasize more global, gestalt processes of word recognition, and Bolivian language planners refer to these approaches when claiming that spelling and pronunciation need not always coincide. But there are historical factors working against this argument; for decades, Bolivian schoolteachers have taught reading via atomistic methods based on drills of individual letters and syllables, and this practice has not disappeared despite the new "reform" pedagogy. Given this entrenched tradition of literacy instruction, and the limited awareness of the standardization process among the general population, most schoolteachers are unprepared to explain to children why the (written) word "juk" should be pronounced /uj/, or why "ruwachkan" should be read as /ruwašan/. Certainly, people can learn to read a non-phonemic orthography, as millions of English- and French-speaking children can attest - but, unlike their First World counterparts, Quechua and Aymara children seldom grow up surrounded by written texts, or even by adults literate in their native language. Given these (and many other) social obstacles to indigenous language literacy, it would seem ill-advised to make the new orthographies more complicated than necessary.

With all of these difficulties, one might wonder why historical criteria were prioritized in the standardization process. It is not just a question of choosing spellings based on etymology rather than on contemporary speech; instead, the entire research base informing the standardization process for Quechua and Aymara emphasizes the historical details of phonological shifts and dialectal divergences, rather than contemporary patterns of language use in indigenous communities, let alone language attitudes and ideologies in those communities. This emphasis on scholarly concerns, in the place of more broadly sociolinguistic ones, may account for much of indigenous speakers' resistance to standardization as currently proposed.

The way that language planners talk about the newly-standardized varieties reveal that antiquity itself is seen as a virtue, and ancient forms as superior to recent ones. Archaic

words are spoken of glowingly, while Spanish borrowings are referred to as "the enemy." I heard one language planner mention, during a training event, that "some of these [Quechua] forms are derivative, but others have the virtue of being very old." [8] He then referred to other forms that are "widely used" ("tienen una amplia difusión"), but did not characterize this as a virtue. The same scholar complained, during this event, that people without knowledge of historical linguistics standardize badly, writing things just as they're pronounced. [9] On another occasion, he mentioned that some years ago there was consideration of eliminating the aspirated and glottalized consonants from written Quechua, since these are not "properly" Quechua, having entered the language (over five hundred years ago) due to extensive contact with Aymara. This notion was abandoned, I imagine because glottalization and aspiration are so crucial to all contemporary Bolivian Quechua dialects that eliminating them in writing would make the written standard all but unintelligible. It is hard to imagine how such a proposal could arise in the first place, if not from this fetishism of archaic forms and the notion of proto-Quechua as the one "true" Quechua. The irony is that there is such enormous effort to salvage archaic forms at the level of words and suffixes, and virtually no official concern for preserving traditional language forms above the phrase level (aside from school exercises involving "native legends" and recipes as material for literacy work).

Orthography, Identity, and "Expertise"

As is clear from the vehemence of orthography debates, contested orthographies are also sites of contested identity (Schieffelin & Doucet, 1998, p. 287). Orthographic debates are not only about how to represent the language graphically, but also the status of vernacular speech as language, and as a marker of collective identity (Schieffelin & Doucet, 1998: pp. 300-301). Speakers' concern for the survival of regional dialects in the face of standardization is, on a deeper level, a concern for the survival of regional identities. Underneath language planners' implicit question of "What is the 'ideal' or 'most authentic' form of the Quechua language?" lies the question: "Who is the 'ideal' or 'most authentic' Quechua speaker?" The answer suggested by recent policies seems to be, on the one hand, the pre-Columbian Incas, who supposedly spoke a "purer" Quechua than any spoken today, uninfluenced by Spanish (though, in reality, greatly influenced by other Andean languages). Projecting the question into the future, the "ideal Quechua speaker" becomes the formally schooled Quechua speaker, who speaks and writes a variety that is "more Quechua" than the speech of peasants and the urban popular classes, with their varying degrees of Spanish influence. As Bolivian language planners are fond of repeating, "the norm must be learned"; the state-legitimated criteria of "correctness" are therefore accessible only through the school.

Bourdieu (1975) has argued that, via the "legitimate language" elaborated by writers and grammarians,

... the dominant classes establish a distance between themselves and [other] speakers. Thus, the language functions not only to communicate but also to set boundaries between the elite and the masses... One of the main characteristics of the legitimate language, "correctness," is a privilege of the dominant classes. [10]

The situation examined here is more complicated, since it concerns official standards of correctness within subordinated languages. Since the establishment of a standard

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automatically defines other varieties as non-standard, these varieties (and their speakers) become doubly stigmatized, first in relation to Spanish and then in relation to the standard variety of their own language. It is notable that those elaborating the standards are all highly-educated bilinguals who use mostly Spanish in their daily lives. One result of this is that the new indigenous-language curriculum materials, despite the avoidance of Spanish loanwords and the striving for morphological purity, display significant grammatical and semantic influence from Spanish, reflecting the class background of their creators (Marcia Mandepora, personal communication [for the Guaraní case]; for Aymara, see Arnold & Yapita, 2000; Yapita, 1994).

Speakers' access to the standard is largely determined by social class, inasmuch as mastery of the standard is generally acquired only through formal schooling ("the norm must be learned"), and its specific logic is comprehensible only to those with specialized academic training. As we have seen, scholarly reconstructions of archaic dialects, rather than the vernacular Quechua and Aymara spoken mostly by peasants, were taken as the models for "correct" usage. Within official parlance, "indigenous language experts" are those with specialized academic training, not indigenous speakers recognized within their communities for their extensive cultural or linguistic knowledge (many of whom do not have a fluid command of Spanish).[11]

The Guaraní case is particularly interesting in this regard. The Bolivian Guaraní enjoy a degree of political organization never achieved by the more numerous and dispersed Aymara and Quechua speakers. During earlier experiences with bilingual education, Guaraní elders played a key role in validating educational materials. Care was also taken to include representatives of the three major dialects (Ava, Simba and Ioseño) in corpus planning decisions. Due largely to the high degree of community participation, these programs were quite successful and today are considered among the major achievements of the Asamblea del Pueblo Guaraní (Assembly of the Guaraní People).

This situation changed drastically with the incorporation of bilingual education into the state-run reform. Corpus planning decisions and educational materials are now made in the capital, La Paz, rather than in Guaraní territory, and community elders have been marginalized from the process in favor of bilingual, university-educated "experts" for whom Guaraní is often a second language. The Simba dialect predominate within this group of experts, and so the materials produced have a decidedly "Simba" flavor in terms of lexicon, but with grammatical and semantic features displaying Spanish influence (Marcia Mandepora, personal communication). For the Guaraní, current standardization initiatives have thus shifted the locus of decision-making, as well as the cultural logic underlying language use, out of Guaraní organizational structures and into the domain of the Spanish-speaking urban bureaucracy.

New Hierarchies for Old

Of course, linguistic stratification can and does arise in the absence of explicit or purposeful language planning; indeed, it appears to be an inevitable accompaniment to social stratification. Nevertheless, such de facto stratification differs substantially from official initiatives to institutionalize a particular linguistic hierarchy, via the imposition of a standard whose logic is impenetrable to most speakers. Aggressively promoting academic notions of linguistic value within indigenous speech communities cannot help

but provoke changes in the status relationships among different language varieties, and among their respective speakers. Not that change in itself is necessarily bad; indeed, indigenous demands for an end to earlier, repressive language policies arose from a well-founded desire to transform existing social and linguistic arrangements. But when linguistic hierarchies are purposefully readjusted in the service of social goals, a certain vigilance with regard to the relation between stated aims and actual results is in order. Having lived in Bolivia for several years and frequently heard the idea expressed that "Quechua [or Aymara, or Guaraní] is a language [or 'dialect'] with no real grammar," I fear that the next refrain in Bolivia's popular language ideology may be: "Quechua has a grammar now that the government gave it one, but the peasants still speak it all wrong." While the creation of new prestige hierarchies within indigenous languages may not have been policymakers' original intention, there has been too little questioning as to whether this consequence of standardization is outweighed by its benefits - many of which are themselves open to question (Luykx, in press).

We should also avoid the sort of simplistic reasoning that assumes that indigenous speakers who oppose standardization, or the use of their languages in formal education, are motivated by a desire to assimilate their children into the dominant language as soon as possible. Clearly, there are many other concerns that might give rise to such opposition (Aikman, 1999; Arnold & Yapita, 2000; Zúñiga et al., 2000). Linguistic and educational planners should be sensitive to the fact that popular objections to language policies may be more widespread and more varied than they realize. When faced with resistance from the target population, they should not assume that their job is simply to convince that population of the proposed policies' benefits, or to forge ahead if the population remains unconvinced.

Corpus planning is enmeshed in "frameworks of value" (Schieffelin & Doucet, 1998: p. 285), from the decision to standardize at all to more minute details. Choices that are etymologically sound may be sociolinguistically misguided. Language planners therefore must take into account not only what is "correct" according to academic criteria, but also what is socially and culturally acceptable to the speech community in question. Speakers who have long struggled against a linguistic hierarchy that marginalizes them are unlikely to embrace a new hierarchy in which they are similarly disadvantaged - even if those outside the speech community perceive the proposed change as a vast improvement over the previous state of affairs.

Conclusions

The last few decades have made abundantly clear that language planning is not an exact science; language policies have effects both on language ideologies and language use, but not always the desired effects. Policies aimed at eradicating vernacular speech varieties have often provoked their resurgence, while policies meant to strengthen subordinated languages may in fact contribute to their decline (Luykx, 1999). Given the experimental nature of the field, it behooves language planners to: 1) tread lightly when the future of other people's languages is at stake; 2) seek constant feedback as to a given policy's results "on the ground"; and 3) use that information to analyze whether policies are fulfilling their goals and how they might be adjusted. Research on the language ideologies of both indigenous speech communities and language planners/policymakers should be part of this process. If the language ideologies of these

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two sectors conflict with each other, and the discrepancies are not addressed, the success of language planning initiatives is likely to be greatly diminished.

Collins (1998) has warned against "an academic concern with systematic regularity [that] leads to a neglect of linguistic practice, its historical situation, and its sociocultural implications" (p. 262). The contradictory discourse of Bolivian language planning, which fetishizes language itself as the object of political struggle rather than the social and cultural dislocation that leads to language loss, and extols indigenous languages' structural elegance and illustrious past while denigrating contemporary speakers' own language practices and beliefs, suggests that current language policy may "minoritize"[12] indigenous speech communities even as it seeks to empower them.

As Kathryn Woolard (1998) has observed:

Movements to save minority languages ironically are often structured (...) around the same received notions of language that have led to their oppression and/or suppression... [M]inority language activists often find themselves imposing standards, elevating literate forms and uses, and negatively sanctioning variability in order to demonstrate the reality, validity and integrity of their languages. (p. 17)

In Bolivia's new linguistic order, native indigenous language speakers are no longer considered the experts on how their language should be used, or on what constitutes beautiful, powerful, or correct speech. Instead, indigenous criteria of linguistic value are subordinated to those of university-trained experts and government functionaries. This rankles not only with many indigenous speakers, but also with those of us whose linguistic training included the axiom of native speaker judgement as the definitive criterion of grammaticality and meaning. A more critical consideration of the language ideologies of all participants in Bolivia's language planning process could do much to improve its chances of success, and bring it closer in line with the democratic and pluralistic ideals from which it arose.

Notes

1 By "policy-oriented," I mean survey-type studies that are primarily descriptive and intended to gauge either the feasibility or the effectiveness of particular language policies. The contrasting tradition of critical scholarship often takes language policy as its object of analysis, but does not generally engage the policy-making apparatus directly or make specific policy recommendations. Authors within this tradition tend to operate independently of state language policy bureaucracies, whereas policy-oriented research is often undertaken directly at the behest of government agencies.

2 Corpus planning refers to that branch of language planning dealing with the form of the language itself, e.g., the development of writing conventions or technical vocabulary. The other main branches of language planning are status planning, dealing with the domains of use of the language, and acquisition planning, dealing with the transmission of the language to new speakers.

3 The following analysis is based on: 1) my observations of training events for various groups of educators (rural schoolteachers, teacher trainers, etc.); 2) informal conversations with participants in these events, including my own students (indigenous educators from various Andean countries and language groups); and 3) research carried out by some of those same students in rural schools where these policies are being implemented. The observations and conversations reported here occurred between 1999 and 2001. I gratefully acknowledge the support of the Spencer Foundation/National Academy of Education for this research.

4 For reasons of space and scope, this paper focuses primarily on Quechua and Aymara. Quechua, as the most widely spoken indigenous language in the hemisphere, has received the greatest amount of attention by contemporary sociolinguists (Fauchois, 1988; Godenzzi [Ed.], 1992; Haboud, 1998; Hornberger & Colonel-Molina, in press; King, 2001), but many of the planning decisions concerning Quechua are similar to those made for Aymara and Guaraní. For a detailed analysis of Bolivian Guaraní language, education, and cultural politics, see Gustafson (2001).

5 Correspondingly, King (1999) observes that what is implemented under the name of "language maintenance" is often in reality "language transformation."

6 This is less true in Peru, where regional varieties differ much more widely than in Bolivia. Genetically speaking, Bolivian Quechua dialects are grouped together with Cuzco Quechua as part of the "Southern Peruvian" branch, (see Cerrón-Palomino, 1987). The Aymara case is somewhat different, since the La Paz dialect is already dominant, by virtue of sheer numbers and its high salience in Bolivia's capital city (see Briggs, 1993). Here, the concern is that other regional varieties will be subsumed by the "hegemonic grafolect" (Yapita, 1994) of La Paz Aymara, now that this has not only a demographic majority but the weight of officialdom behind it.

7 This is a necessary oversimplification; for details on vocal elision in Aymara, see Hardman, Vásquez, & Yapita (1988, pp. 21-22, 67-77).

8 "Algunas de estas formas son desviantes, mientras otras tienen la virtud de ser muy arcaicas."

9 Most of these assertions came from just a few individuals, but they are individuals with considerable influence over how Andean language policies are made and implemented; several of the comments described above were collected during a training seminar for 25 indigenous educators charged with teaching their respective standard varieties to 6000 schoolteachers. In a small country like Bolivia, the actions of a few well-placed individuals can have significant effects at the national level.

10 1975. *Le fétichisme de la langue*. *Actes de la Recherche en Sciences Sociales* 4, 2-32. Cited in Schieffelin and Doucet (1998, p. 308).

11 Correspondingly, one member of Bolivia's language planning establishment, when asked about Aymara children's difficulty with reading standardized texts, consistently

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argues that "anyone who can't read them easily must not speak Aymara" (an assertion that would seem to contradict the accompanying claim that the norm must be learned).

12 After King & Haboud (in press).

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