

Response to "Whose Language Is It Anyway? Historical Fetishism and the Language of Expertise in Bolivian Language Planning" by Aurolyn Luykx

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Aurolyn Luykx examines how language ideologies influence state policies and pedagogies in Bolivia and, by implication, the rest of the Andean region. She goes beyond the technical questions of how to create standardized written varieties to the much more fundamental question of why. By challenging some widespread assumptions about language revitalization and the way indigenous languages should be written and used in schools, Luykx opens the door to considering more effective strategies for improving the condition of marginalized indigenous groups. She does not elaborate on what these other strategies might be, or on a more appropriate role for language planning, so her paper raises a number of questions for further investigation.

As she examines the effects of such policies on language use, Luykx tries to situate the speakers in the whole process of standardization, and explicitly criticizes the prevailing notion that standardization is necessary to revitalize, fortify, and bestow prestige upon a language. Luykx challenges the dominant practice of confining standardization to written communication and text-based pronunciations that are alien to the way local native speakers actually speak the language, and questions why the first step in language revitalization is assumed to be standardized, school-based literacy.

However, although she successfully calls attention to the effects of standardization on marginalization of indigenous languages in Bolivia in particular and the Andean region in general, Luykx fails to provide alternative means to foster language fortification and revitalization. Luykx clearly recognizes the long history of inequality and oppression that has fueled the demand for linguistic and cultural rights. At the same time, she suggests that support for indigenous languages would be better focused on the domains where they have traditionally been the strongest, at the family and local community level. But should indigenous languages remain limited to a small number of domains, such as the home, the church, and the village marketplace, with Spanish remaining the exclusive language for school, literacy, and wider communication? Luykx hints at some alternative uses of indigenous languages in schools that do not involve standardization, but does not elaborate on them. What other options exist for expanding indigenous languages into written domains? Luykx criticizes language planners' attempts to make indigenous languages behave more like Spanish rather than focusing on their unique strengths and cultural value. However, isn't there some value to be gained by extending the reach of indigenous languages into territories previously dominated by Spanish?

Luykx articulates in no uncertain terms the fate indigenous languages suffer amidst the prevailing practice of standardization, specifically the manner in which school-based literacy, with its text-based pronunciation, serves as the foundation of a standardized

language, regardless of how foreign its morphology, phonology and syntactic features are to the local, native speakers. Despite such articulation however, Luykx fails to provide alternative means first, to achieve standardization without marginalization and consequently, to divorce standardization from school-driven literacy and text-based phonology. Her paper would have achieved a breakthrough in literacy studies if she had offered solutions on how these could be done or presented alternatives to language planning that are not defined by historical constructs and language ideology rooted on "purity" and "antiquity".

In the question and answer session following her presentation at Teachers College, Luykx offered some alternative areas of language planning that could contribute to empowerment and language revitalization. She advocated a wider use of indigenous languages in local bureaucracies so that people could accomplish necessary tasks in their native language. She also suggested more intercultural (not necessarily bilingual) education that emphasizes ethnic tolerance and more positive attitudes towards indigenous languages. Her paper would be strengthened by a further discussion of these alternatives. A critique of standardization as a means to empowerment should offer some other ways of challenging the linguistic, and therefore the social and political, status quo.

Nonetheless, Luykx's paper has contributed to the discussion of indigenous language revitalization and education by questioning the ideological assumptions that sometimes limit that discussion. She points out that the focus on standardization and school-based literacy has drawn attention and resources away from other activities. The challenge to those who are concerned with indigenous language rights in Bolivia and beyond is to pursue these other possibilities further, always keeping in mind the experiences and diverse attitudes of the indigenous people involved. Listening to the legitimate grievances of marginalized people should lead to valuing not only the indigenous languages, but the speakers of those languages as well.

Reference

Luykx, A. (2003). Whose Language Is It Anyway? Historical Fetishism and the Language of Expertise in Bolivian Language Planning. *Current Issues in Comparative Education*, 5(2)