

Language ideology, policy and planning in Peru (a review)

Original work by Serafín M. Coronel-Molina published by Multilingual Matters 2015

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In this book, Mr. Coronel-Molina shows his personal interest in preserving and standardising the Quechua language in Peru. Quechua is an Amerindian language spoken, according to the author's estimation, by around six to twelve million people in the Andean region of South America.

With his perspective as a Quechua speaker-teacher-scholar, he questions the effectiveness of the practices in the High Academy of Quechua Language (HAQL) and the role it has played in language policy and planning in the Andean region, where according to him, the language has struggled to survive not only because of the HAQL position but for cultural reasons as well, since the time of the Spanish occupation of the region.

Therefore, the author proposes an ethnographic approach to research to fully understand the

sociolinguistic background and find ways to preserve language purity.

With this research, Mr. Coronel-Molina seeks to provide enough information to help policy makers and educators work towards an efficient language policy planning for Andean governments. This study would be helpful in the development of corpus planning and acquisition planning, as well for the maintenance and revitalisation of the language he seeks to achieve.

In chapter three, the author mentions the benefits of Language Academies established around the world. As early as in the 15th century, Europeans began to standardise languages. Records show that in the 1400s Italy was apparently the first country to gather intellectuals to conform to and prescribe proper language usage, with France and Spain following in their footsteps. American language

academies included the Academia de las Lenguas Mayas, The Navajo Language Academy, the Hebrew Language Academy, and the Arabic Language Academy. The author's personal challenge is to provide substantial input for the development of the best Quechua Academy.

Although ethnographic analysis was the author's research method of choice, this is not exactly the easiest approach. To elicit information, he had to use more Spanish than Quechua; even his research instruments were designed in Spanish and English. However, Mr. Coronel-Molina managed to differentiate his translations, give a more authentic voice to the speakers and probably a better understanding of the variables within the language itself.

His thorough compilation of historical issues between the two worlds reflects the resistance that all Amerindian tongues still face. Whether colonisation is presented historically as a means of evangelisation and progress, the final result was rejection instead of integration. Since the data is not accurate and presented by the 'conquistadores', the way the conquerors imposed their beliefs on the new world inhabitants is still unknown. One of the most infamous techniques was the inquisition, but prior to that dark era, nothing else was fully recorded. All conquests or wars are dark and tainted by savagery and domination, and the colonisation of the Americas

was no different. This is one of the reasons many cultures disappeared and will never be heard of again.

A good example is the annihilation of indigenous peoples in North America, particularly what is now the United States. Those who survived and were sent to the reservations had to struggle to preserve their culture and deal with the new owners of their lands. The negative feelings for their conquerors are indeed justified, and these feelings were shared by all Amerindian cultures in the Americas: the French and the British dominated in Canada and the United States, in Mexico and Latin America, in Brazil and Portugal. People were forced to abandon their beliefs and preferred to 'express' their resentment by hiding their culture from their enemies at the time. This became their only way to be safe and live quietly. Moreover, their mother tongue became a code used to express or hide their hatred. The many conquerors did everything in their power to wipe out the Native American population and almost succeeded. As a result, the world lost valuable people that could have contributed with their knowledge of their culture. This rejection is noted in the discrimination that Quechua speakers still face in the region, as Coronel-Molina mentions.

The other side of the coin is how much are the Quechua people themselves willing to contribute to Mr Coronel-Molina's project?

To revitalise a language is an incredible enterprise. In the case of Quechua like many other indigenous languages, there is no current alphabet or symbols to represent phonemes, as they were either lost or nobody can interpret them accurately. Other cultures have their own symbols such as Chinese, Hebrew, Arab, etc. However, for learners of any of these languages, it still has to be Romanised. If the Quechua had it, it is lost now, and every sound had to be represented and interpreted in Spanish (Romanised), which is the predominant language in the region.

As the author experienced, most of his diagnostic instruments had to be written in Spanish and in some cases – English. This leads us to the purity of the language that Mr. Coronel-Medina is looking for, considering that the difficulty of preserving the purity of the Quechua roots and the use of language without the intrusion of Spanish definitely complicates his goal. All languages have imported words from other languages and cultures, and Quechua is no exception. Varieties of the language among their speakers are endless.

A good example is the accent of each region. For example, Quechua speakers from the north of Bolivia would definitely use a different accent and word choice to a speaker from Ecuador. If we add the cultural diversity of South American countries, it is very likely that the historical use of the language is completely different.

Analysing the influence of Amerindian languages will involve recognition of different varieties of Quechua in the countries mentioned above plus defining where the source of purity resides. Who will decide, the expert or the authorities, Bolivian Quechuas or Peruvian Quechuas? As the author mentions, the HAQL still don't know if they would collaborate. The same applies to government.

The conflicts Coronel-Medina foresees in the development of corpus planning are internal and external. Which body will decide the best options for the Andean region? Will HAQL rise to the challenge? This raises more questions than answers. The supporters of revitalisation and modernisation of the language are opposed to the conservative group that wishes to preserve traditions and a notion of purity. Any language incorporates new words and concepts, and borrows words from other languages, and finding the right approach in order to please everyone is a major issue. Quechua current experts admire the 31 phonemes that the language has, but so far have not agreed on whether any new vowel or consonant sounds should be incorporated as well. The expert community has to decide whether the language should be used in its original or modernised form. A standard has to be set to define what will be considered the best version of pure Quechua.

Coronel-Medina shares a dream of disseminating

and enriching his language and culture. His proposals cover many aspects of what it would take to achieve it, but he faces the same paradox that all indigenous language defenders encounter: governments and authorities with no plans.

Over millennia cultures have vanished for different reasons, either due to human action or natural catastrophe. The outcome for researchers is the same. They are 'scratching' small vestiges of ancient civilisations, where their knowledge of them is little more than a best guess. And these assumptions are frequently based on current ways of thinking. We hope these perished cultures thrived with the same success of our recorded 21st century. But their progress was probably based on a very different perspective that is difficult or impossible to understand by our modern culture., reviving unknown history is just a lucky

presumption.

Investigating and preserving the record of the world's culture and history is part of being human. The collection and preservation of information helped us survive as a species; our culture is defined by the human race and the world we have built around ourselves. It doesn't matter what country or culture people are part of, one thing is certain, it will be transformed by technology, ethnicity, beliefs, and Quechua has changed, much more than its speakers care to admit.

Coronel-Medina's desire to share his language and culture is laudable, but in a region where language ideology, policy and planning do not really exist, it is up to the Quechua community to untangle their conflicts and find the key to preserve their language and culture by contributing and sharing.