

Linguistic diversity as politics of language

This presentation approaches linguistic diversity in Ecuador as a site of contested site of power rather than a neutral celebration of “multilingualism.” Building on Southern perspectives that insist on the pluralization of multilingualism into multilingualisms (Makoni & Pennycook, 2023; Heugh, 2017), I argue that in plurinational Ecuador distinct and unequal multilingualisms are actively produced and hierarchized through state and international projects.

Constitutionally, Ecuador has been a plurinational and intercultural state since 2008, recognizing the coexistence of 14 Indigenous nationalities and their corresponding languages within a formally indivisible nation. Yet in practice, the ecology of knowledges and languages remains governed by the coloniality of power: Spanish continues as the dominant official language, while English is institutionalized as the global language of aspiration, mobility and modernity. Parallel to this, Ecuadorian bilingualism (Spanish–Kichwa) is framed as an intercultural project, yet existing only in intercultural bilingual education geared towards Indigenous communities.

Based on comparative ethnographic research in a teacher education college that prepares both English and Kichwa teachers, I explore politics of overlapping multilingualisms: global English–Spanish bilingualism and Spanish–Kichwa bilingualism. Using a decolonial lens on concepts, analytics and praxis (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018), and drawing on work that situates Southern multilingualisms within longer histories of coloniality and epistemic denigration (Skutnabb-Kangas & Phillipson, 2010; Makoni & Pennycook, 2023), I discuss how English and Spanish are positioned as marketable resources, while Indigenous languages are simultaneously invoked as heritage and exposed to ongoing marginalization.

References:

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