

Title: Frameworks of knowledge and language ecology in a plurinational Ecuador

Long abstract

In Ecuador's plurinational, multilingual ecology, international educational organizations act as powerful English language advocates whose epistemic agency shapes what counts as 21st-century skills. Drawing on institutional ethnography (2020–2024) and ongoing participatory action research with Kichwa educators in Educación Intercultural Bilingüe (EIB) (2024–2027), this presentation contrasts two frameworks of knowledge: (a) international advocates who position English as the necessary language of science and internationalization while relegating Indigenous languages to heritage/family domains, and (b) EIB educators who, through curricular/didactic innovations and community partnerships, revitalize Kichwa as a language for higher education and knowledge production. The analysis mobilizes an ecology of languages perspective (Haugen, 1972; Hult, 2013) and theorizes epistemic agency of educational stakeholders (Madany-Saá, 2023; under revision) through a decolonial lens (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018).

Findings show that international English advocacy simultaneously expands access to some global circuits and devalues Kichwa by naturalizing hierarchies of “international” versus “intercultural” languages, narrowing Indigenous languages to symbolic identity work. In a plurinational state aspiring to an intercultural society, this discrediting agency works against the construction of that society. Kichwa educators—who lack equivalent international advocates—advance alternatives through curriculum innovations and place-based pedagogy centering Andean cosmovision. The presentation argues that without addressing this asymmetric advocacy and its effects, Ecuador's plurinational project risks reproducing the very hierarchies it seeks to undo.