Heritage languages and the outcomes of revitalization efforts in the Amazon

This talk examines the role of two indigenous languages in higher education in the Amazon of Peru. It looks at efforts to implement Kukama and Kichwa as key components in the teacher training model developed by the Programa de Formación de Maestros Bilingües de la Amazonía Peruana (www.formabiap.org). At present, Kukama and Kichwa are at different points of UNESCO’s endangerment scale. Teaching them in higher education is part of a more comprehensive commitment to build culturally and linguistically appropriate education for Amazonian indigenous groups. The study looks at a sample of eight participants, five Kukamas and three Kichwas, to reflect on the outcomes of their learning process. An important finding of this study is that endangered languages can be relearned by heritage speakers in a combination of naturalistic and well-structured instructional settings. We conclude that the assessment of these relearning processes needs to be holistic, going far beyond linguistic proficiency. In the Amazonian context, at the center of it all are language attitudes, sense of cultural membership, and the learners’ positioning with respect to the aspirations of their communities and indigenous organizations. Although the general teaching components can be planned for several groups, the implementation of the proposals and the evaluation of the outcomes must capture the uniqueness of each sociolinguistic context.

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