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Media Lengua in Ecuador

Pieter Muysken

The relevant map is listed at the end of this text.

The variety of Media Lengua (ML, lit. 'half language' or 'halfway language') described here is spoken natively by at least about a thousand people in Central Ecuador. The references are summarised in Muysken (to appear). Other varieties have been discovered in Sarajuro (Province of Loja) and outside of Cañar, both in the southern part of the Ecuadorian highlands.

Nature of the mixture and structure

Linguistically speaking, Media Lengua is essentially Quechua (Q) with the vast majority of its stems replaced by Spanish (S) forms. Examples of Media Lengua (ML) utterances are given in (1) through (3), with the (b) examples giving the regional Quechua equivalent, and the (c) examples the regional Spanish equivalent.

Abbreviations in the interlinear translations of all examples:

- AC accusative, direct object
- BN benefactive (for), purposive (in order to)
- CI cislocative (movement towards speaker)
- FN finite nominalizer
- LO locative
- PR progressive
- SD sudden/discovery tense
- TO topic marker
- 1 first person subject

- (1)a. *unu fabur-ta pidi-nga-bu bini-xu-ni* (ML)
one favour-AC ask-FN-BN come-PR-1
'I come to ask a favour.'
b. *shuk fabur-da maña-nga-bu shamu-xu-ni* (Q)
c. *vengo para pedir un favor* (S)

It is clear that (1a) has resulted from putting the phonological shapes of the word in (1c) into the lexical entries in (1b). Thus *shuk* is replaced by *unu*, *maña-* by *pidi-*, etc. Several things should be

noted. First, we get an emphatic form of the indefinite article in Media Lengua, *unu*, rather than Spanish unemphatic *un*. Second, the Spanish irregular verb form *vengo* appears in a regularised stem form *bini*. Third, the Quechua rule voicing the accusative case marker *-ta* to *-da* after *fabur* has not applied in Media Lengua; Quechua dialectological evidence suggests that this is a recent rule. Fourth, what is peculiar about Media Lengua is not so much that it contains Spanish words (many dialects of Quechua do as well), but that *all* Quechua words, including all core vocabulary, have been replaced. Fifth, the Spanish forms have been adapted phonologically to Quechua; mid vowels have been replaced by high vowels. Quechua word order and morphology have been retained.

- (2)a. *kuyi-buk yirba nuwabi-shka* (ML)
cavia-BN grass there.is.not-SD
'There turns out to be no grass for the cavia.'
b. *kuyi-buk k'iwa illa-shka* (Q)
c. *No hay hierba para los cuyes* (S)

Note that the Quechua word *kuyi* 'guinea pig' appears in the local Spanish as well. The Media Lengua verb maintains the Quechua-specific 'sudden discovery tense' marking *-shka*. The Quechua negative existential verb stem *illa-* has been relexified with a newly formed 'frozen' stem *nuwabi-*, derived from Spanish *no* and *haber* 'have'. The Spanish verb 'have' has an impersonal form *hay* which also has existential meaning.

- (3)a. *yo-ga awa-bi kay-mu-ni* (ML)
I-TO water-LO fall-CI-1
'I come after falling into the water.'
b. *ñuka-ga yaku-bi urma-mu -ni* (Q)
c. *vengo despues de caer en el agua* (S)

Examples such as (3) show the extent to which Media Lengua utilizes the possibilities of Quechua verbal affixation. Cislocative *-mu* can be attached to non-movement verb stems indicating that the subject comes after some action. This possibility exists in both Media Lengua and Quechua.

What examples (1) to (3) illustrate is that:

- (a) Media Lengua is essentially the product of replacing the phonological shapes of Quechua stems with Spanish forms, maintaining the rest of the Quechua structure;
- (b) the Spanish forms chosen have undergone regularization and adaptation to Quechua morphophonology;
- (c) Media Lengua is conservative in sometimes reflecting earlier stages in Quechua pronunciation;
- (d) it is not made up on the spot every time it is spoken;
- (e) the occurrence of Spanish strong alternants, frozen composites, etc. is an indication that we do not have a simple process of vocabulary replacement here;
- (f) the Quechua and Spanish that have contributed to Media Lengua have influenced each other in other ways as well.

Media Lengua phonology resembles that of Quechua, so that Spanish words are often adapted. Since we are concerned with the fate of the Spanish words in Media Lengua, when incorporated into a predominantly Quechua phonology, the most important differences involve elements or combinations of elements present in Spanish but not in Quechua. The voiced stops [b], [d], and [g] occur in Quechua primarily in loans from Spanish and from unidentified Amerindian substrate languages. In addition, they can result from rules that voice initial consonants of affixes. We find that *e* and *o* are often, but not always, pronounced as *i* and *u*, respectively (with some variation that also occurs in the Quechua pronunciation of Spanish loans). The Spanish vowels [e] and [o] are often retained in names and interjections. In stressed position [e] and [o] are

more frequently retained than in unstressed position.

Processes of genesis

Media Lengua probably came into existence because acculturated Indians could not identify completely with either the traditional rural Quechua culture or the urban Spanish culture. Thus, it was not communicative needs that led to it, but rather expressive needs. It appears that ethnic self-identification is of crucial importance in determining the relation between Quechua, Media Lengua and Spanish in the Ecuadorian Highlands. Media Lengua is not the product of an interlanguage arrested and fixed, resulting from an emergency contact situation, but rather it is a departure from Quechua through massive relexification, and not at all along the path of Quechua-Spanish interlanguage.

The Ecuadorian capital of Quito went through a phase of rapid expansion in the period between 1905 and 1925, after the railway linking it to the Pacific port of Guayaquil had been built. Many of the construction workers were recruited in the provinces south of the capital, where also the speakers of Media Lengua are to be found. The variety reported on here is spoken about two kilometers from a station on this railway. While now it has lost its importance, the influence of the railway station after the turn of the century and its pulling effect on the Indian labourers must have been tremendous, and there is a long history of cyclical migration to the capital. It is not at all unlikely that Media Lengua emerged as a result of the migration to the capital, among the young adult males who were suddenly much more affluent and independent than their peasant relatives, and suddenly confronted with a Hispanic urban society.

Wider social context

The Media Lengua-speaking communities studied here and located on the fringe of a Quechua-speaking area, to which the community historically belonged. Due to its geographical

situation and due to the necessity for and possibility of its inhabitants to make frequent trips to the capital to look for work, the community has come to be culturally differentiated from neighbouring areas to the extent that its people find it necessary to set themselves apart from the neighbours.

Media Lengua is not used with outsiders, but neither is it a secret language. Rather it is an ordinary, day to day community-level form of communication.

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Language acquisition aspects

Media Lengua is either learned as a first language or, now that language shift towards Spanish is more advanced, as a second language, in any case before Quechua. Only the oldest generation may still have Quechua as its first language, but everyone has some knowledge of Media Lengua. Many people now in their early middle age are frequently trilingual in Quechua, Media Lengua and Spanish. Some older people have less fluent Spanish, many younger people only rudimentary Quechua.

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Relevant map

Contact languages: Ecuador and Bolivia (Media Lengua). Compiled by Pieter Muysken. Map 142.