

DIVIDED WE STAND, UNIFIED WE FALL? THE IMPACT OF STANDARDISATION ON ORAL LANGUAGE VARIETIES: A CASE STUDY OF AMAZONIAN KICHWA

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Abstract

This article adds to the discussion on standardisation of minority languages spoken in primarily oral cultures. Focusing on Amazonian Kichwa (Quechuan, lowland Ecuador), we show how the introduction of a written standard can undermine language transmission, prompt contradictory ideologies, and instil conflicting aims within speech communities. Our approach combines descriptive linguistics and ethnography. First, we examine the extent of variation within Amazonian Kichwa and compare the local varieties with the standard. We juxtapose this with the speakers' perceptions of and attitudes towards variation, evidenced in their linguistic practices and discourse. We show that these perceptions have little to do with the features being standardised, but this does not preclude the speakers' having clear attitudes towards what the perceived standard. To explain this, we propose that Amazonian Kichwa speakers value *authenticity* above mutual intelligibility, contrary to ideologies assigning value to languages as potential tools of wider communication. To conclude, we provide policy recommendations grounded in this study, but applicable to minoritised oral varieties in other contexts.

Keywords: language standardisation; language variation; language attitudes; Quechua; Kichwa.

RESISTIM DIVIDITS O ENS ENFONSEM UNITS? L'IMPACTE DE L'ESTANDARDITZACIÓ EN LES VARIETATS LINGÜÍSTIQUES ORALS: UN ESTUDI DE CAS DEL QUÍTXUA AMAZÒNIC

Resum

Aquest article és una contribució al debat sobre l'estandardització de les llengües minoritàries parlades en cultures predominantment orals. Centrant-nos en el quítxua amazònic (terres baixes de l'Equador), mostrem com la introducció d'una norma escrita pot minar la transmissió del llenguatge, generar ideologies contradictòries i inculcar objectius també contradictoris en les comunitats de parla. El nostre enfocament combina la lingüística descriptiva i l'etnografia. En primer lloc, examinem l'abast de la variació en el quítxua amazònic i comparem les varietats locals amb l'estàndard. Complementem aquests resultats amb les percepcions i les actituds dels parlants cap a la variació, detectada tant en el discurs com les pràctiques lingüístiques. Demostrem que sovint aquestes percepcions tenen poc a veure amb els elements lingüístics estandarditzats, però que això no exclou que tinguin actituds molt clares cap al que perceben com a estàndard. Per explicar-ho, proposem que els parlants de quítxua amazònic valorin l'autenticitat per sobre de la intel·ligibilitat mútua, en contradicció amb ideologies que assignen valor a les llengües sobre la base del seu potencial com a eines de comunicació més àmplia. Acabem recomanant polítiques basades en els resultats d'aquest estudi i que són aplicables a les varietats orals minoritzades en altres contextos.

Paraules clau: estandardització lingüística; variació lingüística; actituds lingüístiques; quítxua.

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1 Introduction

This paper aims to contribute to the discussion on standardisation of minority and minorities' languages, with particular reference to how the process of introducing a standard variety affects the use and transmission of the varieties which become non-standard as a consequence.

1.1 Data and language background

In the work presented here, we focus on varieties of Kichwa spoken in the Ecuadorian Amazon. The comparison of linguistic features provided in Section 2 includes all Quechua¹ varieties spoken in the Ecuadorian Amazon, while the ethnographic data presented in Section 3 focuses on the region of Upper Napo in the Napo Province, where all three authors have conducted fieldwork.

Karolina Grzech has been working in Ecuador since 2013, focusing on the grammatical description of Upper Napo Kichwa and the use of evidential and epistemic marking in the language (e.g. Grzech, 2016, Grzech, 2019).² Her research stays in Ecuador lasted more than a year in total. Together with a native-speaker research team, comprising Wilma Aguinda, Nilo Andi and Jacobo Chimbo, Grzech collected a 13h corpus of naturalistic and quasi-naturalistic speech, subsequently transcribed and translated into Spanish, encompassing a variety of topics and including data from over 40 speakers.³ She also conducted extensive participant observation in villages along the Napo River, some 50 km east of Tena, the capital of the Napo Province. Grzech's contribution to this article is based both on the aforementioned corpus data and on participant observation and conversations with speakers carried out during her stays in Ecuador. Grzech speaks and understands Upper Napo Kichwa on a level that may be characterised as upper-intermediate.

Anne Schwarz worked and lived for more than three years (2014-2017) in Tena, where she studied and learned Upper Napo Kichwa. She directed and was involved in several interdisciplinary research projects working with Kichwa communities in the area, studying local indigenous agriculture and ecological knowledge, traditional food and medicine, female reproductive health, local history and women's life histories, etc., with special attention to the language (structures and use) of the local rural and semi-urban Kichwa communities. From 2015, she taught indigenous participants and local students to use language and culture documentation practices and tools, such as the annotation software ELAN. In 2016, she teamed up with the Kichwa speakers Silvia Andy, Adela Alvarado and Ruben Calapucha to provide informal language classes on Upper Napo Kichwa at a regional university. Together with local Kichwa speakers and Ecuadorian colleagues, she produced a bilingual guide to the agricultural diversity existing in three Kichwa communities around Tena. In a participatory project with a Kichwa midwives' association located in Archidona, and Ecuadorian and international researchers, Schwarz studied local midwifery practices and collaborated in an ethnographic video documentation of the midwives' life and work. Overall, Schwarz and her collaborators were able to create a transcribed and translated (local Spanish) corpus of Upper Napo Kichwa consisting of over 50 hours, ranging from formal and planned speeches to informal conversations on various topics, and based on their work with around 80 speakers from several Kichwa communities around Tena. Schwarz is currently working on an encyclopaedic multimedia dictionary with various examples of language use based on this corpus.⁴

Georgia Ennis has conducted long-term fieldwork on the effects of Indigenous-language media on daily communicative practices, focusing on the production and reception of radio programmes in the Tena-Archidona region. Our ethnographic data on linguistic ideologies and attitudes are drawn primarily from her work. For eighteen months between December 2015 and July 2017, Ennis worked as a guest host and participant-observer on four different Kichwa-language radio programmes in Napo. She lived in a rural Kichwa community near Archidona and accompanied residents while they listened to the radio. She also assisted a women's midwifery and cultural revitalisation cooperative, whose members regularly participated

1 We use "Kichwa" to refer to language names of individual varieties spoken in Ecuador, and "Quechua" to refer to the language family. Quechua varieties spoken outside Ecuador are referred to as "Quechua".

2 This research was funded by the Endangered Languages Programme (ELDP) doctoral grant (IGS0166, 2012-2015), the Frederick Soddy Trust/Royal Geographical Society Expedition Funding.

3 The corpus, currently under re-construction, can be found here: <https://elar.soas.ac.uk/Collection/MPI849403>

4 This work and its publication is supported by a project grant from the German Association for Endangered Languages (<http://gbs.uni-koeln.de/wordpress/index.php/en/projects/>).

in local radio programmes. Working with the association, Ennis produced a trilingual (Kichwa-Spanish-English) book and DVD which collected the stories of its members and their husbands. Ennis' research methods included participant-observation, linguistic elicitation, informal and structured interviews, and surveys. Data presented in Section 4 are drawn from 23 survey interviews with male and female heads of household of the rural community where she lived (age range: 25 to 75). All of her interviewees were L1 Kichwa speakers from the Archidona-Tena area. Ennis began her fieldwork highly conversant in Kichwa, as she had studied both Southern Peruvian Quechua and Archidona-Tena Kichwa for three years prior to beginning her dissertation research.

Although each of the different authors worked in a different location in Upper Napo, the sociolinguistic contexts in all the communities we visited were similar. In most households, intergenerational transmission had broken down, and the last generation to use Kichwa with one another were speakers aged around 25 to 30. There was a pervasive presence of Spanish, especially in communities closer to bigger towns, due to the presence of television. Although television programming was exclusively in Spanish, several local radio stations also broadcast in Kichwa (see Section 3). Our experience in the field suggests that, contrary to official assessments (see Section 2), Upper Napo Kichwa and its local micro-variants are far from being vital, and could become critically endangered in a generation, that is, in less than two decades from now.

1.2 Research questions and methods

Our work concerns a Quechuan language that is far from typical in terms of the Quechua language family. Upper Napo Kichwa is spoken in the Amazon, and not in the Andes. Its contact languages were predominantly Amazonian, and the culture and mythology of Amazonian Kichwa peoples are related to those of other inhabitants of the Amazon, not those of Kichwa or Quechua speakers from the Andes. Yet despite the unique situation of Amazonian Kichwa speakers, research on Quechua languages often fails to do justice to the variation found, not only in the Ecuadorian Amazon, but in Ecuador more generally. In fact, Quechua is an internally diverse language family, as opposed to the macro-language it is often incorrectly portrayed as. This can lead to difficulties in funding linguistic work on Quechua dialects as well as give rise to misguided ideas about the applicability of one standardised language variety across different communities of speakers.

Our first research aim in the present work is to contribute to creating a clear picture of the variation between varieties of Kichwa spoken in the Ecuadorian Lowlands. To this end, we review currently available descriptions of linguistic variation in the region, and complement those with data collected during our own fieldwork. We show that, in the just over six decades that separate the first linguistic description of Amazonian Kichwa from our own work, some dialectal differences seem to be fading. We then compare the Amazonian Kichwa varieties with Unified Kichwa, the national standard backed by the Ecuadorian government.

The first part of our study, grounded in descriptive linguistics and analysis of linguistic features of local variation, paves the way for the second, ethnographic part. Here, our aim is to discover how implementation of the standardised variety of Kichwa affects language use, transmission and ideologies in local communities. This part of the study is motivated by several considerations. The first is the need to account for discrepancies between official assessments of language vitality and its declining use (see Grzech 2017). The second is the need to understand how local attitudes shape the uptake of official language policies, so as to be able to provide accurate policy evaluations and appropriate recommendations for language policy design in the future.

The case study of Amazonian Kichwa has not yet been investigated in detail in this regard. Although linguistic anthropologists such as Michael Wroblewski (2012, 2014) and Nicholas Limerick (2018) have provided a detailed analysis of the ideological positions and tensions among Kichwa language activists in Ecuador, particularly those involved in implementing linguistic unification, less attention has been paid to the effects of these policies among the communities they are intended to serve. Our work fills this gap, focusing on communities representative of the majority of the speaker population: rural dwellers who have limited use for literacy in their day-to-day life, and are far removed from any institutions or organisations that represent them politically at local or national level.

The insights presented in this article were obtained through a combination of two different research perspectives: collaborative descriptive fieldwork, oriented towards describing and analysing the language, and an ethnographically-minded anthropological approach. While studies to date have tended to emphasise one or the other, we believe that such a juxtaposition of methods and approaches is not only beneficial but necessary for well-informed research on language standardisation, both in the context of Amazonian Kichwa and beyond.

By combining a detailed account of both linguistic structure and speakers' ideologies of linguistic variation, we propose that previous analyses of evaluations of Unified Kichwa as "strange", "confusing", "like a foreign language", and "unintelligible [...] often to the point of extreme exaggeration" (Wroblewski, 2012: 73), are not spurious exaggerations but are in fact grounded in demonstrable dialectal differences, as well as in speakers' ideas of linguistic difference and belonging.

2 Language standardisation: a brief background

The objective of this section is to situate the reader with respect to the existing literature on issues relevant to language standardisation. The following paragraphs aim to give the reader an idea of the current state of the debate. However, for reasons of space and the geographical focus of this work, our discussion focuses on issues that resonate with the sociolinguistic situation of Amazonian Kichwa. The purpose of this section is merely to provide an introduction, as specific literature on issues pertaining strictly to the context of this particular case study will be discussed in the relevant sections.

Amazonian Kichwa culture boasts a rich oral tradition, and elaborate storytelling techniques are one of its salient characteristics (see Uzendoski & Calapucha-Tapuy, 2012). The language does not have a deep-rooted written tradition, and a diglossia exists between Spanish, used for dealing with official matters, and Kichwa, which tends to be the language of the home and community. Most speakers would only write Kichwa in the context of Bilingual Education (see Section 3) and social media. This situation contrasts with urban context situations such as those studied by Limerick (2018), whose work focused on Kichwa literacy in Quito.

A focus on orality is in fact a common feature of minority and minoritised languages around the globe. Many such languages only acquire an orthography when they are described by linguists, and thus notions of orthography development become pertinent to language documentation projects and subsequent language maintenance and revitalisation efforts. When language documentation was gaining ground as a sub-discipline of linguistics, it was often assumed that creating literacy in a given language is a natural consequence of creating a documentation, and a good vehicle for "community materials" (see, for example, May, 2003; Grenoble & Whaley, 2005), or that the default way for a language to become safe is for it to expand into the same domains in which the majority language is present, including the educational system and the media (see the influential GIDS scale in Fishman, 1991). Alternative models were also explored. These relied, not on literacy, but on reinforcing intergenerational oral transmission of the language outside the confines of formal education. Such models included the "master-apprentice programme" (Hinton, 1997) and the "language nest programme" (King, 2001), both of which were very successful in their respective communities.

The issues involved in creating an orthography are always related to the need to create an orthographic standard. However, case studies from all over the world, from the Ecuadorian Andes (Hornberger and King, 1996) to Siberia (Grenoble & Bulatova, 2017), have shown that the process of creating a standard, especially in the case of predominantly oral cultures, can lead to the exclusion of speakers of the varieties that become non-standard in the wake of introduction of the standard. Theoretical responses to the issue, such as "polynomic" orthographies, involving multiple orthographic possibilities (cf. Sallabank, 2010), have therefore been proposed. The concept of standardisation has itself become a focus of theoretical study (see e.g. Amorós Negre, 2008), and the more recent literature thoroughly engages with its implications in multilingual contexts (see, for example, Ostade & Percy, 2016).

3 Amazonian Kichwa varieties and Unified Kichwa

In this section, we offer an overview of the most important defining characteristics of the Amazonian Kichwa varieties spoken in Ecuador and describe how these varieties differ from Unified Kichwa, the official standard language variety of Kichwa endorsed by official language policy in Ecuador. We also mention some relevant aspects of the current sociolinguistic situation of Amazonian Kichwa.

3.1 Ecuadorian Kichwa

The Quechua language family is spoken by about 12 million people (Comajoan, 2005) across several countries along the Andes, and has been compared with the Romance language family in terms of its internal differentiation (Muysken, 2000: 973-974). This differentiation does not end at Ecuador's national boundaries, even though common language labels suggest a single language. The Quechua varieties in Ecuador, which belong to the Northern Quechua branch (Quechua II, according to Torero, 1964, and Adelaar, 2013), are officially referred to as Kichwa. This name reflects the absence of phonetic mid-vowel allophones in Kichwa, due to its lack of uvular consonants, in contrast to other Quechua languages (Adelaar with Muysken, 2004: 196). In the most recent standard orthography, the use of certain graphemes inherited from Spanish has been discontinued in favor of symbols closer to the International Phonetic Alphabet, such as <k> for the velar stop, or <w>, for the initial component of a rising opening diphthong, both of which are illustrated in the official language name "Kichwa".⁵ The common glossonym used by native speakers, however, is *runa shimi*, "human speech", from *runa* "man, person, mankind" and *shimi* "mouth; speech".

According to Muysken (2011a: 256) Ecuadorian Kichwa first emerged as a separate Quechua variety in the Incaic (15th century) and Colonial (16th-18th centuries) periods, and is based on transplanted Peruvian varieties, mostly from southern Peru. Muysken (2011b: 252) assumes a process of pidginisation and creolisation: in the colonial period, many speakers of smaller Indigenous languages learned Quechua as a second language, simplifying it in the process. The use of Quechua in preference to other Indigenous languages was heavily promoted by missionaries and the Spanish colonial administration throughout the colony, and the process of creolisation was accelerated by forced migration and rapid demographic changes. Ecuadorian Kichwa thus replaced several autochthonous or Indigenous languages, especially in the Amazonian region (e.g. Zaparoa and Chicham, see Adelaar with Muysken, 2004). As a result, Amazonian Kichwa has many distinctive characteristics of substrate languages, but also some archaic characteristics with respect to the Quechua spoken south of Ecuador (Muysken, 2011b: 240).

Estimates of the number of contemporary Ecuadorian Kichwa speakers range from 340,000 to three million (Haboud, 2010: 96). They speak different regional varieties (Aschmann, 2007), most of which have yet to be substantially described, including the most interesting aspect of their grammatical variation (Muysken, 2011a: 265). Some scholars distinguish between at least two main varieties of Ecuadorian Kichwa as distinct languages: Highland and Lowland (or Amazonian) Kichwa (Gómez Rendon, 2008: 169⁶; Haboud, 2010: 96⁷), while a total of eight different Kichwa varieties have been identified nationwide. The map at Figure 1 displays these regional varieties, five of which are spoken in the Highlands and three in the Lowlands.

Although Amazonian Kichwa covers an extensive geographical area and is spoken by a considerable number of speakers – estimates vary between 42,000 (based on data from 1999 onwards, Simons & Fennig, 2018) and 150,000 speakers (Uzendoski & Whitten, 2014: 1) – studies of Kichwa language and culture have typically focused on Highland groups as they were seen as more intriguingly associated with the Inca empire and guardians of Kichwa language and culture. Uzendoski and Whitten (2014: 6) report stereotypical views of Amazonian Kichwa-speaking people as "assimilated" or "acculturated", "in-migrants from the *Sierra*" not worthy of further (anthropological) study. They conclude that "historically, the voices of actual Amazonian Quichua peoples have been distorted rather than transmitted". With this article we aim to challenge such uninformed stereotypes and cultural and linguistic simplifications.

⁵ We use the official notation, unless citing verbatim sources which follow other graphemic conventions.

⁶ "Ecuadorian Quichua is broadly divided in Highland Quichua (*Quichua de la Sierra*) and Lowland Quichua (*Quichua del Oriente*)".

⁷ "Ecuadorian Quichua has two main varieties: highland Quichua and lowland (Amazonian) Quichua".

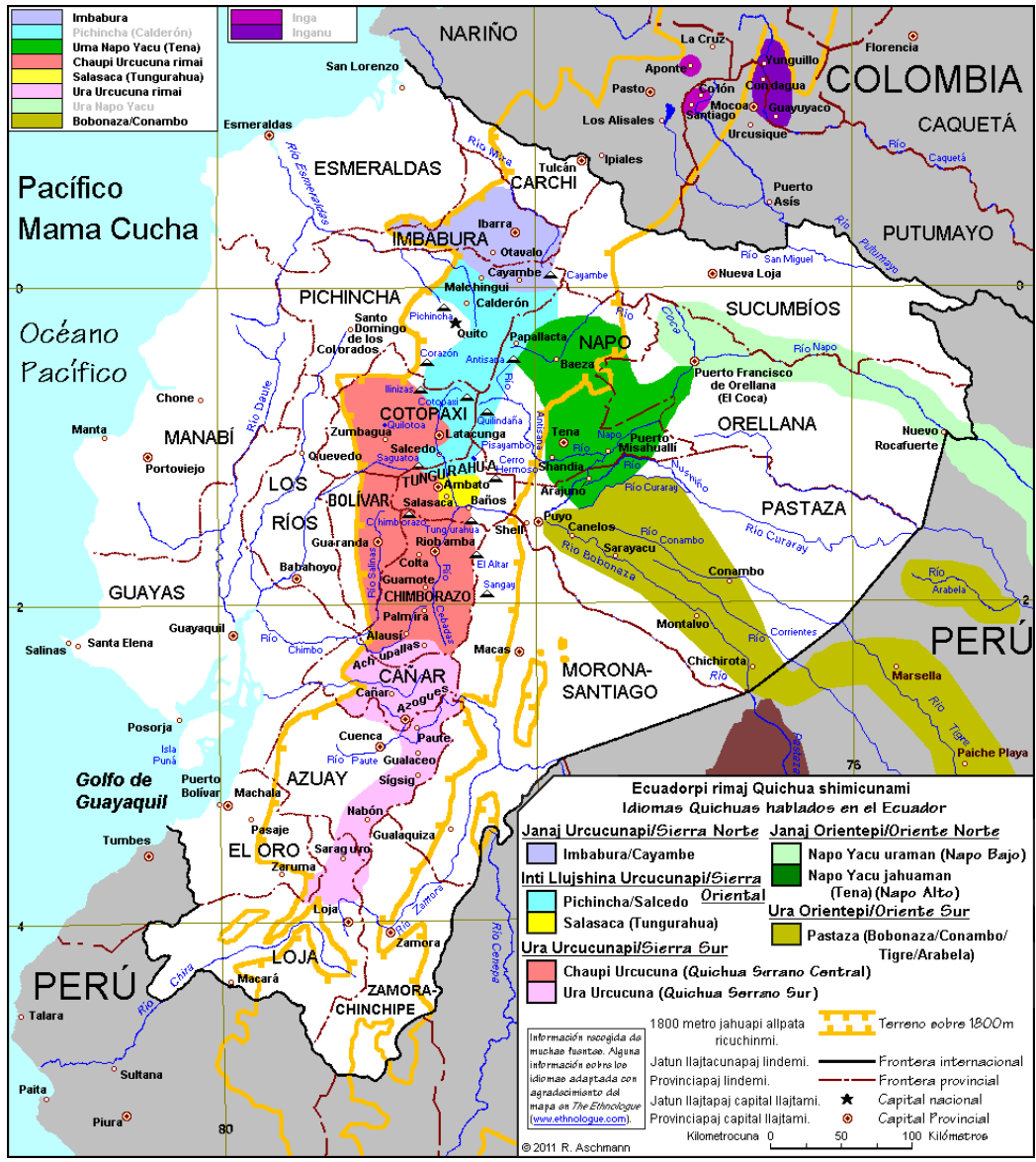


Figure 1. Ecuadorian Kichwa varieties (Aschmann, 2007)

3.2 The Amazonian Kichwa language varieties: linguistic and sociolinguistic aspects

The three Amazonian dialects identified by Orr and Wrisley and shown on the map at Figure 1 are: (i) Loreto–Nuevo Rocafuerte, (ii) Tena–Arajuno–Ahuano, (iii) Bobonaza–Puyo (1981⁸: iii). In Figure 1, the first two dialects are represented as *Bajo Napo* (“Lower Napo”) and *Alto Napo* (“Upper Napo”), respectively, which are the more recent glossonyms (see Table 4 towards the end of this section).

Data from Orr and Wrisley (1981) displays lexical and phonological distinctions between these varieties. Interestingly, we found certain discrepancies between the previously documented regional variation and our recent documentation results. One reason for such inconsistencies could be the influence of Unified Kichwa on local varieties. According to Orr and Wrisley’s data, the Tena dialect sometimes patterns with the Loreto and sometimes with the Bobonaza dialect. Compare the forms of the past tense and perfect suffixes in Table 1 below. The past tense suffix differs for each dialect, with a more complex and conservative form used in the Loreto–Nuevo Rocafuerte variety.⁹ The perfect suffix has only two variations between L., on the one hand, and B. and T. on the other.

⁸ Note the existence of a 1965 publication by the same authors. In this article, we cite the 1981 version of their work.
⁹ This is also the form taught in Intercultural Bilingual Education (see the section on Unified Kichwa below; Ministry of Education

TAM	Dialect(s)	stem-TAM.suffix	Example	Gloss
Past	Loreto–Nuevo Rocafuerte (L.)	stem- rka	mikurka miku-rka-Ø eat-PA-3sg	“he/she ate”
	Bobonaza–Puyo (B.)	stem- ra	mikura miku-ra-Ø eat-PA-3sg	
	Tena–Arajuno–Ahuano (T.)	stem- ka	mikuka miku-ka-Ø eat-PA-3sg	
Perfect	Loreto–Nuevo Rocafuerte (L.)	stem-(3pl)- ska	mikunuska miku-nu-ska eat-3pl-PF	“they have eaten”
	Bobonaza–Puyo (B.); Tena–Arajuno–Ahuano (T.)	stem-(3pl)- shka	mikushkani miku-shka-ni eat-PF-1sg	“I have eaten”

Table 1. Past and perfect suffixes in Amazonian Kichwa dialects (T., B. and L. forms based on Orr & Wrisley, 1981; for B., see also Nuckolls 2012; for T., see also our own data)

Distinctive lexemes set the Bobonaza–Puyo variety apart from the other two dialects. Such lexical items are found, among others, in terminology for flora and fauna. Dialectal variation ranges from phonological differences to morphological operations like metathesis and lexical substitutes, as illustrated in Table 2 below.

Bobonaza–Puyo	Loreto–Nuevo Rocafuerte, Tena–Arajuno–Ahuano	Gloss
ruya	yura ¹⁰	“tree” (gen. term)
tsawata	yawati	“tortoise”
chuba	makisapa (lit. ‘huge arms’)	a monkey species with very long extremities
titimbu, yakun, yakunsillu	kutimbu	“giant armadillo”
chunchupi	chunchupu	a plant species (medicinal use)
puksiri	pusara	a type of heron (coffee-coloured with grey breast and red feet)

Table 2. Sample of lexemes that vary between B., and L. and T. dialects (based on Orr and Wrisley, 1981)

Lexemes in the Tena dialect that contrast with both the Bobonaza and Loreto dialects are frequently characterised by some shortening: elision of initial consonants, truncation of the stem or a suffix compared to the corresponding term in the other dialects, as illustrated in Table 3.

Loreto–Nuevo Rocafuerte Bobonaza–Puyo	Tena–Arajuno–Ahuano	Gloss
ushushi	ushi (also ushushi according to recent data)	“daughter”
wauki	uki (also wauki according to recent documentation)	“man’s brother”
wiru	iru	“sugar cane”

of Ecuador, 2009: 29).

¹⁰ However, our data show that metathesis is also a common process in the Upper Napo: although *yura* is in use around Tena and Archidona, some speakers in Archidona also use *ruya*.

jaku	aku	“let’s go” (to a single person)
llugllu	tiambiku	“beach locust”

Table 3. Sample of lexemes that vary between L. and B., and T. dialects (based on Orr and Wrisley, 1981)

In more recent classifications, these Amazonian Kichwa dialects have been re-labelled as indicated in Table 4.

Orr and Wrisley (1981)	Simons and Fennig (2018)	ISO 639-3	Other common terms
Loreto– Nuevo Rocafuerte (L.)	Napo Lowland Quichua	[qvo]	Lower Napo Kichwa, Riverside Kichwa (<i>de la ribera</i>)
Tena–Arajuno– Ahuano (T.)	Tena Lowland Quichua	[quw]	Upper Napo Kichwa, Quijos Kichwa
Bobonaza–Puyo (B.)	Pastaza Lowland Quichua	[qvz]	Pastaza Kichwa, Canelos Kichwa

Table 4. Nomenclature of the three major regional varieties of Amazonian Kichwa

Considering the three Amazonian Kichwa dialects on the map, a clear geographical pattern emerges, based on geographical features. The pattern indicates that these dialects have been shaped, either along the historically most important gateway into the Amazonian region situated at the foothills of the Eastern Andean slopes in the Tena lowlands (from now on referred to as Upper Napo Kichwa), or along two riverbeds that lead further into the Amazonian lowlands (accordingly referred to as Lower Napo Kichwa and Pastaza Kichwa).

Correspondences between the linguistic and ethno-cultural levels are interesting, but they are only partial. The Pastaza dialect [qvz] is spoken by the Indigenous population of the Pastaza province, who were known as the Canelos-Kichwa (Muratorio, 1998, Whitten et al., 1987), and for whom the process of shifting to Kichwa, mainly from Zaparoa and Chicham languages, is still ongoing. The Upper Napo Kichwa dialect [quw] is spoken by groups that have long been recognised as *Napu runa* (“people of the [Upper] Napo”; Muratorio, 1998), some of which have recently begun to reclaim their historical identity as Quijos or Quijos-Kichwa.

Within these three major Amazonian Kichwa varieties, however, Kichwa speakers also make further sub-distinctions, as indicated two decades ago for Upper Napo Kichwa (Muratorio, 1998), the dialect spoken in major population centres of the province, such as Archidona, Tena and Pano. According to Muratorio (1998: 71), people from Pano, for instance, pride themselves on differentiating their own way of speaking – in intonation and vocabulary – from that of speakers from Archidona, some 30 km to the north-east. This is confirmed by our own fieldwork, in terms of both identity and linguistics. The speakers from around Pano refer to themselves as *Pano runa*, while those from Archidona call themselves *Archiruna*. Although they all use the Upper Napo dialect, micro-variation also exists. Compare, for example, the intransitive verb “to fall”: *rumana* for speakers from Archidona, and *urmana* for those from Pano and Tena, situated halfway between the two.¹¹ Our recent observations and new corpus data (Schwarz 2015–2018) on Upper Napo Kichwa show that, despite considerable migration, such sub-distinctions live on and that L1¹² Kichwa speakers are still aware of their and their kinship group’s (Kichwa: *muntun*) local linguistic identity. Micro-variation within and between Amazonian Kichwa dialects is still relatively unexplored. Our work so far has mainly focused on Upper Napo Kichwa, with limited data from Lower Napo Kichwa, while other colleagues (e.g. Nuckolls 1996; Nuckolls et al., 2015, among others) have been working extensively on Pastaza Kichwa. It would be highly desirable to begin systematic collaborative work involving native speakers to thoroughly describe these dialects.

According to Simons and Fennig (2018), the status of the three Amazonian Kichwa dialects varies. Lower Napo Kichwa is ascribed a secure, developing status. Upper Napo Kichwa has a vigorous but non-standardised status, and Pastaza Kichwa is reported as threatened, with intergenerational transmission at risk.

Our own fieldwork-informed estimates regarding the vitality of Upper Napo Kichwa are less optimistic (see also Section 1), and are confirmed by the observations of other authors (Haboud, 2010: 98; Moseley, 2010),

¹¹ Both verb forms are given in Orr and Wrisley (1981), *rumana* identified as Tena dialect, *urmana* without dialectal specification.

¹² As opposed to speakers who learned Kichwa only as a second language (L2) in school.

who estimate that, in the short- or mid-term, all the varieties of Amazonian Kichwa will be endangered. Upper Napo Kichwa and Spanish are in a diglossic relation which is typical of the wider area, whereby Spanish is used in official contexts, and the local Kichwa variety is the default choice for informal communicative encounters. Purely monolingual Kichwa speakers are all over 60. In line with Uzendoski and Whitten (2014: 4), we observed that most Napo Kichwa people are bilingual in Kichwa and Spanish, and that the Kichwa language is threatened, as many younger people are either monolingual in Spanish or use it as their primary language. When language transmission breaks down, intangible cultural knowledge is also affected. As noted by Uzendoski (2009: 149), young people from Napo are losing more of their Kichwa dominion every day, and many have no knowledge of their own oral literature, distinct from the narrative tradition of the Highlands.

The ongoing shift towards monolingualism in Spanish observed among younger generations of Amazonian Kichwa speakers might seem surprising in view of official language policies that strive, ostensibly at least, to prevent such a shift. Kichwa and Shuar are the only two indigenous languages in Ecuador whose “official language for intercultural relations” status is guaranteed by the Constitution (ANCE, 2008: Art. 2). Kichwa is also the most prominent indigenous language used in intercultural bilingual education in Ecuador. However, most of the linguistic and cultural policies intended to preserve native languages and cultures have not been adequately implemented (Haboud, 2010: 98). Paradoxically, policies intended to safeguard Indigenous languages and promote formal bilingual education seem to contribute to the endangerment of Amazonian (and other local) Kichwa dialects by enforcing a well-intentioned but harmful language standard. We return to this issue in Section 4, in which we discuss Upper Napo Kichwa speakers’ perspectives on and attitudes towards language standardisation.

3.3 Unified Kichwa and its relation to Amazonian Kichwa varieties

Ecuadorian Indigenous movements emerged in the 1970s and 1980s (Becker, 2013: 132; Selverston-Scher, 2001: 179ff.; von Gleich, 1994, among others), taking up the struggle for territorial, cultural and educational rights. At the outset, they were acting in a context in which the speakers of Indigenous languages, including Kichwa, were heavily marginalised. At that time, any official interest in Indigenous languages was mainly based on their function as transitional languages of instruction for religious doctrinal and educational purposes. The SIL missionaries, for instance, who worked on several local Kichwa varieties, applied graphemes and conventions from Spanish so as to ease the smooth transition into literacy in Spanish, which was their primary aim (Howard, 2015; Limerick, 2018). As part of an effort to strengthen the rights of Indigenous peoples to socio-economic inclusion and education, Kichwa has been taught at the Pontifical Catholic University of Ecuador (PUCE) since 1970, within the framework of Indigenous literacy courses (von Gleich, 1994; Moya, 1989; King and Haboud, 2007: 74)¹³. This gave rise to an urgent need for appropriate materials (Montaluisa, 1980: 126). It is in this context that Indigenous movements and academics were seeking unification across different Kichwa-speaking peoples and began planning for a pan-Quechua standard. As a result, a highly standardised Unified Kichwa orthography was created, intended to be applied by all Kichwa-speaking communities across Ecuador without any variation. Ultimately, the standardisation process went far beyond orthographical unification (see Sections 4 and 5).

Early standardisation efforts enjoyed unprecedented cooperation among Ecuadorian ethnolinguistic communities, which led to the founding of the Confederation of Indian Nationalities of Ecuador (CONAIE) in 1986 and provided powerful political momentum in support of Kichwa language planning (von Gleich 1994: 96). Closely linked to political unification, standardisation was considered essential for safeguarding Kichwa, although the challenges faced by the process, such as orality or “dialectalisation and its corresponding ethnic group delimitations” (von Gleich, 1994: 80), were also acknowledged.

Kichwa was now becoming a language of education, which implied that all Kichwa Highland and Lowland dialects needed a written grammar, a dictionary and a common written code. Of these, the unification of orthography was perceived as the most urgent task (Montaluisa, 1980: 121). Raising the profile and prestige of the Kichwa language and countering the negative ideologies surrounding Indigenous languages were major goals at the time (King & Haboud, 2007: 75). Formal linguistic publications and a unified orthography were considered necessary steps to achieve these goals.

¹³ Nowadays, Unified Kichwa language courses are taught at many universities in Ecuador.

The linguistic codification, together with the regulations and recommendations for the use of Kichwa and its alignment with other Quechuan languages, were debated, revoked, and adapted at less than ten-year intervals after implementation (see Limerick, 2018, for a detailed overview). The initial 1980 decision on the uniform orthography was made by delegates of various Kichwa organisations. No particular dialect was selected as the basis, although historical reconstruction, based on the descriptions of Highland varieties, was considered in the process, drawing on the model of the historically-informed standardisation of Euskara (Montaluisa, 2018: 288, 292). The inclusion of graphemes for certain phonemes and allophones was based on a combination of the following criteria: longevity, frequency, pedagogical advantages, and unification of the Kichwa people. Importantly, the last criterion was considered the most important (Krainer, 1996: 17f.). A major debate arose on whether to adopt the International Phonetic Alphabet symbols for certain phonemes or stick to graphemes and orthographic conventions from Spanish (see Limerick, 2018, for discussion of ongoing issues). The graphemes <k> and <w>, already in use in the PUCE's Kichwa literacy course, were considered representative of "imperialistic" letters and rejected in favour of the Hispanic conventions (Montaluisa, 1980; Howard, 2015), only to be re-adopted much later, in 1999 (Yanez Cossío, 2007: 15). Moya (1989) describes the result of the early 1980s debates as a "compromise alphabet" between Kichwa and Spanish phonology. What had been created under the name Unified Kichwa was a type of "pan-phonology" for Ecuadorian Kichwa, representing the phonemes existing in all dialects, but not those appearing in only some varieties (Moya, 1989: 14, cited in King & Haboud, 2007: 75). The decisions made on Unified Kichwa were subsequently codified in dictionaries and grammars and the "nation-wide standardisation of Ecuadorian Quichua" was initiated (King & Haboud, 2007: 75).

Comparing language planning and standardisation in Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia, Howard (2015: Paragraph 327) notes that "in Ecuador, the principle of a unified Quechua has been taken to the extreme, with its implementation somewhat forced onto the spoken and not only the written language". The standardisation effort yielded an alphabet and orthographical conventions that fail to capture the phonological system of most of the existing dialects. Consequently, it later became necessary to extend the alphabet used in official linguistic publications in order to accommodate words with phonemes which were originally deliberately ignored. A case in point is the second edition of a children's dictionary (*Sisayakuk Shimipampa-Diccionario Infantil Quichua*) in which "lexemes are present whose orthography was not taken into account by the standardisation agreements" (Mendoza Orellana; 2009: 14). Grzech (2017) argues convincingly that Unified Kichwa is incompatible with Upper Napo Kichwa, taking different features of the phonological system of the spoken variety into account (Grzech, 2017; O'Rourke & Swanson, 2013). It is noteworthy that, even where the choices of graphemes are phonologically acceptable, standardisation has created a very deep orthographical system (Katz & Frost, 1992; Seifart, 2006), that is, a system which lacks many direct sound-spelling correspondences. Such an orthography is therefore difficult to read, and "carries the application of phonological rules and processes too far into the writing system" (Wölck, 1991: 48). Wölck also observes the development of a new oral recitation and reading variety of Ecuadorian Quichua among students at bilingual schools, which he calls *Quichua escolar* ("school Quichua"; Wölck, 1991: 48).

We can conclude that Unified Kichwa emerged in connection to Indigenous movements striving for political unification and educational rights, and that the Kichwa language became an important symbol for these aims. However, the unification process disregarded important linguistic criteria, such as the socio-linguistic factors and interests of different speaker groups. Linguistic rights, such as the right of children to receive school instruction in their mother tongue (see Skutnabb-Kangas et al., 1994), were set aside in favour of the ideological, political argument of pan-Quechua unification. For many speakers and stakeholders, the political focus of the standardisation process came across as an implicit suggestion that the local Kichwa varieties must be deficient, and thus unworthy of linguistic study, of being written down or used in schools or other official domains.

In the next section we draw on ethnographic research among speakers of Upper Napo Kichwa to show that the implicit suggestion behind the linguistic norm is acutely perceived, and strongly resisted, by speakers of regional varieties. We aim to show that the linguistic ideologies underlying standardisation are not merely abstract political, ideological or, at best, linguistic choices. Instead, we demonstrate how these ideologies exert a significant effect on speakers' lives, influencing their linguistic choices, and potentially further endangering the language they were intended to support.

4 Speaker perceptions: local varieties and Unified Kichwa

In this section, we show how language standardisation and pan-Kichwa unification often run counter to local ideologies of language (Silverstein, 1979; Irvine, 1989), which linguistic anthropologists such as Paul Kroskrity have defined as “beliefs, or feelings about languages, as used in their social worlds” (2007: 498). We note, however, that ideologies of language are multiple and contested in Napo, as they are among all linguistic communities of practice (Jaffe, 1999; Webster & Peterson, 2011; Davis, 2018). Thus, while some people in Napo, already well represented in the ethnographic record (e.g. Wroblewski, 2012, 2014; see also Limerick 2017 for similar attitudes in the Ecuadorian Highlands) support the ideological underpinnings of linguistic unification, many others have ideologies that associate political and linguistic unification with a violation of their deeply held beliefs. Following Jaffe, we suggest that “the divergent positions that they take are all equally coherent responses to dominant language ideologies and their effects on people’s lives” (1999: 1). In this section, we consider the voices of this latter group of speakers, underrepresented in the literature to date.

Many of the debates about language standardisation in Napo revolve around perceptions of the foreignness of Unified Kichwa. Our data suggest that these conflicts hinge less on perceptions of the artificialness of the standard, and more on the ways that people already differentiate among regional communities based on speech. As mentioned in Section 3.2, speakers in Napo often make fine distinctions between linguistic varieties, with forms varying between nearby towns and even neighbouring communities. These micro-variations in pronunciation or lexicon can be significant for speakers, who identify their speech as part of their familial heritage, often invoking the concept of *ñukanchi kikin shimi* (“our own language”).¹⁴ Ethnographic research suggests that, for many Kichwa speakers in Napo and elsewhere in the Ecuadorian Amazon, language forms a crucial part of personal identity. It is often seen as an embodied substance contained in breath and speech, ideally transmitted through repeated, mimetic interactions between caretakers and children (Muratorio, 1991; Mezzenzana, 2017; Uzendoski & Calapucha-Tapuy, 2012). In everyday conversation as well as formal interviews, speakers frequently express strong attitudes towards linguistic unification, grounded in the intense connection they feel to local ways of speaking. Interestingly, such local ways of speaking, perceived as authentic, often include lexemes derived from Spanish; these are seen as undesirable by language planners, and replaced with Quechua neologisms in Unified Kichwa.

The Kichwa elders (50 years of age and above) that Ennis worked with frequently expressed dislike for the use of Unified Kichwa in schools, largely because of their perception that it is “another” Kichwa, distinct from their own variety. The experiences of a primarily Spanish-speaking teenager and his Kichwa-speaking grandmother are illustrative of these difficulties. Although his family was originally from Archidona, the young man had studied Kichwa at a bilingual school and described that he had been taught “another Kichwa”. However, when he began learning Kichwa from his grandmother in Archidona, he decided the Kichwa he had learned in school was *mezclado* (“mixed”) with Kichwa from the Highlands and that it “sounded different”. His grandmother, meanwhile, described the Kichwa he learned was *llutachishka* (“unified”, lit. “glued/stacked together”). She emphasised that she wanted local Kichwa to be used and argued that, because bilingual educators have combined the languages, children now use pronunciations like [a]ku “dog” and [ata]pa “chicken”, popularly associated with Highland Kichwa, in contrast to the expected [a]ku and [ata]ba.

This example is representative of the attitudes of many speakers. For an increasingly vocal population in Napo, their language is threatened, not just by Spanish, but by “another” Kichwa, an emerging spoken register based on the written standard of Unified Kichwa, which they ideologically associate with the Highlands. This association largely derives from the fact that Unified Kichwa is based on the norms of Highland Kichwa (see Section 3), as well as the fact that the strong historical association between Kichwa and the Highland Andes in national media and public discourse leads to the “ideological erasure” (Irvine and Gal, 2001) of Amazonian Kichwa speakers.

Such language ideologies were also expressed during Ennis’s structured interviews on linguistic history and attitudes in a rural Kichwa-speaking village in the Archidona area. These interviews revealed that speakers had a well-developed awareness of regional variation which, though it varied from speaker to speaker,

¹⁴ In Tena–Archidona Kichwa, the first-person plural pronoun is generally formed *ñukanchi* in contrast to the *ñukanchik* form used in Unified and Highland Kichwa.

generally coincided with the dialectal areas discussed in Section 3. As was the case for Southern Quechua speakers (Mannheim, 2017), ideologies of local essentialism connecting speech and personal identity to particular places were pervasive among these speakers. Languages and people were regularly described using the ablative morpheme *-manda*, indicating that they are *from* and *of* particular places. However, in contrast to the specificity with which many interviewees described the Amazon, drawing upon their varied experiences with speakers from the larger region, fewer had interacted with Kichwa speakers from the Highlands. Some would reflect that the *Sierra* belongs to another *muntun* (“kinship group”), distinguished from their own by dialectal difference. One interviewee reported not understanding speakers of Kichwa from Quito, saying that, though they also speak Kichwa, it is “twisted up” with “mistakes”.

Issues related to the “ancestral code” (e.g. Woodbury 2011) and intergenerational transmission were also deeply ideologised. One woman in her 40s described that she wanted her children to speak what she called *ñawpamanda rukuguna sakishka shimillara* (“just the language our ancestors left behind”). Another speaker, in her late 60s, emphasised the importance of uninterrupted intergenerational transmission of language and knowledge. Like many others, she argued that her language had been left behind by her ancestors and therefore needed to be remembered (see Ennis, 2019b for further discussion of these attitudes). Respect for their ancestors is one of the central moral values of Tena–Archidona Kichwa speakers (Muratorio, 1991), and we found it played an important role in their attitudes towards the process of language standardisation. Throughout the interviews, speakers expressed concern that their ancestral language “from here” (*kaymanda*) was being forgotten in favour of speech “from elsewhere” (*shuk partimanda*).

In this ideological context, Unified Kichwa forms remain highly marked for many people in Napo, even when they are not identified as Highland or Unified in origin, but simply perceived as non-local. The speech of the hosts on the community radio station Radio Jatari often elicited commentary in the households where Ennis studied reactions to radio broadcasts in Archidona. The station broadcasts from the nearby city of Arajuno in Pastaza province, which is dialectally grouped with Tena Kichwa (Orr and Wrisley, 1981). The hosts, however, frequently use a broadcast register incorporating many standardised forms of speech, which draws comments from listeners. One morning, for instance, upon hearing the announcer say *aswakunata upyachiychi* (“serve manioc beers to drink”, bolded in the example below),¹⁵ the 70-year old matriarch of the household repeated the phrase, and emphasised that in her variety it is said differently:

- 1 “*aswa*” ni-nun, ñukanchi “*asa*” ni-nchi
aswa say-3PL 1PL *asa* say-1PL
‘They say *aswa*, we say *asa*.’

- 2 “*asa-ra upi-chi-ychi*” ni-nchi ñukanchi rima-nchi,
asa-ACC drink-CAUS-2PL.IMP say-1PL 1PL speak-1PL
‘In our speech, we say “serve *asa* to drink”.’

- 3 pay-guna=ga “*aswa-kuna-ta upi-chi-ra-ychi*” ni-nun
3-PL=TOP *asa-PL-ACC drink-CAUS-do-2PL.IMP say-3PL*
‘They, on the other hand, say “serve *aswa* to drink”.’

This transcript reflects the variants employed by the speaker, which point to a number of perceived differences between local speech and that of the radio host.

¹⁵ It is also worthy of note that plural marking on *asa* appears to be non-obligatory in Archidona-Tena Kichwa, while it is proscribed in standardised speech as *aswakuna*.

Most salient seems to be the pronunciation of *aswa* (Spanish: *chicha*), a fermented manioc brew, which is a staple product of many households. In Archidona, syncope of diphthongs is a common phonological process, yielding the form [asa], which contrasts with [aswa], used in both Unified Kichwa and some local varieties. The form [aswa] is in fact also in use in Archidona, sometimes even in this particular woman's speech. However, this pronunciation seems to have emerged as a salient difference in the context of standardised morphology. This is evident from the speaker's variation between the regional plural marker [guna] and her purposeful repetition of the radio host's use of the standardised form [kuna] in line 3. In her quote, she also explicitly includes the use of the object marker [ta], which contrasts with the speaker's own use of [ra] in line 2.¹⁶ Thus, the sounds of standardised speech activate speakers' semiotic ideologies of linguistic belonging and difference (Irvine & Gal, 2000), establishing contrasts between how *we* and *they* say things.

Wroblewski (2012, 2014) observes that an increasingly standardised oral register of Unified Kichwa has been promulgated through the Napo Provincial Directorate of Bilingual and Intercultural Education (DIPEIB-N, *Dirección Provincial de Educación Intercultural Bilingüe de Napo*), as well as related broadcast media. Through events like Tena's annual intercultural bilingual Indigenous beauty pageant, public oratory competitions, and television programming, language planners, educators, and activists in Napo have "solidif[ied] the Unified Kichwa-based intercultural code as the de facto speaking style of Indigenous intercultural media" (Wroblewski, 2014:77).

However, we found local media to be one of the most prominent sites of debate over the use of Unified and regional forms of Kichwa. These debates were so pervasive that even Spanish-speaking owners and managers of radio stations in Tena were aware of the issues surrounding the use of regional or standardised varieties on the air. In interviews, many emphasised that their Kichwa-speaking audiences want *kichwa de aquí* ("local Kichwa"). A number of hosts of Kichwa-language programmes broadcast from Tena were aligned with regional varieties of Kichwa, but many acknowledged that they walked a difficult line to appease the members of their audience most comfortable with daily, regional forms of speech as well as those that favour linguistic purism and language standardisation.

The young host of the morning and evening Kichwa-language shows broadcast on the Catholic Josephine Mission's station *La Voz de Napo* ("The Voice of Napo") sometimes received messages from listeners criticising her speech. A listener wrote one evening by text message – using a mixture of standardised spellings and local phonetic forms – to correct her on-air description of a mobile phone as *celular muku* (Spanish: *celular* "mobile phone", Kichwa *muku* "junction/joint"), suggesting that she use the neologism *willilli* instead. This form does not appear in the Unified Kichwa dictionary (Ministerio de Educación del Ecuador, 2009) distributed by the Ministry of Education and written by coordinators from the Direction of Intercultural Bilingual Education.¹⁷ It may be derived from the verb *willana* "to tell, to inform", a neologism drawn from other varieties which was introduced to replace the Spanish-derived *kwintana* (from *contar* "to tell, to converse"), and semantically extended to replace *celular*. This exchange highlights the unpredictable way that the standard may be applied in Napo, as ideas about linguistic purity sometimes contrast with knowledge of the standardised code. The incident described above is not an isolated one: hosts of other Kichwa-language radio programmes in Napo also faced dilemmas and criticism for their language choices, and are also acutely aware of the multiple, conflicting ideologies held by their listeners. Rita Tunay, the host of the popular program *Mushuk Ñampí* ("A New Path"), for instance, regularly code-switches from a more regional to a more standardised register while on the air, depending on the ideological commitments of her interlocutors. She tends to use more standard forms in exchanges with bilingual educators and politicians who employ Unified Kichwa, and employs regional variants with speakers of regional varieties.

The possibility of becoming a target of criticism for choosing an "incorrect" form provokes a great deal of anxiety in many speakers, especially when speaking on the air, in the classroom, or in public. Although the register of Kichwa-language media is contested, speakers around Napo are increasingly familiar with many examples of media and public discourse in which Unified Kichwa has been used, establishing expectations among many that a standard register be used as a public form of speech. This is seen, not only in Tena

¹⁶ In Upper Napo Kichwa, the object marker may be realised variously as [ra], [da], and [ta] depending on the preceding sound, while Unified Kichwa prescribes the use of [ta].

¹⁷ Our anonymous reviewer reports that this form is also in use in the Highlands, though we have no personal experience of it.

and Archidona, but also in rural communities at a considerable distance from major towns, where Grzech conducted her fieldwork.

Although unification and purification have lent ideological strength to Unified Kichwa, they have at the same time engendered anxiety in speakers that frequently hinders language use. This is akin to the influence of Unified Kichwa in parts of the Ecuadorian Highlands, described more than twenty years ago (Hornberger & King, 1996; King, 2001). In the Highland context, the presence of Unified Kichwa in schools instilled insecurity in speakers and learners of the local variety, and in effect hindered the transmission of local Highland Kichwa dialects. The results of our respective research indicate that similar processes are playing out today among speakers of Lowland Kichwa. However, they also show that speakers of local dialects are not simply acquiescing to linguistic unification through standard language literacy. Instead, they are increasingly turning to other – primarily oral – forms of mediation, such as radio and others forms of community media (see Bermúdez and Uzendoski, 2018) to transmit “their own” ways of speaking.

The radio program *Mushuk Ñampi* was first broadcast in the summer of 2015, with the goal of bringing regional voices to the airwaves. The program is funded by the Municipality of Archidona, under the direction of the mayor Jaime Shiguango, a Kichwa-speaker in his mid-50s from a local community. During his tenure as mayor, Shiguango has instituted a number of popular social programs, under the banner *Mushuk Ñampi/ Un Nuevo Rumbo* (“A New Path”). The radio show, one of the most important facets of his campaign, is a two-hour Kichwa-language programme, produced live between 4 and 6 a.m. It is explicitly directed at a rural audience Shiguango defines as ignored by most broadcast media and alienated by linguistic unification. Consequently, he sees the program as a way of reconnecting local audiences to the voices and lifeways of their elders (see Ennis, 2019a).

When asked about his stance on the use of Unified Kichwa on the radio programme and at other events by his administration sponsors, Shiguango observed that linguistic unification “has made us lose our own cultural identity, our own language”. Yet he is also careful to demonstrate respect for the political project of standard language literacy and unification. This is indicated by the naming of his signature platform, *Mushuk Ñampi*, which is spelled in all marketing materials according to the conventions of Unified Kichwa. His choice of the word for “path” is surprisingly complex. In the Ecuadorian Lowlands, and in Shiguango’s own speech, the most common pronunciation for “path” is [ɲambi]. Although the Unified form is ñan [ɲan], Shiguango uses an officially recognised lexical variant from the Lowlands (Ministerio de Educación del Ecuador, 2009), where ñan is affixed with the locative *-pi*, voiced following a nasal. Thus, while this form would read as “on a new path” for speakers of many other Quechua varieties, for speakers of Upper Napo Kichwa it simply means “a new path”. Like many of the “dialect-defenders” discussed by Wroblewski (2012), Shiguango first identified the Unified neologism for “thank you” *yupaychani* (lit. “I am grateful”) as one of the greatest threats to local linguistic practices, even when those practices utilise Spanish-derived forms, such as *pagarachu* (“may you be paid”; derived from Spanish *que Dios le pague*).¹⁸ He suggests that the use of such forms causes ruptures in transmission:

I am opposed [to unification] because, well, to say *yupaychani*, when you go to (your) grandfather’s house, they say *pagarachu*, if you say *yupaychani*, they don’t respond. So, what is ours keeps getting lost. That’s why, in my speech, I speak how my father, my mother, my dear grandmother speak with me, I keep maintaining [their speech]. Sometimes, so I don’t come off poorly in other institutional spaces, I say *yupaychani*, since it can be necessary to be neither too left-wing nor right-wing, right? It’s better to keep joining together, right? But demanding what is fair, that we can’t lose our own culture, our own language, what we speak.

Wroblewski has suggested that defenders of local forms of speech point to the standard’s foreignness and unintelligibility, “often to the point of extreme exaggeration” (2012: 73). A similar claim seems to be made by Shiguango when he suggests that grandparents will not respond to *yupaychani*. However, as the examples above suggest, elderly speakers are very sensitive to variations in form, and adept at recognising and translating across regional varieties. Evaluations of unintelligibility may have more to do, then, with the ideological disjuncture represented by the use of “another” form of Kichwa. As Shiguango and others indicate, respect for one’s familial heritage is often perceived as being encoded in the use of regional forms of speech. Like radio hosts and guests, local school children and their grandparents, Shiguango navigates a

¹⁸ In the Highlands, *yupaychani* replaces similarly Spanish-derived forms such as *pagi* and *dios si lu pay*.

complex linguistic landscape in Napo, in which regional speakers of Kichwa face pressure to shift towards Spanish, and to use Unified Kichwa as a standard, in their speech as well as in writing.

In the following section, we bring together the insights drawn from our ethnographic and linguistic analyses to show that the tension between regional and standardised forms of speech stems from the violation of deeply held beliefs about language and social belonging, which are grounded in demonstrable linguistic differences. We also suggest how linguistic policies at mezzo and micro level can take these issues into account to better cater to the needs of speakers.

5 Discussion

The data presented in this article is not meant as an argument opposing language standardisation *per se*. Rather, we aim to show that standardisation based on common orthography – which may work well against a context of long-standing literacy (as in the Basque case, e.g. Fernández Iglesias, 2012) – may not work, and may in fact have adverse effects on oral language cultures like that of the Amazonian Kichwa. It is also our aim to demonstrate that the normative approach implemented in this particular case, rather than a normalising approach to a language standard, can be especially harmful to an endangered oral language.

As we have shown in Section 3.3, standardisation was intended to give Kichwa prestige, and possibly elevate it to the status of the language of wider communication between the different Kichwa-speaking peoples. It was also informed by the assumptions discussed in Section 1, that successful language maintenance and revitalisation projects should be based on literacy. However, as our research shows, this proved to be the wrong avenue to pursue in this particular geographical, political and socio-linguistic context. In a multilingual ecology such as that of Napo, the role of the language of wider communication is already occupied by Spanish, in which almost all present-day Kichwa speakers are bilingual. They are also literate in Spanish, and have limited use for standard literacy beyond the official domain. Social media, used prolifically, are not prescriptive and do not require their users to use a standard form of language. Therefore, as shown by the speaker attitudes discussed in Section 4, Kichwa is typically not needed as a language of wider communication, but rather to cater to the identity needs of its speakers. This is especially true for the speakers we worked with, who live in rural areas, and whose work is not associated with either local politics or Intercultural Bilingual Education. For these speakers who, despite being the majority in Napo, have been largely ignored by previous research, or even perceived as “acculturated” and not worthy of further study (see Section 3.1), replacing the local forms of speaking with a standard has a counterproductive effect on language maintenance. Many speakers of local Kichwa varieties do not associate the unified language with their local culture, and therefore have not come to perceive it as their own. What further exacerbates the situation is the fact that, even though Unified Kichwa was first conceived as an orthographic standard, due to the way it was implemented it became perceived as the standard for spoken language as well. The speakers traditional value system, in which respect for their ancestors and heritage is one of the most important principles (see Section 4), makes the adoption of the standard in their everyday lives even more difficult and less desirable.

Of particular interest in the case of the unification of Ecuadorian Kichwa is the tension between oral and written standardisation, alongside the emergence of an increasingly standardised register of speech in public media. It is this standard oral register, in turn, which seems to be the greatest issue for speakers of regional varieties of Lowland Kichwa in the Archidona–Tena region. While Unified Kichwa was ostensibly created as a written standard (See Section 3.2), methods for its implementation in classrooms and other contexts have been unclear. For instance, the official text of the *Modelo del Sistema de Educación Intercultral Bilingüe* (“Intercultural Bilingual Education System Model”) describes the purpose of the Academy of the Kichwa Language as “the consolidation of Kichwa at *oral* and written levels” (DINEIB, 2013: 20; our italics), implying a concordance between the two, in addition to an explicit goal of oral standardisation. Our research confirms that such ideologies have influenced linguistic practices in Upper Napo. Written norms are treated as *de facto* oral norms, and it is very common for speakers to pronounce texts according to the orthography in which they are written. This leads to the rejection and eventual erasure of dialectal features such as the voicing of stops, perceived as indexical of local speech (see Section 4).

As mentioned in Section 1, language revitalisation projects are often shaped by dominant language norms and institutions (Meek 2010), and tend to rely on literacy as the vehicle for language transmission. This is especially true of Latin America, where revitalisation movements from Mexico (Faudree, 2013) to the Andes (Hornberger and King, 1996; Coronel-Molina and Solon, 2011; Hornberger and Coronel-Molina, 2004; Limerick, 2018; Haboud and Limerick, 2017; Kendall A. King, 2001) have focused on the development of Indigenous alphabets and literatures, literacy programs and bilingual schooling. As in many of the cases described in the literature, the case of Upper Napo Kichwa does not lend itself well to such initiatives, due to the extreme importance of orality and localised narrative practices for cultural transmission among the *Napo runa* (Uzedoski & Calapucha-Tapuy, 2012).

Language attitudes are well-known to be a key factor influencing language use (Dauenhauer & Dauenhauer, 1998), and our fieldwork shows that the rural Kichwa-speaking population in the areas surrounding Tena and Archidona demonstrates strong anti-Unified Kichwa attitudes. Moreover, despite this resistance, the process of unification may have already had a unifying influence on the forms of speaking in the region. Although the reasons for this would require further study, our research shows (see Section 3.1) that some distinctive dialectal features documented 60 years ago (Orr & Wrisley 1981) are already blurring.

The negative attitudes we observed are in line with previous findings (Wroblewski, 2012), but our analysis of the reasons behind these attitudes is significantly different. Wroblewski values the potential of the “pan-ethnic project” that he sees expressed in Unified Kichwa, and sees the adherence of speakers to local dialects and distinctive cultural practices as examples of “re-essentialisation” of the local culture (Wroblewski, 2012: 68). He also points out that speakers refer to local varieties of Kichwa as “authentic”, “despite its considerable influence from Spanish lexicon, phonology, syntax and morphology” (Wroblewski, 2012: 68). However, a different picture of authenticity emerges from our experience in Napo and the conversations we had with our consultants. For the Amazonian Kichwa speakers we worked with and talked to, support for the local varieties and aversion towards Unified Kichwa seem to stem from the fact that the local dialects are seen as an intrinsic part of their identity. Authentic language, to them, is not a language purged of century-long Spanish influence, but the language that everyone in their family and community can understand. For many people in Napo, the hegemonic ideologies of national unification implied by language standardisation, particularly at the oral level, violate beliefs about regional linguistic identity, respect for one’s ancestors, and the very nature of linguistic socialisation.

Although the speakers may not, as some interviews show, have a clear picture of how Unified Kichwa differs from the local varieties at the linguistic level, or may themselves use words which they stigmatise in metalinguistic interviews, in Section 3.1 we show that interdialectal differences do exist, and are not merely the result of an ideological process of “othering”. If the goal of implementing a standard is for a language to survive, our research shows that Unified Kichwa is not accepted as *kikin shimi* (“our own language”, see Section 4), and therefore is failing at the very task it was designed to achieve. As discussed by Milroy and Milroy (1997: 75), while standard language maintenance – in this case the standardisation effort – “is assisted by overt institutional pressures”, such as implementation in schools and production of written materials, “non-standard maintenance relies wholly on informal, non-institutional and largely uncodified norm-enforcement, [which will] frequently be in conflict with the norms of the standard”. This work therefore reinforces recent calls (see Montaluisa, 2018: 309) for policy initiatives and broadcast media content which could build on the co-existence of standardised and regional language varieties, for instance by providing adequate teacher training to create “polydialectal speakers”.

6 Conclusions

Throughout this article, we have also attempted to elucidate some of the conflicting pressures generated by the “standard” and “non-standard” enforcement of language norms. We have shown that Unified Kichwa was envisaged as a pan-Ecuadorian standard, with a clear disregard for the fact that Ecuador has, not one, but two major Kichwa-speaking cultures, with their respective regional and micro-variations: one in the Andes, and one in the Amazon. We have mentioned that language planning efforts focused on creating a written standard, but that there was no adequate follow-up which would allow the intended users of that standard to understand that Unified Kichwa was meant to be written, not spoken. At the same time, the linguistic

features of Unified Kichwa fail to adequately represent the language which these speakers – acutely aware of linguistic micro-variation and reliant on it for constructing social belonging – perceive as their own. This eroded its unifying potential and, as the interviews we cite clearly show, ensured that it is perceived as a threat. This, sadly, mimics the reality of language standardisation contexts the world over. “A single standard variety de facto results in other varieties being interpreted as non-standard and thus divides speakers (Gal, 2006, cited in Grenoble & Bulatova, 2017: 122). Grenoble and Bulatova (2017: 122-23) describe a similar situation for Siberian languages, where the artificially created standards not only failed to succeed as written varieties, but also, by “excluding potential users, they failed to include anyone”.

The situation in Napo might well have been different today had language standardisation not been enforced as normative law, but rather served as a guide to be routinely applied unless there is a reason not to do so. This confirms what much previous research on standardisation has already shown: that for a standard to be successful, all levels of language planning and policy need to be attuned to the speakers, who should be involved as decision-makers and regarded as the intended beneficiaries of such policies, rather than the subjects responsible for implementing them. This more moderate and detailed implementation, however, would have required the presence of a dialogue between all levels of government, the inclusion of the speakers of the different varieties in the decision-making process, and a careful follow-up on the ground.

We have pointed out the particular danger that the encroachment of a supposedly written standard into the oral domain represents for endangered, hitherto oral varieties, such as Upper Napo Kichwa. The enforcement of Unified Kichwa as the only “correct” Ecuadorian Kichwa language and its normative, unreflective implementation in the classroom silences speakers of the local oral varieties. Due to a lack of adequate, context-sensitive language planning, such inflexible standardisation results in a potentially irretrievable loss of oral genres and former literary traditions. Tragically, it is particularly detrimental for culturally underrepresented speaker communities, as is the case for Lowland Kichwa speakers. However, we have also found that local broadcast media can avoid pressure to use the standardised language to a greater extent than would be possible in education or the printed media. This in turn gives the speakers an avenue to use the local varieties in the public domain, thus raising its status. While the hosts of local radio shows have a difficult task navigating between the standard and local ways of speaking, it is still possible for them to do so, largely because the content of their programmes is ephemeral and does not have to be put down in writing, which would require the use of the standard. Moreover, local radio is in a position to cater to the linguistic and identity needs of the local speakers, as it is created in the very communities it intends to serve. Consequently, local broadcast media have great potential to promote the local ways of speaking as acceptable and apt for the public domain, providing an effective counter-balance to the current policy of enforcing Unified Kichwa as the standard in both writing and speech.

Reformulating our findings in terms of policy recommendations, we would therefore suggest confining standardisation to the written domain and allowing for flexible local solutions. The standard currently in place is divisive and remains largely unused, mostly due to the purist ideology from which it is derived. Measures that would serve the maintenance and revitalisation of Upper Napo Kichwa far better could include further studies of the local linguistic varieties, raising teacher and student awareness of linguistic variation in a non-prescriptive spirit, and a positive reappraisal of the rich local tradition of oral literature.

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¹⁹ We use deviates from Unified Kichwa in favour of a relatively shallow and reader-friendly orthographic representation of Upper Napo Kichwa. Contrary to Unified Kichwa, the graphemes <y> and <w> are here restricted to the glides present at syllable onsets or at the beginning of a diphthong. Likewise, voiced consonants and fricatives are graphemically represented here, where Unified Kichwa applies graphemes for voiceless phonemes (see Peñuela et al., 2016, for a similar approach). Note that this convention was not used in the Kichwa examples in this article, which are written in unified-type orthography with Upper Napo Kichwa elements such as the voicing of stops, in line with the conventions used by Georgia Ennis in her other work.

Abbreviations

1 – 1st person; 3 – 3rd person; ACC – Accusative; CAUS – causative; IMP – imperative; PL – plural; TOP – topic.

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