

Bilingualisms, political economy and new subject positions: tensions and challenges for the 21st century

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Abstract:

Current globalization processes, increased mobility, and technological advances have brought tensions and challenges for multilingualism in indigenous contexts with regard to how languages are understood (Pietikainen et al. 2016). In this talk, I will discuss how diverse constructions of language and bilingualism intersect with processes of political economy in the bifurcation between two generations of Quechua speakers in Perú. In a context where Quechua is starting to be perceived as a resource that can be exchanged for other symbolic and material capital, Quechua experts, as authorizing agents in the valuation of language practices and speakers, are being challenged by a new generation of Quechua activists. These latter social actors, with much more access to higher education and new media than their parents, no longer conceive languages as discrete codes linked to fixed ethnolinguistic groups and bounded cultural practices, but display a more fluid, inclusive view of bilingualism and being Quechua. While experts enact recursive moves to position themselves as powerful listening subjects within hegemony, the new generation is trying to disinvent both Quechua and bilingualism in order to reconstitute them in new times. Using ethnographic data from testing practices and selection techniques for recruiting teachers, policies and practices from teacher training programs, and Quechua youth activism in different sites, I will explore how current ideological battles around bilingualism are linked to economic resources, commodification, inequality and new subject positions in the 21st century.