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Communicative strategies across Quechua languages

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Abstract: Though usually referred to as “the Quechua language”, Quechua is actually a diverse language family extending from Colombia to northern Argentina. Quechua languages are not all mutually intelligible, but speakers are generally unaware of that fact, since they use it mostly in local, communitarian settings. This study examines the evolving speech behavior and meta-linguistic discourse of an international group of Quechua speakers, most of whom were encountering different varieties of Quechua for the first time as participants in a two-year graduate program in bilingual-intercultural education. Over the course of the program, students developed several strategies to facilitate communication across their different Quechua varieties. We examine those strategies and their implications for language planning, language education, and the emergence of a broader pan-Quechua identity.

Keywords: Quechua, inter-dialectal communication, indigenous higher education, language planning

1 Introduction

This article examines the possibilities, challenges, and implications of face-to-face verbal communication across different varieties of Quechua, the most widespread indigenous language family in the Americas. The analysis is based on observations and interviews with Quechua-speaking graduate students in PROEIB Andes (Programa de Formación en Educación Intercultural Bilingüe para los Países Andinos), an international Master’s program in bilingual-intercultural education headquartered in Cochabamba, Bolivia. Data were collected during the program’s initial cohort, in which most students were bilingual in Spanish and one or another indigenous language.

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This setting was very nearly unprecedented, due to the historic marginalization of indigenous people from higher education. Even when indigenous youth gained access to the Andean region’s public universities, their ancestral languages, along with other overt markers of indigenous identity, were excluded from academic settings. In recent decades, however, initiatives arose to incorporate indigenous languages into public education, accompanied by demands for inclusion of indigenous people not only as the targets of education policies, but as designers, implementers, and researchers of those policies.

In the mid-1990s, a coalition of universities, Ministries of Education, and indigenous organizations established PROEIB Andes, a multi-pronged initiative whose centerpiece is a Master’s program that recruits indigenous college graduates in education, linguistics, psychology, and related fields to form specialized cadres of professionals in bilingual-intercultural education. PROEIB’s aims with regard to students’ native languages were twofold: to foster the development of academic registers (oral and written) in those languages by encouraging students to use them in their academic work; and, especially with regard to Quechua (and Aymara), to habituate students to the use of government-approved standardized orthographies and academic vocabulary (see Estudiantes PROEIB and Sichra 2011).

As it turned out, the students were more interested in learning about each other’s languages than they were in learning “standardized” Quechua. Before long, the Quechua students (who made up more than half of the initial student cohort) were meeting in small groups to compare and contrast features of their respective varieties. And thus, as so often happens in ethnographic research, the original focus of the study shifted in the direction of the subjects’ own concerns.

2 Conceptual framework

2.1 Historical background

Quechua is the most extensive indigenous language family in the western hemisphere, with 6–8 million speakers across the Andean region. Over 80% of these are in Peru and Bolivia; there are also sizable populations in Ecuador and Argentina,

1 An important antecedent was the Proyecto Especial de Educación Bilingüe (PEEB) in Puno, Peru (see Zúñiga 1990; Jung 1992). During the 1980s, PEEB-Puno trained bilingual educators from Peru, Bolivia and Ecuador, including several members of PROEIB Andes’ initial student cohort. Both initiatives were financed in large part by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ) [the German agency for technical cooperation], which has been a key player in indigenous/bilingual education initiatives throughout Latin America.
and some 20,000 in Colombia (Howard 2011: 192). Since the late twentieth century, the spread of mass schooling throughout South America has accelerated the shift toward Spanish; however, Quechua has endured as the dominant vernacular in many rural areas, and is also widely used in some urban centers in Bolivia and Peru. Additionally, there are pockets of Quechua speakers in immigrant communities in the U.S. (e.g., in New York and Virginia [Albro 1998]).

Quechua is also among the most extensively described indigenous language families. The first published grammar of “coastal Quechua” appeared in 1560; a grammar of Cuzco Quechua (by Diego González Holguín) appeared in 1607. Though it is popularly known as “the language of the Inkas”, Quechua’s spread across the central Andean region predates the main Inka expansion by centuries (Heggerty 2007, 2008), and several scholars assert that the Inkas’ own court language was not Quechua but some variant of Aymara (Hardman 1985; Hardman de Bautista 1985; Cerrón-Palomino 2004; Heggerty 2008). In any case, bi- and trilingualism were the norm throughout the Inka empire, and language and ethnicity did not necessarily correspond (Mannheim 1991: 52). During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Spanish colonizers spread a modified version of Cuzco Quechua (pertaining to the group of dialects that Torero [1974] classified as “Quechua IIC”) across much of the central Andes, finding it a convenient lengua general for purposes of Christianization and colonial administration. Despite regular pronouncements on the desirability of “hispanicizing” the indigenous population (especially after the indigenous uprisings of the late eighteenth century), Quechua continued to be used in urban as well as rural areas, and even enjoyed some literary production (Itier 1995).

As one would expect, given its vast geographical range, Quechua had already evolved into a highly diverse language family by the time of the Spanish invasion. Even as a medium of Inka statecraft, it was not standardized nor hegemonic; rather, it formed part of a complex linguistic and cultural mosaic alongside several

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2 Fray Domingo de Santo Tomás’ Grammatica o arte de la lengua general de los indios de los Reynos del Perú. Despite the appellation “coastal Quechua”, evidence within the text itself suggests that the author worked with speakers of both central and southern Quechua and produced a synthetic account (Bruce Mannheim, personal communication).


4 During the late twentieth century, standardization initiatives were ubiquitous, contentious, and based more in ethno-nationalist ideologies than in linguistic scholarship (Godenzzi 1992). More recent efforts have benefitted not only from government support, but also from a better understanding of Quechua grammar and dialectology. Nonetheless, ideological biases in Quechua language planning continue to be a source of debate (see King 2001; Luykx 2004).
other languages, many of which have since disappeared (Hardman de Bautista 1985; Mannheim 1991). Extant varieties of Quechua differ widely, and are not all mutually intelligible, especially in the central Peruvian valleys. A general description of Quechua would be practically impossible, since it encompasses a range of diversity comparable to the Romance languages. This linguistic diversity is commonly obscured by the habitual use of the term “Quechua” (and even “the Quechua language”) to refer to all varieties indistinguishably, or by the trivializing term “dialects” (Hornberger and Colonel-Molina 2004: 10; Pearce et al. 2011a: 2). Such usage is common even among experts, although published scholarly descriptions are necessarily more precise.

While there has been some debate and readjustment of genealogical relationships among Quechua varieties, most scholars agree on the principal divisions (Adelaar 2007; Cerrón-Palomino 2003a; Mannheim 1991; Torero 1974). Traditionally, linguists dated the apparent split between the Quechua I and Quechua II branches to pre-Columbian (and pre-Inka) times. However, recent research (Pearce et al. 2011b) suggests that a more gradual dialect continuum was disrupted by colonial relocations of indigenous populations. Figure 1 shows the Quechua “family tree”, simplified and reduced to include only those varieties present in the setting under study.⁵

![Figure 1: Quechua varieties present in initial cohort of PROEIB Andes students.](http://lingweb.eva.mpg.de/quechua/Eng/Sounds/Home/HomeQuechuaRegions.htm)

⁵ For a fuller description of historical and extant Quechua varieties, see Cerrón-Palomino (2003a) and Mannheim (1991). A map showing their geographical distribution can be found at http://lingweb.eva.mpg.de/quechua/Eng/Sounds/Home/HomeQuechuaRegions.htm. Albó (1995), drawing on modern census data, has mapped the more recent distribution of Bolivia’s indigenous languages, even down to the neighborhood level.
The current distribution of the Quechua language family is the result of two main historical processes. First was the spread of Quechua II, which began before the Inka period, was furthered by the Inka empire during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and continued after the Spanish conquest (Hardman de Bautista 1985; Mannheim 1991; Sichra 2003). All southern varieties of Quechua, including the Bolivian dialects as well as those from Puno and Ayacucho (Peru), derive from this expansion. Differences among these southern varieties, while notable to speakers, are minor and do not significantly hinder communication. Analogous differences exist within the northern branch of Quechua II, which includes Ecuadorian Quichua\textsuperscript{6} as well as varieties from Colombia and northern Peru; however, these varieties are not generally mutually intelligible with those of the southern branch. The second process was the diversification of Quechua I in central Peru. Although covering a much smaller geographical area than Quechua II, Quechua I displays more dialectal fragmentation. This is partly due to the roughness of the terrain, which has long impeded communication among the region’s villages.

Speakers of distinct Quechua varieties have come into contact numerous times over the centuries. Prior to the Spanish conquest, the Inkas relocated entire populations under the \textit{mitmaq} system, to organize the labor force and promote administrative control of different regions (Mannheim 1991: 49–50). These movements involved not only different Quechua-speaking groups, but also speakers of Aymara, Puquina, and other (now extinct) languages. The result was a complex, non-contiguous distribution of languages and ethnicities in which linguistic boundaries were rigidly maintained (unlike the more recent diffusion of Spanish into indigenous speech communities). Superposed over the “insider” and “outsider” (\textit{mitmaq}) varieties was Cuzco Quechua, which served as a lingua franca and medium of statecraft throughout the empire.

The Spanish conquest led to further demographic shifts, as indigenous labor was concentrated into \textit{reducciones} around haciendas or missions and conscripted for the mines that financed the colonial enterprise. The nineteenth century wars of independence again brought conscripts from different regions into contact, as did the War of the Pacific (1879–1883), which redrew the boundaries of Peru, Bolivia, and Chile. With the decline of the hacienda system and the rise of liberalism in the twentieth century, urbanization, public education, universal military service and universal suffrage laid the social foundations for the hegemony of Spanish and the spread of Spanish-Quechua (and Spanish-Aymara) bilingualism.

In recent decades, agricultural crises, mass unemployment, and ambitious colonization schemes targeting the Amazon region have continued to spur

\textsuperscript{6} Ecuadorian varieties of the Quechua language family are collectively referred to as \textit{quichua}. 
migration of indigenous populations. Incursions of Quechua speakers have pro-
voked language shift in areas where the predominant language was once Aymara,
one or more Amazonian languages, or another (local) Quechua variety. Research on
the causes and consequences of these movements, (e. g., Macdonald 1998; Cecilie
2010) have not focused much on the contact between Quechua languages – prob-
ably because the language of wider communication in these situations is, almost
invariably, Spanish. Thus, while contact among speakers of different Quechua
varieties has been occurring for centuries, the linguistic details are largely lost to
history, or subsumed within the larger trend toward hispanicization.

2.2 The ideological determinants of language boundaries

The lack of precise scientific criteria for establishing the boundaries between
languages is well known to linguists, though little understood by non-linguists.
In most cases, the simplest test is that of mutual intelligibility; if speakers can
understand each other, we say that they speak the same language; if they
cannot, we say that they speak different languages. At the extreme ends of the
spectrum (i. e., effortless comprehension vs. complete lack thereof), this techni-
que is more than sufficient. However, in cases where there is limited intellig-
ibility between two related varieties, there is no firm basis on which to declare
them two closely related languages or two highly divergent dialects.
Furthermore, intelligibility is not simply a product of structural similarities
between the varieties in question, but rather a social fact that is highly depen-
dent on context (Lippi-Green 2012; Trudgill 2000).

For languages that have an established standard form, a long literary tradi-
tion, and/or a firm association with a nation-state, language boundaries are
often determined by political boundaries or group loyalties; we say that a person
speaks German because s/he affirms that this is so and, furthermore, is a citizen
of Germany. The fact that our German speaker may understand the speech of
his/her neighbors across the border in Holland better than what is spoken in
Berlin is attributed to the individual’s provincialism, lack of education, and
distance from the capital, where they speak “real” German (see Reagan 2002:
56–58; Trudgill 2000: 4).

In the case of non-standardized languages, or those whose recent standardiza-
tion is still subject to negotiation or resistance, the question of language boundaries
becomes entangled with a multitude of political and pedagogical considerations.
Such has certainly been the case with Quechua, as is vividly illustrated by the
contrasting viewpoints collected in Godenzzi (1992). Ethnologue.com describes
Quechua as “a macrolanguage of Peru” and lists no less than 40 distinct regional
varieties. Ethnologue’s parent organization (Summer Institute of Linguistics / Wycliffe Bible Translators) has been the target of considerable criticism for its tendency to “split” (rather than “lump”) language varieties in ways that serve their evangelical ends. Conversely, most non-speakers of indigenous languages tend to lump together varieties that they cannot themselves distinguish, as part of the general erasure or “flattening” of ethnic distinctions that is a common consequence of colonization. (Indeed, the term “indigenous people” is itself evidence of this same tendency.) Non-Quechua speakers’ exposure to Quechua tends to be via elite or bilingual speakers (or text), rather than a representative range of dialects – and of course it is they who have traditionally held the power to name and define social phenomena. Nor are the splitting or lumping tendencies of Quechua language activists free of ideological and political considerations.

Descriptive and historical linguists are likely to rely on structural features of phonology, morphology, and syntax to determine whether it makes more sense to “split” or “lump” dialects. However, native speakers may draw on other criteria to decide whether they speak “the same language” or not. For everyday speakers (and an increasing number of sociolinguists), intelligibility is determined not only by the structural similarity and depth of historical relatedness between speech varieties, but also by their relative prestige, the historical and current relationships among groups of speakers, their ethnic identifications, their purposes for wanting to communicate with each other, and their willingness to understand and be understood by the other (Lippi-Green 2012: 71–75). Nor can we ignore the fact that Quechua remains an “oppressed language [family]” (Albó 1977; Mannheim 1991: 35); as all three authors of the present work can attest, it was not so long ago that knowledge of Quechua would be denied even by individuals who could clearly understand it, and even speak it, if circumstances required.

Linguists, Spanish monolinguals, and indigenous language speakers (bilingual as well as monolingual) thus bring varying perspectives to the “distinct languages” vs. “dialects of a single language” question. The Quechua situation is also complicated (or illuminated) by the fact that a growing number of native Quechua speakers (including two authors of the present work) are academically trained linguists. Availing ourselves of this dual perspective, we examine below some of the factors – social and situational as well as structural – that bear on native speakers’ communication across different varieties of Quechua.

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7 Such criticisms will no doubt be familiar to many readers from informal conversations among colleagues. Examples in print can be found at http://languagehat.com/ethnologue-in-the-news/; see also Svelmoe (2009).
3 Methodology

3.1 Research setting

Headquartered in Cochabamba, Bolivia since 1996, PROEIB Andes brings together indigenous graduate students from across the Andean region for specialized training in the analysis, design, and implementation of educational programs for indigenous populations. The first student cohort – including students from Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador, Colombia and Chile – arrived in Cochabamba in 1998. (Later cohorts also included students from Argentina and México.) About half of those first 50 students were Quechua speakers, including all of the Ecuadorian and about half of the Bolivian and Peruvian students. Of the three Colombian students, only one was from a Quechua speech community, and his proficiency in his ancestral language (known in his natal region as ingano, a cognate of the term Inka) was extremely limited. None of the Chilean students were Quechua speakers, as Quechua has mostly disappeared from modern-day Chile. The Peruvian group exhibited the greatest linguistic diversity, including speakers of several Quechua varieties (from Cuzco, Puno, Ayacucho, and Ancash), and also speakers of Aymara and Awajún (an unrelated Amazonian language).

Quechua, like most of the world’s languages, is used mainly for local communication; outside the rarefied setting of PROEIB Andes, there is little perceived need for mutual comprehension across regional varieties. Most Quechua speakers today are bilingual, and typically use Spanish for interactions with those outside the immediate community, even if the latter are also Quechua speakers. Historically, this has much to do with the social stigma associated with indigenous ethnicities and languages; while that stigma is arguably diminishing, Spanish remains the language of non-local, cross-ethnic communication throughout the Andean world. Prior to entering the Master’s program, the PROEIB students reflected this pattern in their own speech behavior, using Quechua with family and/or in their communities of origin and Spanish in their professional and public lives. One aim of the program was to shake up

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8 For this reason, quechua ingano is not included in the present analysis.
9 Quechua-medium satellite radio programming offers an instructive example of how inter-varietal communication can emerge, not via homogenization/standardization, but rather through exposure to different varieties. For an exploration of how Quechua-language broadcasters adapt their professional speech to an international audience, see Luykx (2001).
this traditional division, challenging the diglossic\textsuperscript{10} relationship between Quechua and Spanish and expanding the contexts of use for the former.

The curriculum was organized around three broad domains: language, culture, and education. Students also met twice a week in the Indigenous Language Workshop, to work in groups on and in their ancestral languages. Among other aims, they were to familiarize themselves with the standardized orthographies used in bilingual elementary schools, but the faculty team’s ambitions for the incorporation of indigenous languages into academic activities went above and beyond that required for training elementary schoolteachers. Students were encouraged to develop a graduate-level academic writing practice in their respective languages, and various classroom activities were designed to that end.\textsuperscript{11} More generally, the program provided a unique space for frequent and prolonged contact among speakers of different Quechua varieties. Most of the Quechua students appeared more interested in learning about each other’s different Quechua varieties than in mastering the standardized forms promoted by their respective governments, and eventually, they succeeded in turning at least part of their time in the Indigenous Languages Workshop to that purpose.

3.2 Research questions

The authors of this work bring a unique viewpoint to the area of Quechua sociolinguistics. Luykx is a linguistic anthropologist and English-Spanish bilingual with rudimentary knowledge of Quechua; during the research period, she was a founding member of the PROEIB Andes faculty. García and Julca were among the program’s first graduates. García, a linguist with years of experience in indigenous education, is a native speaker of quechua ayacuchano, a well-known Peruvian variety from the southern branch of Quechua II. Julca, also a linguist, is a native speaker of quechua ancashino (from the Quechua I family),

\textsuperscript{10} In the U.S. and European sociolinguistic literature, the term diglossia, as originally coined by Ferguson (1959) refers to the functional relationship between closely related language varieties: a “high” supra-ordinate variety and one or more less prestigious (“low”) varieties. In the Andes, the term is commonly used to refer to the difference in prestige between Spanish and the socially subordinated indigenous languages. See Fishman (1967) and Luykx (1999a) on the contested meanings of this concept.

\textsuperscript{11} Students resisted some of these activities, finding them forced and difficult. PROEIB’s efforts to socialize students into new practices related to their indigenous identities will be explored in a forthcoming article.
which is much less widespread and quite distinct from the more well-known Quechuan languages (see Julca 2009).

As originally conceived, Luykx’s proposed research was to focus on the students’ use of their indigenous languages for academic tasks (both oral and written). To this end, she took over instructional duties for the Indigenous Language Workshop in 2000, and continued with participant observation the following semester when support from the Spencer Foundation freed her from her teaching duties. Initial interviews with student participants (including Quechua, Aymara, and Guaraní speakers) focused on the challenges entailed in using their ancestral languages for academic purposes. Over time, as several students began to organize their activities around the comparison of their respective Quechua varieties, the research came to focus exclusively on the Quechua students.

From the beginning, Luykx asked students to choose their preferred level of participation, from none at all, to being observed during classes and around the PROEIB facilities, to being interviewed, to helping with the analysis and potentially participating as a co-author. García and Julca had opted for the highest levels of participation. Furthermore, they held undergraduate degrees in linguistics and had more extensive knowledge of Quechua dialectology than did most of their classmates. During the program’s first year, they had emerged as leaders in the Indigenous Language Workshop, and interviews with them produced rich insights into what was happening there. On a few occasions, García or Julca used the Indigenous Language Workshop to present (in Quechua) lessons for their Quechua classmates around some aspect of Quechua dialectology. Subsequently, Luykx interviewed them about the planning that went into these events and the specific speech behaviors through which they were carried out. In time, it became clear that García and Julca were functioning more as collaborators than as research subjects. Due to this evolving dynamic, they appear in the following sections as both co-authors and interviewees. Excerpts from these and other interviews (conducted by Luykx in 2000–2001) have been translated from the original Spanish.

From these observations and conversations emerged the following questions:

- What structural and social factors impeded or facilitated cross-varietal communication among Quechua students in the PROEIB Master’s program?

12 Since none of the original faculty were native speakers of any indigenous language, Luykx’s research interests (and her study of quechua cochabambino) sufficed to make her a logical choice for this task. During the program’s second cohort, Dr. Pedro Plaza, a native Quechua speaker, joined the faculty team and took charge of the Indigenous Language Workshop.
What strategies did students develop to foster communication across dialects?
What are the implications of these findings for Quechua communities?

4 Findings

4.1 PROEIB Andes: A confluence of Quechuas

Over the two-year course of the program, students were able to hear and compare several regional Quechua varieties on a regular basis. Prior to entering the program, most students’ knowledge of Quechua had been limited to their own local variety, though some had had contact with other neighboring varieties in their home countries. Most were quite surprised to discover that the Quechua “language” is comprised of many distinct varieties, some of which were unintelligible to their ears. As one Bolivian student put it: “I always thought that everyone spoke Quechua the same way. Until I entered the Master’s program, I didn’t know that Ecuadorians spoke Quechua so differently, or that our Quechua was more similar to that of Peru.”

This newly discovered linguistic diversity provoked intense interest among students, and informal comparisons occasionally crystallized into more systematic efforts at analysis and instruction. Although all the students also spoke Spanish, the program’s emphasis on academic use of indigenous languages, combined with students’ own enthusiasm for extending Quechua into new contexts, led them to seek strategies for facilitating comprehension across their respective varieties. Thus the unique sociolinguistic and academic space that was PROEIB Andes gave rise to efforts – initially spontaneous but increasingly purposeful and coordinated – to bridge language varieties that had been geographically separated, each evolving along its own distinct path, for centuries.

The Quechua varieties present in the program displayed noticeable differences in phonology, morphology, lexicon, and grammar, with the Ancash variety (from central Peru, part of the Quechua I branch) differing most sharply from the rest. In fact, the phonological, grammatical, and lexical particulars of quechua ancashino precluded any possibility of mutual comprehension between its single speaker (Julca) and the other Quechua students in the program (unless, of course, they spoke in Spanish). This circumstance gave rise to the following comment from the above-mentioned Bolivian student (whose native variety was quechua cochabambino):

Undoubtedly there were also important regional differences at the level of discourse, or the social uses and interactional norms of Quechua speakers, but such differences are beyond the scope of the current work.
I got tired of making the effort, so much effort, because even with the Ecuadorian classmates it was some effort [to understand them]. But with Felix one had to really, really try hard, you know? Because to tell the truth, I couldn’t understand a thing. Nothing! Really, it seems like another language, so different; a few words here and there are similar to the Quechua that we use, but the majority, and the writing system as well, it was just another language, I couldn’t understand anything ... It was tiring for me [laughs], I would spend long minutes staring at the page like this [pretending to squint in confusion] – no, I really couldn’t work up much enthusiasm to read Felix’s variety of Quechua. I didn’t like to, because from the very first word I would get tired.

Julca’s quechua ancashino was similarly challenging for practically all other Quechua speakers in the program; their varieties, though significantly different from each other, all pertained to the Quechua II branch. A number of factors, not all purely linguistic, made communication across dialect boundaries difficult; nonetheless, students developed strategies to facilitate comprehension, and eventually were making regular attempts to use Quechua with classmates from outside their own dialect area. The next section explores these difficulties, as well as students’ strategies for overcoming them, in greater detail.

4.2 Factors affecting cross-Quechua communication among PROEIB students

4.2.1 Structural differences

As we saw in Figure 1, all Quechua varieties spoken in Bolivia are closely related, and are close cousins of the Cuzco and Puno varieties. The students who spoke these varieties noticed lexical and morphological differences among them, but these did not constitute a significant barrier to understanding. However, they identified Ayacucho Quechua (García’s native variety) as significantly different, especially with regard to lexicon. Bolivian Quechua – especially that of Cochabamba, where these interactions took place – displays an abundance of Spanish borrowings, which are less common in the Ayacucho variety.

14 Although most often associated with the peasantry, Quechua has a history in Cochabamba as an elite language. Prior to Bolivia’s 1952 revolution and subsequent agrarian reform, many rural elites learned Quechua in order to communicate with their laborers. In Cochabamba as in Cuzco, some descendants of former hacendados advocate for “the language of the Inkas” through regional
For this reason, many of the Bolivian students characterized the Quechua of their ayacuchano classmates as “more pure” or “more beautiful” than their own.

Highland Ecuadorian Quichua displays marked phonological differences with respect to the above-mentioned southern varieties. It lacks the post-velar consonant /q/, which in itself did not seem to cause much difficulty in communication between the Ecuadorian students and their Southern-Quechua speaking peers. However the absence in Highland Quichua of the aspirated and glottalized stops (/ph/, /pʰ/, /th/, /tʰ/, /kh/, kʰ/, and of course /qh/ and /qʰ/), which are present in some varieties of southern Quechua (including that of Cochabamba), constituted a more serious obstacle to mutual comprehension.

These difficulties paled in comparison to the challenges presented by quechua ancashino (Julca’s native variety), whose lexical, phonological, and grammatical differences made it largely unintelligible to all other Quechua speakers in the program. For example, although quechua ancashino displays the tripartite vowel system typical of most Quechua varieties,¹⁵ it also distinguishes between short and long vowels. Many of the most common inflectional suffixes bear no obvious similarity to their analogues in the aforementioned varieties, and of course there are innumerable lexical differences. Unlike all other Quechua varieties represented in the program, quechua ancashino derives from Quechua I, the other main branch of the Quechua language family. The distinctiveness and novelty of Julca’s speech provoked great interest among the other students, but made it impractical for conversational purposes within the PROEIB community. At the time, García noted the following.

(2) I’ve studied linguistics and have some knowledge of the extreme dialectal differences of Ancash Quechua, so [although] when I first heard Felix I had almost zero comprehension, as I went along listening to him I felt like slowly I was coming to understand ... As we are practicing writing in our respective dialects, I was surprised to find that I can understand quite a bit of Felix’s dialect when it’s written, although to do that I have to read the written text aloud and “feel” the similarity or equivalences with my own dialect.

¹⁵ The exceptions are the more urban, Spanish-influenced varieties, some of which contain five vowels; see Guion (2003) and Pérez Silva (2011).
García’s Ayacucho Quechua is more similar to *quechua ancashino* than are the other Quechua II varieties (Durston 2007: 39). With help from Julca, García was sometimes able to serve as a bridge between Julca’s speech and the other students’ Quechua varieties. García also had more experience hearing – and reading – different Quechua varieties than did most of his classmates. His relative ease with written Quechua allowed him another, less ephemeral medium through which to engage Julca’s variety; phonological and morphological differences that are quite salient in spoken language may appear somewhat “smoothed out” in the written form. (Consider, for example, that most PROIEB faculty and students could read Portuguese, more or less, even if they could not understand spoken Portuguese.) However, the specific effects of engaging different Quechua varieties textually rather than aurally are beyond the scope of the present work.

During PROIEB’s initial planning phase and the subsequent selection of students for admission to the Master’s program, the faculty team prioritized the inclusion of at least two speakers for each of the languages represented therein, to facilitate the use of indigenous languages within the program.16 Although this decision was much discussed during the admission process, it was never even raised with regard to our single speaker of *quechua ancashino*. In retrospect, we might attribute this to the deceptively simple fact that his mother tongue was also “Quechua”. Nonetheless, when it came to opportunities within the program for authentic communication in his mother tongue, Julca was very nearly as isolated as his Amazonian classmates.

### 4.2.2 Situational factors

The main situational factor affecting students’ communication in Quechua was undoubtedly their bilingualism; given that all were fluent Spanish speakers, the efforts at cross-varietal communication were driven by intellectual curiosity/enjoyment and a sense of ethnic solidarity, not by communicative necessity. All had been accustomed since childhood to using Spanish in academic contexts; in fact, using Quechua for academic purposes, as they were urged to do within the Masters’ program, took considerable mental effort. Even on those occasions when they decided to speak only in Quechua, they found it hard not to slip back into Spanish to express academic concepts for which Quechua terms were non-existent, as well as everyday concepts for

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16 We relaxed this requirement for speakers of Amazonian languages; given the small number of candidates from those language groups, to do otherwise would have effectively excluded most of them from the program.
which their respective Quechua varieties had differing terms. Of course, the students also spoke different dialects of Spanish, according to their place of origin; however, the greater prevalence of supra-regional contact in Spanish, as well as the existence of, if not a unified pan-regional Spanish standard, at least a regional dialect continuum less diverse than its Quechua analogue, meant that the features that distinguished students’ Spanish dialects were quite minor and did not constitute a barrier to communication.  

The time dedicated to Quechua within PROEIB was small compared to the amount of time students spent conversing in Spanish. Despite efforts to incorporate students’ ancestral languages into PROEIB’s daily activities, Spanish, as the only language shared by all participants in the program, was the language of general daily use among students and faculty. If the program had consisted solely of Quechua speakers (or if they had not all shared another language, i.e., Spanish), perhaps the various settings in and around PROEIB would have fostered a broader communicative practice in Quechua, leading to better comprehension of each other’s varieties. Research in other settings (e.g., educational seminars and workshops organized by rural activists of Quechua-speaking peasants activists) could more shed light on this question, and on the process of grassroots (as opposed to governmental) development of new registers in Quechua.

### 4.2.3 Social factors

Students’ interactions in Quechua efforts were also affected by various social factors. From the program’s first semester, there was conscious intent among students to constitute themselves as a Quechua speech community, despite their difficulties understanding one another. Unlike most Quechua speakers, the PROEIB students were all highly educated individuals, committed to expanding the role of indigenous languages in formal education. They were strongly motivated toward studying and strengthening their ancestral languages because they considered them central to their respective ethnic identities. Thus, the program by its very nature (academic as

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17 This also relates to students’ control of different Spanish and Quechua registers. All held college degrees, indicating their successful socialization into at least some academic registers of Spanish, which tended to be similar (though not identical) across the region. Only a few had any comparable experience with their native Quechua. Fostering the development of academic registers in Quechua was in fact part of the program’s *raison d’être.*

18 Some students shared housing with classmates from their home country, and thus had more opportunities to use their indigenous language among themselves.

19 Regalsky and Laurie (2007) offer provocative examples of such settings, though their work not focused specifically on language use.
well as political) selected for candidates with a high degree of metalinguistic awareness.

Nonetheless, not every aspect of the social milieu was conducive to communicating across dialect boundaries. A vivid example arose when Luykx, interviewing García, asked him what factors impeded communication between students from Ayacucho (Peru) and those from Ecuador. Instead of the expected description of phonological and morphological differences between *quechua ayacuchano* and *quichua ecuatoriano*, García replied (with some dismay), “I think it’s because of the war…”–referring to the recent border conflict between Ecuador and Peru.

As Lippi-Green (2012: 72–74) and others have observed, mutual intelligibility arises not only from features of linguistic structure, but also from a willingness to understand and be understood, which is conditioned by countless non-linguistic factors. Minor dialectal differences that might be easily overcome in a favorable social context can derail communication if they index conflicting cultural and political allegiances among interlocutors. This phenomenon has been noted in many other parts of the world as well, such as the former Yugoslavia (Greenberg 2004; Trudgill 2000: 46–48) and in Papua New Guinea (Brison 2003; Kulick 1992), where slight dialect differences are extremely salient for purposes of ethnic identification.

In this vein, Julca remarked in an interview: “Sometimes there’s that regional pride, like, ‘Where I come from it’s said this way; we speak like this, not like that.’ So, I think [to understand] is also to concede to the other.” Similarly, an Aymara student observed of her Aymara-speaking classmates: “It seems to me that sometimes they don’t want to understand each other … Each speaker defends his or her own speech variety and wants to impose that variety.” Such examples illuminate the local, personal nature of how linguistic subordination and indigenous identity are experienced (see Paris 2013; Sichra 2003; Wyman et al. 2014). In social contexts marked by regional or national rivalries, speakers may balk at the notion of “yielding” to an interlocutor perceived as “other”.

### 4.3 Speakers’ strategies for communicating across Quechua varieties

Faced with a surprising range of linguistic variety, some of the PROEIB students developed strategies for building bridges between their respective “Quechuas”. Some emerged from academic contexts, such as the Indigenous Language Workshop, while others arose from students’ informal interactions outside of the classroom. They included, not surprisingly, techniques that are commonplace in second language teaching and “foreigner talk” (see Echevarria et al. 2004): speaking slowly, using visuals, paraphrasing, and so on. Other strategies were
particular to the PROEIB setting, and to the specific linguistic resources of the participants.

During the program’s first semester, the Quechua students engaged in several exercises aimed at systematically comparing their respective speech varieties. In the Indigenous Language Workshop, they listened to each other speak, took note of structural differences and correspondences, and organized these into five columns on the blackboard (quechua boliviano, quechua sureno-peruano, quichua ecuatoriano, ingano [from Colombia], and quechua ancashino), the better to reveal phonological and morphological correspondences across the different varieties. Later in the semester, Julca began building a “polyglot glossary” of analogous terms from different Quechua varieties, beginning with parts of the body, cardinal numbers, plant names, etc. García wrote summaries in quechua ayacuchano of topics addressed in the Indigenous Language Workshop, and passed these on to his classmates so they could identify terms unfamiliar to them. The comparison of regional Quechua synonyms became a frequent activity, sometimes planned and sometimes spontaneous (e.g., whenever someone used a term that others did not understand).

Analysis of lexical, phonological, and morphological correspondences served to help students to better comprehend their classmates’ speech. But beyond this receptive ability, some students ventured to use this new knowledge productively, adapting their own speech in the direction of their interlocutors’ native variety. This was especially notable in greetings; by the second or third semester, cordial use of the term mashi (which in Ecuadorian Quichua means ‘friend’ or ‘companion’) was common among practically all of the students. A few took this strategy even farther, as García described in an interview:

(3) In conversations with the Ecuadorians, I adopted some morphemes that are particular to their speech, like the affectionate-diminutive suffix /-gu/, which is the voiced form of the southern Quechua /-ku/, you see? And I also suppressed some features of my Ayacucho Quechua, in order to make myself understood and be closer to the Ecuadorian mashigu – like when I would say ñukapa warmi ‘woman/wife of mine’, instead of saying warmiy ‘my wife/woman’, because the Ecuadorians I think don’t have the possessive nominal suffixes.21

20 Mashi + /-gu/, i. e., ‘classmates, pals’.
21 In Ayacucho Quechua, the noun /warmi/ ‘woman’ takes the suffix /-y/ to indicate possession by the first person. In Ecuadorian Quichua, the possessive suffix /-pa/ occurs not on the thing (or person) possessed, but on the possessor (in this case, the first person singular pronoun /nuka/).
We observed that the conscious use of certain communicative strategies could be quite effective. For example, Julca once gave a class presentation, in quechua ancashino, about the unification of written Quechua. To facilitate his audience’s comprehension, he employed several strategies:

- He began his talk with a preamble (also in Quechua) in which he highlighted certain lexical and phonological elements of his native variety, thus providing aural “guideposts” for his audience to follow in the talk to come.
- He exaggerated his use of gestures, intonation, and prosody to emphasize key terms.
- He incorporated the dipthongs characteristic of southern Quechua in place of the corresponding Ancash vowel phonemes (for example, using the term wawqi ‘brother’ instead of the Ancash term wooqi).
- He also incorporated certain terms (for example, ťawiri ‘to read’, kikillantaq ‘the same’) from the recently standardized Bolivian Quechua, which most of the Quechua students had studied, either within PROEIB or previously.

Thanks to these strategies, not only his Quechua-speaking classmates but even Luykx (a neophyte student of Bolivian Quechua) was able to grasp most of the content of his talk.

Something similar occurred when García presented to his classmates, in Quechua, a lecture about Quechua grammar. He described his preparations for the event as follows:

(4) To put together that class, I tried to use what I had studied in the prior workshops, about the speech varieties of the other students. For a given word, I tried to use the term used in Bolivian Quechua, or how the Ecuadorians say it – basically, since there were Bolivian and Ecuadorian classmates there, I took that into account. I spoke in my variety, but I looked for synonyms for those terms I knew they wouldn’t understand, because I already knew, I had already spoken [with them] on other occasions and the Bolivians and Ecuadorians had asked me what such-and-such means. So then later I noted that they called it this or that, so I used [those] synonyms.

Later he added:

(5) I took the Quechua grammatical terms suggested by Mr. Quiroz, our Bolivian consultant on matters of Quechua language, and in addition to the terms he

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22 Accreditation of the Master’s program required that faculty members hold graduate degrees in their respective fields. Due to the historic marginalization of indigenous people from higher
suggested, I used other synonyms from the everyday speech of my dialect and the dialects of the [Bolivian] colleagues ... and I used the terms familiar to them to refer to “word”, “sentence”, “meaning”, “morpheme”, “letter”, etc.

During his lecture, García made effective use of techniques that are a regular part of “scaffolding” in second language instruction (Echevarría et al. 2004); for example, he illustrated key points graphically on the board while explaining them verbally. Of course, the audience’s prior knowledge about the topic aided significantly in their comprehension. This was also a factor in García’s own comprehension of other varieties, as Julca commented to Luykx in a subsequent interview:

(6) ... For example, with a document that I had written, I had Fernando [García] read it, to see what level of comprehension he had of written Quechua in the Ancash variety. He said he had serious problems in understanding it, but since it was a familiar topic about which [linguists] Alfredo Torero, Gary Parker, Cerrón-Palomino and others had written, he said to me, “I could relate it to [other] things I’ve read, so I managed to understand some things.”

We can summarize the PROEIB students’ strategies to facilitate communication across Quechua varieties as follows:

- Strategies to improve (one’s own) aural comprehension:
  - Investigating phonological, morphological, and lexical differences and correspondences among the speech varieties in question.
  - Using contextual clues to locate oneself in the semantic domain at hand.

- Strategies to facilitate aural comprehension by one’s audience/interlocutors:
  - Incorporating phonological, morphological, and/or lexical elements of the listener’s variety into one’s own speech.
  - Juxtaposing regional synonyms and indicating their correspondence via gestures.
  - Using vocabulary collectively developed and/or reviewed in the context of students’ coursework (for example, academic terms in Quechua, either from the official quechua normalizado or coined by students themselves).

education, this resulted in a faculty team that was mostly white/mestizo. To address this limitation, PROEIB contracted expert (albeit non-credentialed) indigenous language speakers to work with students on matters related to dialectology, orthography, and development of academic registers in their native tongues. Mr. Alfredo Quiroz, a key figure in the development and diffusion of Bolivia’s “official” standardized Quechua, was one of these.
Combining verbal communication with visual scaffolding (e.g., using the board to write focal words and diagram relations between terms).

There was also the frequent use, by all of the Quechua students, of the Ecuadorian term *mashi* (discussed earlier), as well as short formulaic phrases from other varieties. While this practice was not directly aimed at increasing intelligibility, it did signal speakers’ willingness to engage each other across linguistic and national boundaries.

Interviews and observations showed only three students employing the second set of strategies (purposeful adjustment of one’s own speech to facilitate comprehension by one’s audience). Not surprisingly, these three were the ones with prior training in linguistics and Quechua dialectology. Two are co-authors of the present work; the third was a Bolivian student who had studied Quechua linguistics and bilingual education in Peru and Ecuador. All three agreed that the Ecuadorian students did not habitually modify their native Quichua to facilitate others’ comprehension, and were possibly unaware of their classmates’ efforts in that regard. As García remarked in an interview:

(7) In order for them [the Ecuadorians] to understand me a little better, I tried to use their variety. But I didn’t observe that they made the same effort. That is, they understood me, because many of them said “Ah! Fernando is easy to understand.” But that’s because I made the effort to speak using synonyms for the others, or what they used, in the other dialects. Even the suffixes.

On the other hand, a Bolivian student from Cochabamba noted her Ecuadorian classmates’ enthusiasm for learning the Quechua of their new environment:

(8) I’ve seen their concern for learning our Quechua. There are words in our Quechua that are completely unknown to them. So, they’re always asking me “What’s this word?” and bam! they write it down, and “What’s that word?” and bam! they write that one down. All the time, they’d go around jotting down words ... The Ecuadorians really put a lot of effort into understanding our Quechua. And the Peruvians too, I recall that several times Martín [a speaker of *quechua cusqueño*] and Fernando [García], I would say a word that was new to them, and “Oh, you don’t say! It’s said like that?” And bam! they would note it down just the same. Or if not, they would repeat it several times, like “Ah, what a nice word!”
Although only a few students embraced the role of linguistic border-crossers, their efforts proved significant. Due to their specialized knowledge and language skills, these students often assumed leadership roles in the Indigenous Language Workshop; during instances of group work in Quechua, they served as bridges among Quechua classmates from different regions. This type of communicative work clearly requires a high level of metalinguistic awareness. Fortunately, the PROEIB Quechua group included a small but significant “critical mass” of such individuals, who were able to spur their classmates toward deeper levels of metalinguistic awareness as well.

5 Discussion

5.1 Factors mediating intelligibility

Aside from the above-mentioned strategies (and speakers’ individual idiosyncrasies), we observed that comprehension across Quechua varieties was mediated by a number of factors:

- structural differences and similarities (phonological and morphosyntactic) between the varieties in question;
- the intensity and frequency of contact between the respective speech communities;
- speakers’ degree of familiarity with other varieties;
- the mode of communication used (oral vs. written);
- the semantic domain around which communication took place;
- interlocutors’ degree of motivation or openness toward mutual comprehension (itself a product of historically-developed social and political relationships).

Regarding the first factor, the examples analyzed in this article illustrate different degrees of distance, from closely-related dialects to varieties pertaining to different sides of the major split between Quechua I and Quechua II.

With regard to the second and third factors, PROEIB constitutes an exceptionally favorable context. As a two-year residential program that is continental in scope, it provides a unique opportunity for extensive, intensive contact among Quechua speakers from different regions. For most participants in the initial cohort, the social milieu at PROEIB far exceeded their prior exposure to Quechua varieties other than their own. Contact between neighboring Quechua varieties is not especially remarkable, especially given the importance of regional markets in the rural
Andes. However, prolonged engagement with non-contiguous, historically divergent varieties is rare (as students’ reactions illustrate). As one might expect, increased exposure led to increased intelligibility. The Bolivian student cited earlier described her own emerging comprehension:

(9) Truthfully, I couldn’t understand the Ecuadorians. It became a crisis for me, not being able to understand them ... It was a huge effort, I would open my ears, eyes, I had to open up everything to understand them. Sometimes I told them, “Help me out with signs, so I can understand.” But I think it’s a question of continuing to listen, because later, by the last semester, I could understand them. Not perfectly, but I could understand more, I didn’t have to make such an effort like in the beginning. I could comprehend what they were saying, pretty well. I must have just gotten used to it, since I also would hear them talk more often [than the other Quechua students].

It is also notable that those students who did have prior exposure to more varieties of Quechua (as well as academic training in linguistics) drew upon a wider range of strategies to facilitate cross-varietal communication, and (at least based on their own self-reports) with greater success.

Regarding the relative intelligibility of oral and written communication, we did not collect enough specific data on this question to address it here. However, the three students who were most skilled at engaging different Quechua varieties were also the most familiar with written Quechua, due to their professional training prior to entering the program. At least one (García) indicated that having access to written as well as oral examples of *quechua ancashino* facilitated his comprehension.

Regarding the fifth factor, it is no surprise that familiarity with the semantic domain of a given speech event would facilitate comprehension. As noted earlier, the curricular focus on bilingual-intercultural education urged students to use Quechua for academic purposes (a rare occurrence outside of rural primary schools). This practice drew on prior language planning that had established conventional Quechua terms for common academic activities and artifacts (“book”, “page”, “read”, “write”, etc.). When a desired term was lacking, students would sometimes invent their own; some of these neologisms caught on with their classmates and continued to circulate in subsequent speech events.

Many scholars know the experience of grasping specialized content in a second (or third or fourth) language more readily than they would “simpler” content that does not make use of familiar concepts and/or structures. For example, Luykx was able to supervise a student thesis written in French, despite no formal study (and very little informal exposure) to that language,
due to: (1) the high proportion of cognate terms between Spanish and French, particularly in the domain of sociolinguistics, and (2) her familiarity with the structural particulars of the genre. Similarly, she was able to comprehend (mostly) the table of contents of a thesis proposal drafted in Quechua by another PROEIB student, by looking for familiar roots and common metaphors and drawing on her expectations of what such a table of contents should contain. How these sorts of domain-specific and genre-specific “literacy effects” play out with native speakers of indigenous languages remains an open question.

Finally, interlocutors’ degree of motivation toward mutual comprehension clearly played a significant role in students’ negotiations of meaning across language boundaries. Not only did these interactions affirm their shared ethnic identity and political commitment to their ancestral languages, they were also pleasurable in themselves. Students enjoyed discovering points of contrast and commonality across their respective varieties, incorporating these into their informal language play, and becoming more knowledgeable about their ancestral tongue. Borrowing elements from each other’s languages – like the Peruvian and Bolivian students’ adoption of the Ecuadorian term mashí, or a Chilean (Mapuche) student’s announcement (on the occasion of her thesis defense) that “¡Hoy soy cochala!”23 – became an index of their shared identity as PROEIBianos (sometimes humorously rendered as PROEIBidos). On the other hand, there were occasions when national rivalries, local loyalties, and personal animosities threatened to disrupt efforts at mutual comprehension.24

5.2 Potential for transferring the observed strategies to other contexts

The language practices we have described arose, not from everyday communicative necessity, but from: (1) students’ shared commitment to expanding the contexts of use for their ancestral language(s); (2) their intellectual curiosity about different Quechua varieties; and (3) pressure from faculty members to “stretch” their use of Quechua into new contexts and functions. Thus, participants often used their ancestral languages in settings that did not feel “natural”, and tried to avoid falling back into Spanish even when their tendency would

23 Cochalo/a is a vernacular term for a person from Cochabamba; the more formal term is cochabambino/a. The students’ declaration (“Today I am a cochala!”) is like a more exuberant, informal version of John F. Kennedy’s “Ich bin ein Berliner”.

24 This article has focused on students’ efforts to bridge ethnic and linguistic distinctions; however, examination of how dialectal differences in Quechua are used to mark and reinforce such distinctions would be equally interesting.
have been to do so. In practice, this commitment required considerable mental effort to maintain (a common phenomenon when speaking an L2, but probably less common when speaking one’s mother tongue). Nonetheless, there is some evidence that the strategies described above were employed beyond the bounds of the program itself.

As noted, the most effective strategies we observed derived from the purposeful analysis of dialectal differences by a few students (García and Julca among them) with specialized linguistic knowledge. Such expertise is rare among Quechua speakers; however, it is not necessary that all interlocutors possess such specialized knowledge for it to play a significant role. The following narrative from García (collected some years after his graduation from PROEIB) illustrates how even a single expert speaker can transfer these strategies to new situations:

(10) In Iquitos [Peru], in the program to train indigenous schoolteachers, I’ve spoken with quichuarunas,25 Amazonian settlers from the Napo River region ... We have evidence that these Amazonian settlers adopted Quechua as their mother tongue and stopped speaking their indigenous Amazonian language. Now these settlers speak Quechua, and when I converse with them, I understand them better than they do me, and in order to help them understand me better, I adopt the same strategies as I did in Cochabamba, using their pronunciations, like for example the /sh/ instead of my own /s/... using synonyms, etc.

Since then, García has also noted that his ongoing contact with speakers of different Peruvian Quechua varieties (a circumstance he encounters frequently in his professional life) has led to greater intelligibility with speakers from Ancash, Junín, Huanuco, etc. He also found that he could, with some effort, comprehend the Quechua of speakers in the departments of Huancavelica, Ayacucho, and parts of Apurímac,26 though the reverse was less true.

25 Runa is the Quechua word for ‘person’; quichuarunas thus refers to Quechua speakers. The (optional) plural suffix in Quechua is /-kuna/ (as in quichuarunakuna ‘Quechua people’); however, bilingual speakers often attach the Spanish plural suffix /-s/ to Quechua roots embedded within Spanish utterances.

26 García hypothesizes that the Quechua currently spoken in these areas derives from the standardization of quechua cusqueño undertaken by the Tercer Concilio Limense (1582–1583), which eliminated diphthongs, glottalized and aspirated consonants, and simplified the morphology. His own dialect of quechua ayacuchano maintains some of these features that were eliminated in this standardized variety.
Aside from academic and teacher-training contexts, other settings where communication across different Quechua varieties might occur are border regions, migration zones, commercial spaces frequented by transregional Quechua merchants and truckers, and regional gatherings of indigenous political leaders. García’s experience suggests that a small number of committed participants could significantly expand the use of Quechua in such contexts.

Periurban schools could be another propitious setting for the exploration of Quechua linguistic variation. To date, most bilingual education efforts in the Andes have focused on rural areas – not surprisingly, since that is where Quechua speakers are concentrated. However, there is a substantial Quechua presence in cities as well. Although urban migration is usually associated with a rapid shift toward Spanish (Howard 2011; Klee and Caravado 2005), Quechua usage is sustained by continuing rural-urban migration. The burgeoning peripheries of Bolivia’s cities are also home to concentrations of Quechua speakers, largely ignored by bilingual education initiatives. In Peru, Bolivia, and Ecuador, periurban schools may have a range of Quechua dialects even within a single classroom. Children of rural migrants are, unsurprisingly, common targets for discrimination. An approach to linguistic variation similar to that devised by the PROEIB students could potentially foster more horizontal relationships among pupils, while also counteracting harmful and erroneous ideologies about linguistic variation. However, most EIB efforts in the Andean region have focused on standardization rather than variation (see King, 2001; Luykx 2004).

5.3 Developing metalinguistic awareness

As the PROEIB students explored the overlapping edges of their respective speech communities, encountering structural contrasts, localized histories, and new contexts of use for their native tongues, they were developing a deeper metalinguistic awareness around Quechua – although much of that process occurred through the medium of Spanish (as did our reflections about it while preparing the present work). Most of the scholarly literature on metalinguistic awareness has focused on children and second language acquisition, in contrast to our focus on adult learners with more nuanced (and overtly political) intellectual aims (but see Cenoz and Hornberger 2008). Additionally, the PROEIB students’ metalinguistic work occurred within a conceptual framework based on
natural variation, rather than the prescriptive notions of correctness that characterize most academic settings.\textsuperscript{27}

If such collective comparative analysis of students’ own linguistic variation were a more regular part of language teaching, it could help combat the reproduction of ethnic and regional hierarchies that almost invariably accompanies formal language instruction. Of course, what Lippi-Green calls “Standard Language Ideology” (SLI) is both widespread and deeply entrenched, so a non-prescriptive approach to natural variation is likely to provoke resistance and controversy (witness, for example, the political debacle around the “Ebonics” proposal in California; see Perry and Delpit [1998]; Ramírez et al. [2005]). However, it might provoke less resistance when applied languages without a well-established standard. The fact that governmental efforts to establish a \textit{quechua normalizado} have met so much opposition from native speakers suggests that SLI has not yet achieved hegemonic force across Quechua-speaking populations.

5.4 Splitting, lumping, and ethnopolitical unification

Hegemonic, standardized languages are commonly viewed as abstract entities, existing independently of any particular group of speakers. The notion goes back to de Saussure’s distinction between \textit{langue} and \textit{parole}, and undergirds most formal language instruction. Within SLI, the institutionalized standard is thought of as “the language,” and what people actually speak as some imperfect deviation from that. The standard language’s claim to “a universality that transcends local particularities” (Keane 1997: 46) plays an important role in the construction of national identity, as has been explored by scholars on every continent.

The reified “Quechua language”, though not associated with any extant nation-state, is an important symbol of ethnic identity, especially among urban bilinguals. However, in the absence of a generally accepted standard, local forms of speech carry considerable ideological weight, as indexes of ethnic authenticity and community belonging. Recalling Spitulnik’s (1998: 164) insight that language ideologies are about “the production of social relations of sameness and difference”, it should

\textsuperscript{27} This framework was in tension with the program’s emphasis on training students to use the newly official \textit{quechua normalizado}, which draws more on historical reconstructions of older forms, rather than any current vernacular variety (see Colonel-Molina 1999, 2011; Luykx 2004). Some students adamantly rejected this emphasis (in private conversations), though they seldom challenged it openly in the classroom. Moreover, the PROEIB setting was certainly not free of other normative institutional expectations; for examples, see Luykx (2000).
not surprise us that Quechua fluency serves as a symbol of both pan-regional unity and local diversity. The tension between these two poles has been an enduring theme throughout decades of Quechua language planning (see Godenzzi 1992; Hornberger and King 1998; Luykx 2004), and continues to fuel resistance to normalization efforts, even among those charged with carrying them out.

As mentioned, most of the PROEIB students had been unaware of the multitude of dialects/languages subsumed under the name “Quechua” before entering the program. As they gained a more detailed understanding of Quechua’s historical development and present diversity, their initial surprise gave way to a collective sense of belonging to a larger transnational polity. Many people (both indigenous and non-indigenous) habitually evoke such an entity, via casual references to “el pueblo quechua”, but few actually experience it beyond the bounds of their local milieu. Students’ engagement with one another across linguistic boundaries and their pleasure in the discovery of linguistic differences arguably helped to make this “imagined community” (Anderson 2006) seem less imaginary, and more like an actual community. Whereas at the beginning of the program, students (and faculty) usually referred to groups of students by nationality (los chilenos, los ecuatorianos, etc.), within a few weeks, students were referring to los quechuas and los aymaras (the two main groups whose membership cut across national boundaries). When more specificity was called for, the Quechua students referred to los ayacuchanos, los ecuatorianos/los quichuas, los bolivianos (signifying only those speakers of Bolivian Quechua varieties) – and “Felix”, the linguistic outlier. Certainly the routine grouping of students by language group in the Indigenous Language Workshop contributed to this usage, but it was not limited to that context.

Over the course of decades among indigenous activists and language planners, we have heard several express aspirations for the linguistic unification of Quechua even beyond national boundaries. (Although national boundaries are a poor guide to Quechua’s diversity, they are a common reference point for non-linguists.) But while some may perceive a political and social benefit in construing Quechua as a single language, powerful tendencies work against the use of Quechua as a vehicle of ethnopolitical unification. Our findings indicate that mutual comprehension among dissimilar varieties requires: (1) specialized linguistic knowledge; (2) a deep commitment to the functional expansion of the language; and (3) extended contact among speakers of said varieties. The strategies described above resulted not from informal or spontaneous communication, but from conscious effort on the part of carefully selected interlocutors in a unique setting. This combination of factors is exceedingly rare across Quechua speech communities.
However, this does not preclude the possibility of a broader ethno-political unification of Quechua communities through means other than linguistic revitalization (nor of effective language revitalization efforts at the local level). Such transregional networking can (and does) occur through the medium of Spanish, even as Quechua remains important for local communication and as a symbol of indigenous Andean identity. Indeed, the use of Andean Spanish, with its distinctive substrate of Quechua (and Aymara) phonology, morphology, and grammar (Cerrón-Palomino 2003b; Stratford 1989), already evokes a powerful emotional resonance for speakers from Argentina to the U.S.

6 Conclusion

Given the rarity of extended contact among speakers of different Quechua languages, what is the broader significance of PROIEB students’ forays into cross-varietal Quechua communication? In contrast to world languages like English and Spanish, where contact between different varieties is increasingly common and dialectal differences are regularly remarked upon, most communication in Quechua occurs between speakers who share the same variety. Despite its recent expansion into more “official” contexts, including schooling, Quechua is still mainly used in communitarian settings, and even there it is losing ground to Spanish (and to “interlanguages” such as quechuañol; see Luykx [1999a] and Cerrón-Palomino [2003b]). However, we have also witnessed an increase in extra-local (and thus inter-dialectal) usage, for example in language planning workshops and supra-regional meetings of peasant confederations. Quechua-speaking merchants and truckers have moved across different dialect zones for many decades; this certainly suggests possibilities (though little studied as of yet) for Quechua usage among speakers of different varieties. And of course, among all Amerindian languages, Quechua has the greatest potential to serve as a language of wider communication, by virtue of its approximately eight million speakers spread across the length of the continent (not to mention immigrant communities in the U.S. and Europe).

In recent decades, a growing number of scholars (indigenous and non-indigenous) have come to view higher education as an effective means to promote the interests and aspirations of indigenous peoples. In fact, numerous PROIEB graduates have gone on to assume high-level positions in Ministries of Education, teacher training institutions, and other government agencies – a significant shift for bureaucracies that have traditionally viewed indigenous language speakers as problems to be solved, not protagonists to be reckoned with. PROIEB’s graduates
are thus key actors who will continue to shape the role of indigenous languages within their respective countries. Hopefully, their actions will help to chip away at prejudicial attitudes toward language variation – not only between Quechua and Spanish, but also among regional varieties of Quechua.

In fact, the PROEIB students’ tolerance and even admiration for unfamiliar varieties – i.e., the decentering of their natural linguistic chauvinism – was among the program’s most striking outcomes. We attribute this to the fact that: (1) students’ linguistic varieties were not hierarchically ranked, nor was one variety imposed at the expense of the others; and (2) students’ linguistic explorations were undertaken at their own initiative and for their own ends, rather than as externally-imposed academic tasks.28 As the PROEIB students engaged each other’s languages and deepened their metalinguistic awareness, they came to see each other as intellectual resources, eventually turning the Indigenous Language Workshop to their own purposes. This must be viewed as a positive development, although it sometimes involved students’ rejection of activities and perspectives prescribed by the faculty team.

The students’ evolving enthusiasm for natural linguistic variation bodes well for cultivating rapport among different Quechua-speaking groups. Given the ongoing migration of Quechua speakers from province to province and country to city, such an attitude could benefit thousands of Quechua-speaking schoolchildren as well. Is it too much to hope that not only indigenous graduate students but also elementary pupils might one day meet the linguistic variation present in their classroom with curiosity and excitement, rather than using it as a basis for disdain and discrimination?

Two decades ago, Jim Crawford insisted that the most urgent priority for endangered language activists was the development of indigenous leadership on language issues (1996: 58). Despite important advances in this regard, indigenous language speakers are still too often relegated to the margins of language planning, and non-indigenous voices remain dominant in most settings where the fate of indigenous languages is decided (see Fishman 2006 [1995]: 203). It is thus encouraging to see native Quechua speakers acquiring specialized training and bringing new perspectives to language planning efforts – in short, reclaiming their rights and their expertise regarding the future of their languages. Whether Quechua speakers can (or choose to) pursue more intensive contact among their respective varieties remains to be seen. At the very least, it will require collective introspection, planning, and determination if practices like those described here are to give rise to a self-sustaining, transregional Quechua speech community.

28 See Luykx (1999b: Ch. 5) on the concept of academic work as alienated linguistic labor.
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