

Chapter 7 The Classification of Languages

Joyce Bruhn de Garavito

“Delving Deeper”

Mixed languages

In this chapter you have seen how languages can be classified as belonging to a language family based on whether they descend from a common ancestor. You can also classify them according to linguistic typology, which considers morphological and syntactic properties, for example, whether they are SVO or SOV languages. Consider the following cases and try to decide how best to classify the languages they describe.

Quichua chico or *Medialengua* (this section is based on Muysken 1979). As you may know, the Indigenous people of what is now Peru speak Quechua (among other languages), the language of the Inca Empire, which stretched from the south of Colombia to Chile. In Ecuador the Indigenous communities refer to their language as Quichua. In some remote regions, Quichua has mixed with Spanish in an interesting way. Most of the lexicon comes from Spanish while the grammar, including almost all inflexional morphology, comes from Quichua. This language, often referred to by its speakers as *Quichua chico* ‘small Quichua’, is incomprehensible to both Spanish speakers and speakers of Quichua. Quichua Chico is spoken in the home and with friends. Standard Quichua is the language of the region, and Spanish is the language of the country.

In (1) you find an example in Quichua Chico, Spanish as it is pronounced, and standard Quichua, with an English translation. The morphemes in red come from Spanish (examples from Muysken 1979).

- (1) a. in~~ki~~-da ~~azi~~-ngi? (Quichua chico)
 what do-you
- b. ke ases (Spanish pronunciation of *Qué haces?* ‘what are you doing’)
 what do-you
- c. ima-da ura-ngi (standard Quichua of the región)
 ‘What are you doing?’

As you can see, the inflexional morphemes *in-*, *-da*, and *-ngi* are the same in standard Quichua and Quichua Chico (*in-* *ima-* are allophones). However, the question word *ki* clearly comes from Spanish, as does the root of ‘to do’ or ‘to make’, *azi*¹. Neither of these is found in the standard language. Example (2) shows a more complex sentence.

- (2) No-chu ~~sabi~~-ngi ~~purki~~-di ~~isti~~-da ~~azi~~-rka-ngi?

¹ Recall from Chapter 3 Phonology (Exercise 3.5) that in Quechua/Quichua the phoneme /i/ has two allophones: [i] and [e]. This explains some of the changes from Spanish to Quichua, besides the variation in the name of the language.

‘You don’t know why you did this?’

The Spanish root words and their phonemic representations are *saber* /saber/ ‘to know’, *por qué* /por ke/ ‘why’, *esto* /esto/ ‘this’, *hacer* /aser/ ‘to do’.

Spanish is an SVO language, just like English. Quichua Chico, on the other hand, is SOV, the same as Quichua, additional evidence that the grammar of Quichua has been maintained. The phenomenon of changing most of the content words in a language is referred to as relexification. In some cases, the new words in Quichua Chico maintain the meaning of the corresponding word in Quichua, as seen in (3). In other cases, it adopts the meaning found in Spanish (4).

- (3) a. *sinta* (Quichua Chico meaning: to be sitting, to be, to live, there is/there are)
- b. *sentado* (Spanish meaning: to be sitting).
- c. *tiya* (Standard Quichua meaning: to be sitting, to be, to live, there is/there are)
- (4) a. *irmanu, irmana* (Quichua Chico meaning: brother, sister)
- b. *hermano /ermano/, hermana /ermana/* (Spanish meaning, brother and sister)
- c. *wauki, turi, pani, ñaña* (standard Quichua, siblings)

A similar case to Quichua Chico is found in Paraguay. The Indigenous language of Paraguay, Guaraní, is one of the most successful, perhaps the only successful, Indigenous language of the Americas. It is not only the official language (with Spanish) of Paraguay, education all the way to university can take place in Guaraní. Around 80% of the population speaks Guaraní.

However, Guaraní, like Quichua, has developed a variety, referred to as Jopara, which includes a great many Spanish roots, while at the same time maintaining Guaraní word order and inflexional morphology. In a similar fashion, Nahuatl, the language of the Aztec empire in Mexico, now includes a great many borrowings from Spanish. The extent to which Nahuatl grammar has changed is a matter of debate, and may depend on the region where it is spoken.

Does this only happen with Indigenous languages? Consider the sentence in (5).

- (5) The warden of that prison offends justice and honour.

You may be aware the Normans from France invaded England in 1066. Again, we have a situation of contact between a conquering people and the natives of the land. Unlike many Indigenous people English survived and thrived. However, consider again the sentence in (5), repeated here as (6), with words of Norman French origin in red.

- (6) The **warden** of that **prison** **offends** **justice** and **honour**.

As you can see, in this example, the only Indigenous English words are *the, of, that, and*. Does this look familiar?

References

- Muysken, P. (1979). La mezcla de quechua y castellano. El caso de la 'media lengua' en el Ecuador. *Lexis*, III(1), 41-55.
- Muysken, P. (1981). Halfway between Quechua and Spanish: the case of relexification. In A. Highfield & A. Valdman (Eds.), *Historicity and Variation in Creole Studies* (pp. 52-78). Ann Arbor: Karoma.