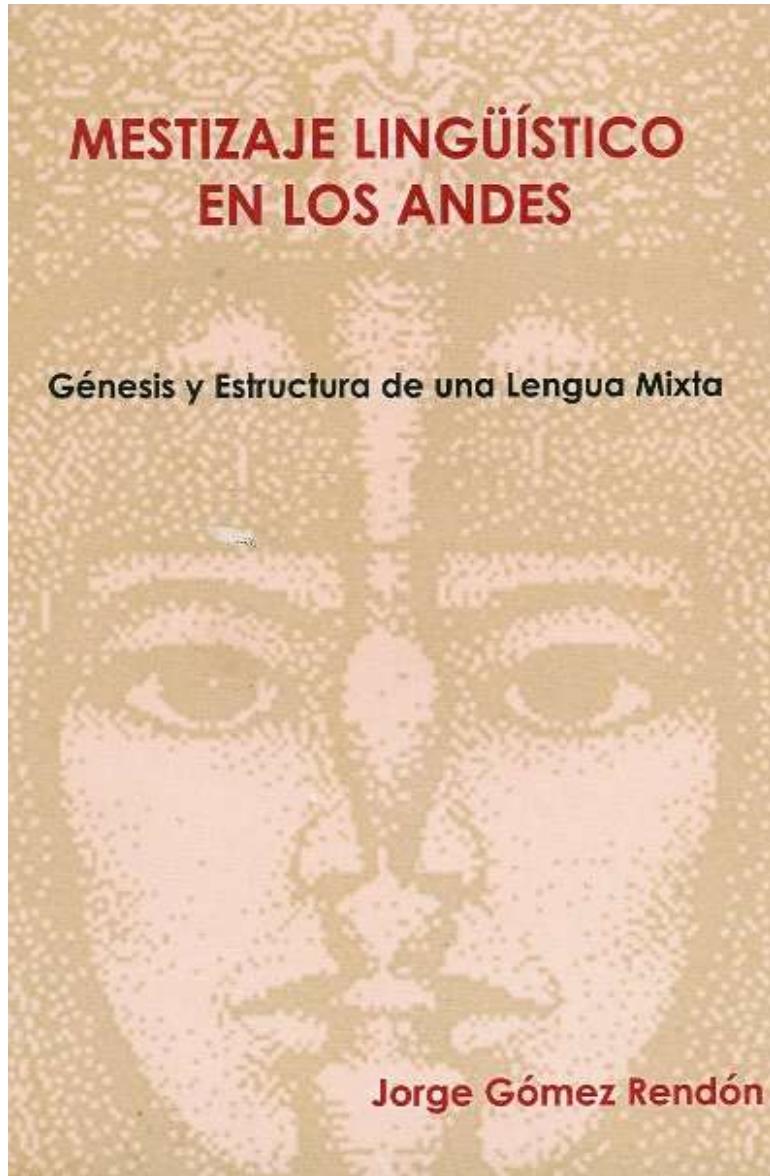


My work with Media Lengua and Kichwa in Ecuador

After having spent considerable time in northern Ecuador studying the Chota Afro-Ecuadoran communities (see that section), I decided to investigate traditional Andean Spanish as spoken as an L2 by indigenous Kichwa speakers. I tried several possible sources for contacts in the Imbabura indigenous communities, but nothing turned up. Then I came across Jorge Gómez Rendón's book on the Media Lengua of Imbabura.



I had been aware of Pieter Muysken's ground-breaking work on Media Lengua in Salcedo, Cotopaxi in the 1970's, but I assumed that it was long gone (more on that later), and I had no idea that ML was alive and well in Imbabura. Although I fantasized about the possibility of actually getting a sample of Imbabura ML, my immediate thought was that Jorge could supply

me with contacts in the indigenous communities where I could study L2 Andean Spanish. I saw in the book that Jorge had studied with Pieter Muysken, so I wrote to Pieter (a friend who I miss terribly), who put me in contact with Jorge. Jorge was no longer working with ML but rather was collecting data on Amazonian languages for a governmental agency, but he was in Quito at the time, and gave me phone numbers of his former collaborators Gabriel Cachimuel in Angla, and José María Casco in nearby Casco Valenzuela. Jorge offered to accompany me to the communities as soon as he could get free; in the meantime I called Gabriel Cachimuel, who invited me to visit him in Angla, giving me instructions on travel from Otavalo.



This was to be the beginning of a friendship that continues to this day. On that first visit I met Gabriel and some older neighbor ladies who were cooking for a wedding. I also met his late mother, an amazing speaker of Kichwa, Media Lengua, and her own brand of Andean Spanish, who became my adopted mom in subsequent visits.





While we were sitting in Gabriel's yard, some folks from Pljal drove up to buy soft drinks from the little store that Gabriel's family then ran from their front room. They happily gave me my

first recorded examples of Media Lengua in conversation with Gabriel, all the while teaching me some basic expressions. This certainly whetted my appetite, but my focus was still on Andean Spanish. A few days later I returned with Jorge Gómez, who met me in nearby San Pablo del Lago, the parish seat. After spending more time with Gabriel and his family, Jorge and I walked across the valley to Casco Valenzuela, where we dropped in on José María, again the beginning of a wonderful lasting friendship.

Over the next few visits I interviewed many traditional Andean Spanish speakers, including JMC's mother, aunt and uncle and many other older speakers in Casco, Angla, Topo, Ugsha, Huaycupungo, San Miguel Alto, Tocagón, Imbaburita, etc. These data resulted in several articles and presentations.





























By this time I had picked up some expressions in Kichwa, but more to the point, I had fallen head over heels in love with the Kichwa/Media Lengua culture and language, and I began to systematically elicit detailed data on ML and to acquire enough traditional Kichwa to participate meaningfully in conversations as participant-observer. After many ML elicitation sessions I devised a series of interactive psycholinguistic experiments to determine the extent to which speakers could accurately identify Kichwa and Media Lengua and keep the languages apart. Once I determined that the two languages were indeed treated as discrete non-overlapping languages by K-ML speakers, I realized that this would provide a perfect environment for code-switching research, since Kichwa and ML have identical morphosyntax down to the very last system morphemes; only lexical roots separate the languages. Therefore if particularly grammatical items such as subject pronouns, interrogatives, or negators disfavored language switches in the absence of any morphosyntactic differences, this would support claims based on language dyads with more confounding factors. My subsequent psycholinguistic experiments led to an article in *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition* and a successful NSF grant, which also probed for the minimal linguistic material needed to keep languages apart cognitively.





During my work with Media Lengua I obtained data from Pijal (and neighboring Gualacata) as well as Casco Valenzuela and Angla, the 2 communities studied by Jorge Gómez. In Pijal only a few older residents speak ML, although folks in Angla and Casco believe that ML arrived in their communities from Pijal. After working with Jesse Stewart, I became friends with Antonio Maldonado and his Sumak Pacha tourism initiative. Antonio aided in recruitment of Pijal ML speakers.





While working with the Media Lengua speakers in Imbabura, I decided to visit the areas where Muysken had encountered ML and similar forms in the 1970's. In Cañar he had found a ML-like speech form referred to as *catalangu*. In 2017 I traveled by bus from Otavalo to the small city of Cañar. Pieter Muysken gave me the names of the communities he had visited and I was able to conduct interviews in the communities of Gallo Rumi (parroquia Honorato Vásquez), La Capilla and Quilloac (parroquia Chorocopte), and San Rafael (parroquia Cañar). All are currently connected to the small city of Cañar by blacktop roads, and the distance by private vehicle is between fifteen minutes and half an hour.



Not surprisingly after nearly two full generations, the Catalangu described by Muysken was not in use anywhere in the region, but all older interviewees acknowledged that *Catalán* or *Catalano* (as the term is currently rendered) once existed, and a few individuals were able to recall and imitate some utterances. More importantly, all of the interviewees were adamant that Catalán/Catalano/Catalangu was never a stable language, but rather the halting attempts of monolingual Quichua speakers to communicate in Spanish, as Spanish-language schools and businesses brought the language into their lives for the first time. This admittedly anecdotal testimony is consistent with Muysken's speculation that Catalangu was a "kind of Spanish." When I spoke (Imbabura) Media Lengua, the response was laughter, and the assertion that the former Catalangu had been nothing like that.

In 2018 I also traveled to Saraguro (Loja), another area where Muysken had found a form of Media Lengua in the 1970's. Pieter told me that he had found ML in the community of Oñakapak, so I spent several days there (nowadays less than half an hour by car from Saraguro). I found some older folks who recalled a few ML-like expressions (especially when propted by me), and many pure Kichwa speakers, but nobody was spontaneously using ML. I also visited the more remote community of Gera (almost an hour from Saraguro by private vehicle), where Kichwa is alive and well (but no ML).







I had assumed that the Media Lengua speakers that Muysken met in the 1970's near Salcedo (Cotopaxi) had largely dispersed. Then I found Andrea Müller's thesis, where she described interviewing some of the remaining ML speakers. I contacted her (and Pieter Muysken), and Andrea put me in contact with Alberto Taxo, an indigenous activist and spiritual leader (who later passed away sadly during the COVID-19 pandemic). I traveled to Salcedo in 2018 and again in 2019, where I met Alberto and was able to interview a couple of the last remaining ML speakers, in the communities of Pilaló and Collanas (and one in neighboring Quilajoló).

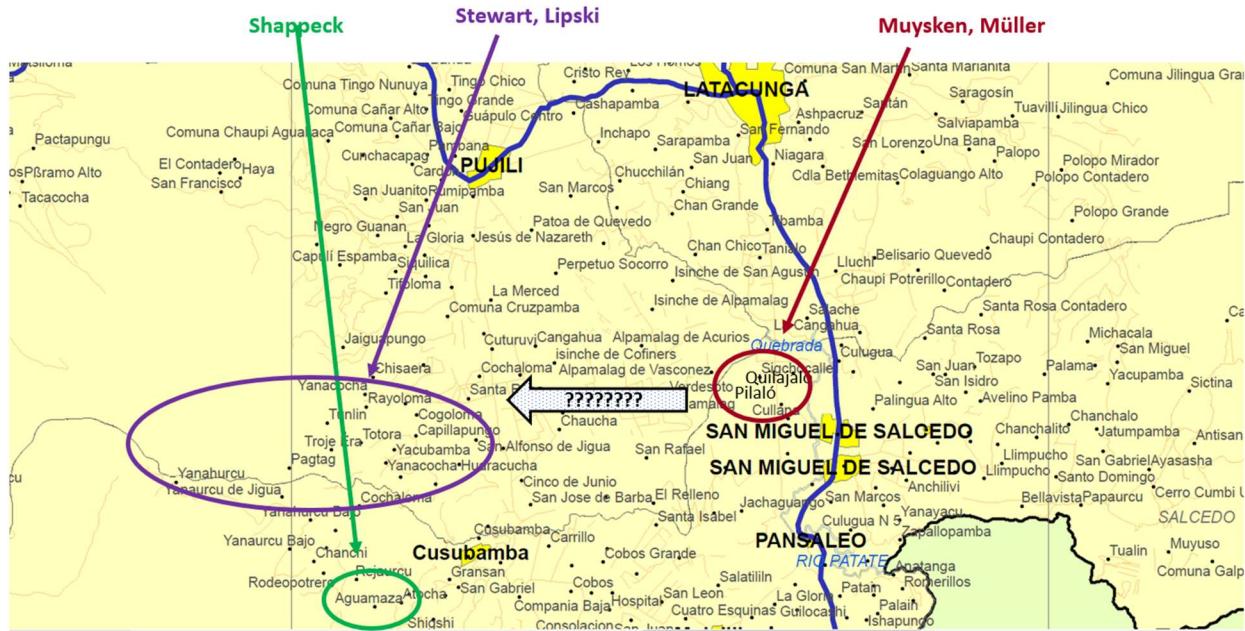






In April, 2022, after researching possible links between Pijal and Cotopaxi based on the family name Chicaiza, Jesse Stewart traveled to Cotopaxi, accompanied by a Media Lengua speaker from Pijal. Based in Pujilí, the capital of a *cantón* to the north of Salcedo, they traced several false leads before arriving in the indigenous community of Yacubamba, where they found middle-aged speakers of the same Cotopaxi Media Lengua described by Muysken for Salcedo. After conversations in Media Lengua between the Pijal speaker and residents of Yacubamba, they were told that Media Lengua was also spoken in other communities in the area.

Encouraged by this news, I traveled to Cotopaxi in August, 2022, and documented the presence of Media Lengua among middle-aged speakers in the communities of Yacubamba, La Capilla, Rayoloma, Tuglín, La Playa, and Yanahurco. Elderly speakers in these communities were not able to converse in Media Lengua but only in Quichua, while younger community members speak only Spanish, although they may possess passive competence in Media Lengua. All community members concurred that beyond Yanahurco, or to the north of Rayoloma, no Media Lengua is spoken. This area is deceptively small, since many communities in this mountainous zone can be reached only by precarious dirt roads that become treacherous or even impassable during the rainy season. The apparently tight clustering of the Media Lengua communities in the Yacubamba area may be due to the fact that all of the communities belong to the same *juihua*, a loose confederation of communities that not only share a common water authority, but also a sense of collective identity. One community member remarked that “we imitate one another” (e.g. in speech), and several indicated that Media Lengua (mostly referred to as *chaupi chaupi*) was characteristic of this *juihua* and not found elsewhere, an assertion that remains to be verified. During the same August 2022 trip, I was invited to Quilajaló (previously visited briefly), where a number of 60-70 year old speakers still use Media Lengua, another indication of the importance of trusted guides (my guide during my earlier visits to Salcedo had been a young woman from Collanas). Cotopaxi Media Lengua is still a viable language among middle-aged community residents in a very small region, and the ease with which appropriate communities can be “missed” without the aid of knowledgeable and well-known and trusted guides and drivers. For example Shappeck collected data just to the south of the Yacubamba cluster and found no ML.



Quilajaló (Salcedo, Cotopaxi)



Yanahurcu (Pujilí, Cotopaxi)



Yacubamba (Pujilí, Cotopaxi)



Tuglín (Pujilí, Cotopaxi)



Capillapungu (Pujilí, Cotopaxi)



Rayoloma (Pujilí, Cotopaxi)







With Jorge Gómez at the Universidad Católica in Quito



Alegría Yanes; wife of José María Casco and “the voice” in so many of my stimuli



Gabriel Cachimuel



Gabriel and Alegría Colta (his wife)



Gabriel in State College (2019)



José María Casco