

Decolonial Theorization of Epistemic Agency in Language Policy Management: Case of Plurinational Ecuador

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Abstract : This paper compares language management of two languages policies in plurinational Ecuador: (1) mandatory English language teaching that uses western standards of quality, and (2) Indigenous educación intercultural bilingüe which promotes ancestral knowledges and the indigenous languages of Ecuador. The data are from a comparative institutional ethnography conducted between 2018 and 2022 in English and Kichwa teacher preparation programs in an Ecuadorian teachers' college. Specifically, the paper explores frameworks of knowledge promoted by different educational actors in both teacher education programs and the ways in which the Ecuadorian transformation towards a knowledge-based economy is intertwined with the country's linguistic policies. Focusing on the specific role of language advocates and their discursive role in knowledge production, the paper elaborates on the notion of agency in Language Policy and Planning, referred to as epistemic agency. Specifically, epistemic agency is conceptualized through the analysis of English language epistemic advocates who participate in empowering English language policies and endorse knowledge production in that language. By proposing an epistemic agency, this paper argues that in the context of knowledge-based societies, advocates are key in transferring the policies from the political to the epistemic realm - where decisions about what counts as legitimate knowledge are made. The study uses the decolonial option as its analytical framework for critiquing the hegemonic perpetuation of modernity and its knowledge-based models in Latin America derived from the colonial matrix of power. Through this theoretical approach it is argued that if indigenous stakeholders are only viewed as political actors and not as knowledge producers, the hegemony of Global English will reinforce a knowledge-based society constructed upon Global North modernity. In the absence of strong epistemic advocates for indigenous language policies, powerful Global English advocates occupy such vacancies at the language management level, thus dominating the ecology of knowledges in a plurinational and plurilingual Ecuador.

Keywords : educación intercultural bilingüe, English language teaching, epistemic agency, language advocates, plurinationality

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