## *New approaches to orality: the Ecuadorian experience*

Jorge Gómez Rendón

*University of Amsterdam*

Ecuador's languages

- Number: Ecuador has 13 indigenous languages
  - 4 in the Pacific Lowlands
  - 1 in the Andean Highlands
  - 8 in the Amazon Lowlands
- Population: 2-2 ½ million speakers; Kichwa and Shuar speakers represent over 75%;
- Vitality: while all of these languages are endangered, some are more critically so.
- Official languages: Spanish; "Kichwa and Shuar are official languages of intercultural communication".
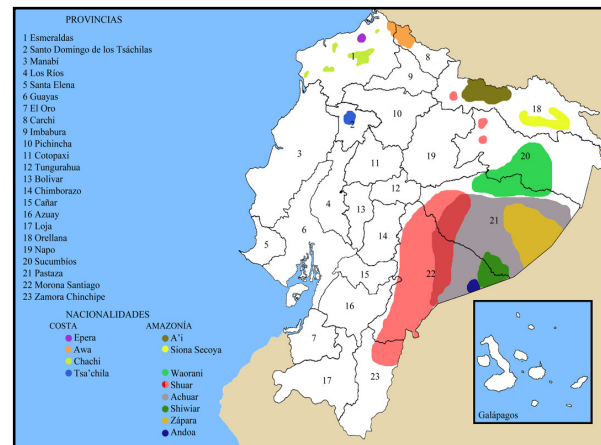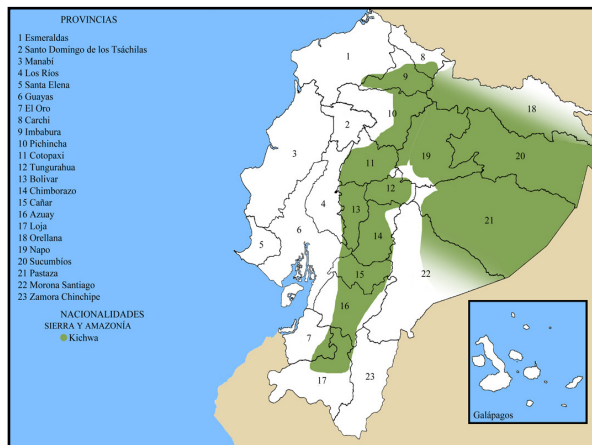
Indigenous languages & education

- Since 1989 a nation-wide Programmme of intercultural bilingual education (IBE) provides elementary school children with education in Spanish and their native languages;
- The Intercultural Bilingual Education Programme as established in 1989 was the outcome of a process of political empowerment of indigenous peoples, in which they learned how to position their native languages as hallmarks of ethnic identity in the frame of a self-claiming multicultural and multilingual State.
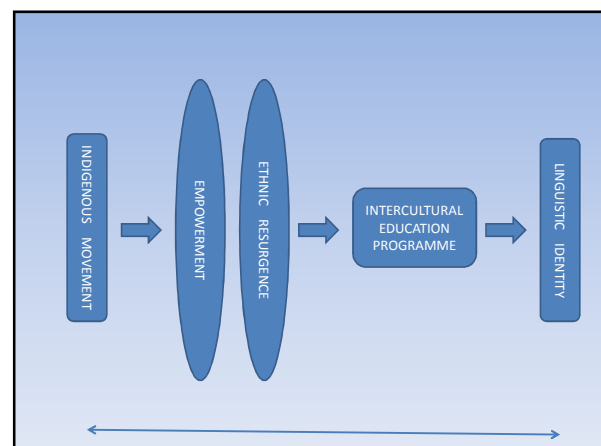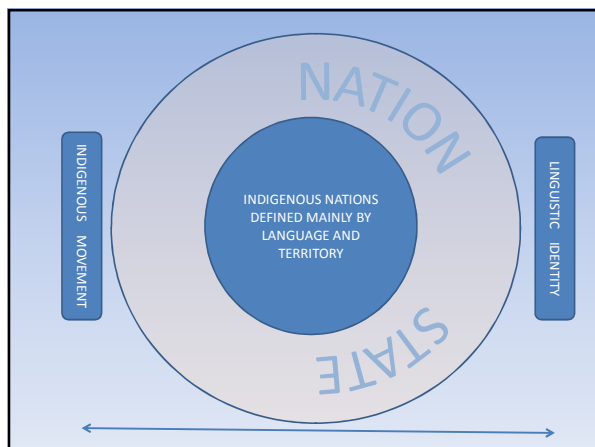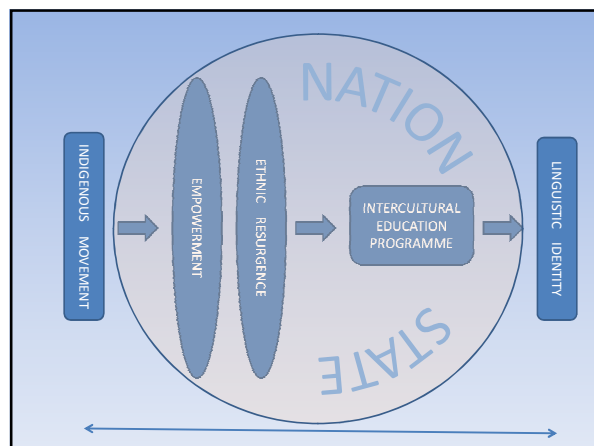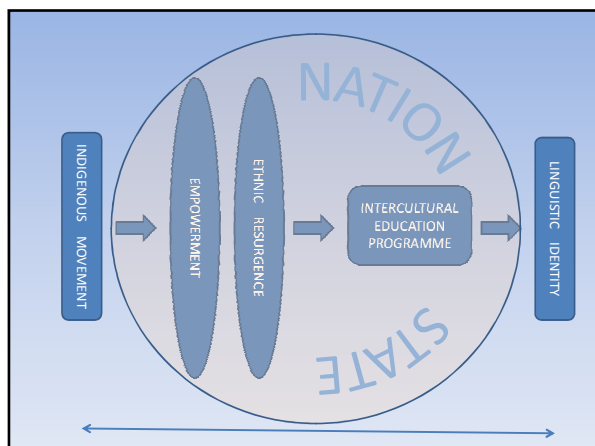
NATIVE LANGUAGES AND EDUCATION

- Some facts (after 20 years of IBE):
  - Retention and dropout rates keep high;
  - Teaching materials only for some languages;
  - Teaching materials generally not used by teachers;
  - No standardized methodology for IBE;
  - Poor training of teachers in IBE methodology;
  - Native languages not usually written outside schools
  - **NATIVE LANGUAGES HAVE NOT ENTERED THE FORMAL SCHOOLING SYSTEM AND REMAIN MOSTLY ORAL**

URGENT NEED TO FIND ALTERNATIVE WAYS OF MAKING INTERCULTURAL BILINGUAL EDUCATION MORE PRACTICAL AND ATTRACTIVE BOTH TO TEACHERS AND CHILDREN

THE KICHWA LAB

- The Kichwa Lab was launched as a pilot project in bilingual education in 2008 and installed at "millennium schools" located in impoverished areas of the country (14 all over the country).
- Provide an educational and recreational space for school children to learn and use native languages;
- Bring school children of indigenous background closer to ICTs on the basis of their attractiveness;
- Provide school teachers several tools for producing and teaching indigenous languages and train them in the basics of linguistics

LINGUISTIC IDENTITIES AND THE STATE

- In the last decades a policy of the State has been to respect and promote linguistic identities among Ecuador's indigenous nations as part of the country's cultural heritage. As a result of this,
  - The draft of a new Law of Cultures is being discussed at the Ecuadorian Congress which deals with indigenous languages as part of intangible cultural heritage (ICH);
  - The National Heritage Institute (INPC) has recently launched several programs intended to the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage and of languages as a central part of it (UNESCO 2003).

NATIVE LANGUAGES & CULTURAL HERITAGE

- The concept of heritage is not unambiguous but construed and applied at different levels of social organization (world's heritage , a state's heritage, an ethnic group's heritage);
- Each level follows a different approach to cultural heritage and therefore to language;
- And each approach is sustained by different political stances and interests.

NATIVE LANGUAGES & CULTURAL HERITAGE

- The idea of heritage – and language as part of it – as promoted by international bodies such as UNESCO but also by academic institutions is NOT easily and clearly appropriated by ethnic groups, thus being a reason for their often not active participation in safeguarding programmes.

NATIVE LANGUAGES & CULTURAL HERITAGE

- Therefore linguists should be sensitive to speaker's perceptions of their own languages:
- In Ecuador's case, such perception is essentially ethnical and political and usually disregards concerns of science ("human knowledge, human mind", etc.), diversity ("richness of culture", "multiculturalism", etc) or even revitalization ("promotion of minority languages as a cultural right").

NATIVE LANGUAGES & CULTURAL HERITAGE

- The best workable view of language for safeguarding and documenting programmes is therefore one which starts from the language community and their own agendas.
- At the same time, effective safeguarding and documentation – i.e. one that does not see languages as "objects of study" detached from speakers – can only be based on the idea that language promotion is part of the promotion of speaker's social, economical and cultural rights.

NATIVE LANGUAGES & CULTURAL HERITAGE

- The latter view is widely held by indigenous peoples and nations in Ecuador
- Accordingly, they seek to promote language not by itself but always in connection with the respect of their ancestral territories, their natural resources, and other constitutionally defined rights such as those to their education (e.g. their own contents), their own system of justice (who, when and how to punish), their own knowledge systems (worldviews, etc.), and their own idea of "property".

NATIVE LANGUAGES & CULTURAL HERITAGE

- The idea of "property" is fundamental in documentation and archiving;
- Accordingly, it is necessary to know first if knowledge documented through language is viewed as individual or collective property, and in some cases it is necessary to consult the whole group or its leaders, not only the speakers themselves, about the property rights of what is being or is to be documented.

Summing up …

- Language as cultural heritage is an ambiguous concept that veils different political stances and interests;
- Language can be safeguarded efficiently only if viewed as part of a group's cultural heritage, not the nation's, not the humankind's;
- Language revitalization should be tightly linked to the holistic promotion of social, economic and cultural rights;

Summing up

- The relevance of IBE for the State can be only understood from the above perspective;
- Similarly, when giving priority to the writing of indigenous languages we are disregarding the people's main view of them as vehicles of everyday interaction; the background for the writing of indigenous languages is not set yet.
- The concept of property should be discussed first among speakers, leaders and the speech community as whole before proceeding to documentation and archiving.

Gracias!
Yupaichani!
Aishtaish!