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FLARR Pages #38: Spanish: Me Llamo o Me Yamo? Survival of the Phoneme /l/ (ll) in Andean Countries

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FLARR PAGES #38

The Foreign Language Association
of the Red River

File Under:
-Spanish
Linguistics
-Phoneme /l/
(ll)

**“Spanish: ¿Me llamo o me yamo?
Survival of the phoneme /l/ (ll) in
Andean Countries,”** Jacqueline
Alvarez, UMM, Part II (continued)

The empire superstructure consisted of a polytheistic religion and a language which had been imposed on all their inhabitants: the Quechua. About the ideological role of this language, José Antonio Arce points out that “los Incas otorgaban a la lengua quechua un papel unificador de la mentalidad del imperio [pero] el castellano no pudo menos que penetrar entre las capas mestizas, dando un producto lingüístico bastante influido por los quechuismos y aymarismos indígenas que persisten hasta nuestros días.” (73-74) (Incas offered the Quechua a unifying role, a reflection of the Empire mentality, in opposition to Spaniards who felt no need to make Natives participants of their ideas through their language. Despite this, Spanish language penetrated in the different racially mixed social groups, resulting in a linguistic product influenced by “que- chuismos” and “aymarismos” that persist today.)

Based on the above, we might deduce that one of the reasons for the survival of Quechua, for Arce, was the little interest that Spaniards extended to the culture’s language, since the colonization was more economically driven, motivated by exploitation rather than by cultural domination. We might also

add that difficulty of access to some Andean zones, due to the geography, has contributed to the maintenance of Quechua and to the great number of Quechua speakers.

From a long list of words that has /l/, we have the following words in Quechua: imilla (girl), llock’alla (boy), llajta (town, land), llajwa (spicy sauce), llama (llama, the Andean animal), llank’amuy (to go work), llanthu (shadow), lloq’e (left) kallawayá (healer) and palliri (woman who work in the mines), among others.

In Peru, with exception of Lima, the use of the /l/ is almost general, and in Bolivia, the pronunciation of the /l/ is almost general, with the exception of cities such as Santa Cruz. The same phenomenon occurs with Ecuador, a country in which the indistinctive use of both phonemes l=y takes place only in the coast. The places in which the /l/ is maintained coincide, then, within the limits of the now vanished Incan Empire.

Despite the coincidence of the permanence of the /l/ in zones in which Quechua is spoken, we cannot affirm that these countries will not experience the “yeismo”, if we consider the aspect of the urbanization of this sound. We can assure, however, that the countries with smaller percentage of speakers of pre-Columbus tongues that do not have the phoneme /l/ will become “yeistas” in shorter time than Andean countries that speak Quechua.

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