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A Language to be Heard: Andwa Leaders and the Enactment of Linguistic Citizenship in the Ecuadorian Amazon

Una lengua para ser escuchados: Líderes andwa y el ejercicio de la ciudadanía lingüística en la Amazonía ecuatoriana

Uma língua para ser ouvidos: Líderes andwa e o exercício da cidadania linguística na Amazónia equatoriana

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Abstract

In 2003, the Andwa Nationality of Ecuador emerged as a distinct ethnic group, organized around an extinct language known as Katsakati. Since then, Andwa leaders have established linguistic reinsertion as the main political and cultural project of their communities. Drawing on the ethnographic method and critical analysis of interviews, this article explores how Andwa leaders deploy linguistic resources associated with Katsakati, along with other symbolic means, to assert their authenticity in front of other Indigenous actors who question their identity claims. The author interprets these efforts as acts of "linguistic citizenship," as they show how linguistic resources, may be mobilized by historically marginalized peoples to claim agency and address inequalities in postcolonial contexts.

Keywords: linguistic citizenship; Katsakati; Andwa; indigeneity; Ecuador.

Resumen

En 2003, la nacionalidad Andwa del Ecuador surgió como un grupo étnico diferenciado, organizado en torno a una lengua extinta conocida como katsakati. Desde entonces, los líderes andwa han establecido la reinserción lingüística como el principal proyecto político y cultural de sus comunidades. A partir del método etnográfico y el análisis crítico de entrevistas, en este artículo se examina cómo los líderes andwa despliegan recursos lingüísticos asociados al katsakati, junto con otros medios simbólicos, para afirmar su autenticidad frente a otros actores indígenas que cuestionan sus reivindicaciones identitarias. Estos esfuerzos, desde la perspectiva de la autora, se interpretan como actos de ciudadanía lingüística, puesto que permite evidenciar cómo los recursos lingüísticos pueden ser movilizados por pueblos históricamente marginados para reivindicar sus derechos y afrontar las desigualdades en contextos poscoloniales.

Palabras clave: ciudadanía lingüística; Katsakati, Andwa; indigeneidad; Ecuador.

Resumo

Em 2003, a nacionalidade Andwa do Equador emergiu como um grupo étnico distinto organizado em torno de uma língua extinta conhecida como katsakati. Desde então, os líderes Andwa estabeleceram a reinserção linguística como o principal projeto político e cultural das suas comunidades. Com base no método etnográfico e na análise crítica de entrevistas, este artigo examina a forma como os líderes andwa utilizam recursos linguísticos associados ao katsakati, juntamente com outros meios simbólicos, para afirmar a sua autenticidade face a outros actores indígenas que contestam as suas reivindicações identitárias. Estes esforços, na perspetiva do autor, são interpretados como actos de cidadania linguística, uma vez que permitem mostrar como os recursos linguísticos podem ser mobilizados por povos historicamente marginalizados para reivindicar os seus direitos e confrontar as desigualdades em contextos pós-coloniais.

Palavras-chave: cidadania linguística; Katsakati, Andwa; indigeneidade; Equador.

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1. Introduction

In November 2022, during a visit to the Andwa community of Puka-Yaku, on the banks of the Bobonaza River, I interviewed a former leader of the Andwa Nationality of Ecuador. He reflected on the collective efforts undertaken by himself and other generations of leaders in recent decades to document and revitalize their ancestral language, known as *Katsakati*[1] or *Andwa*, in Andwa communities. When asked about the motivations behind such large material and physical efforts, he explained the following:

> (1) Without the language, there would be no recognition; they could erase our nationality. First, the territory; second, the language. If they take away our territory and our language, we are nothing. Where are we going to go? It is as if we had no father or mother. Our father is our territory, and our mother is our mother tongue. Without a father and a mother, we would not exist here. (Juan, Andwa leader, interview by the author, Puka-Yaku, April 2022)

The leader's metaphor of language and territory as the maternal and paternal figures of the nationality highlights how the *Katsakati* language has become central to Andwa cultural identity. Although *Katsakati* was largely absent from linguistic consciousness and daily communication before the nationality's foundation in 2003, it has since become a focal point in Andwa identity discourses. Despite being classified as "extinct" (Gómez and Salazar, 2015), leaders' revitalization efforts have reintroduced *Katsakati* into the local ethnic imagination. This transformation is evident in both public and private interactions. For instance, *Katsakati* is now included in educational curricula and is present in the linguistic landscape of schools, visible in children's drawings and banners. Additionally, leaders frequently include emblematic uses of *Katsakati* in their public appearances before switching to Spanish or *Kichwa*.

The resurgence of *Katsakati* is the result of decades of Indigenous mobilization in which language has been pivotal in Indigenous self-definition and political organization. In Ecuador, Indigenous languages have long occupied a central position in Indigenous representation, serving as proof of cultural continuity in the eyes of outsiders (Viatori, 2007). Additionally, Indigenous leaders have

1 The Katsakati language was spoken until the second half of the twentieth century in Ecuador and Peru, particularly among Indigenous communities along the Bobonaza and Pastaza Rivers. It belongs to the Zaparoan linguistic family, which includes other extinct or severely endangered languages such as Sapara, Iquito, and Arabela (Gómez and Salaza Proaño, 2018, p. 73).

set language as the defining boundary between the different nationalities that constitute the plurinational state. Within this framework, *Katsakati* has recently become central in Andwa leaders' self-representation, and its revitalization has emerged as a key political and cultural objective for the group (Gómez and Salazar, 2018).

Importantly, *Katsakati* revitalization is closely intertwined with Andwa communities' concerns to defend their Indigenous rights. This is evident in the leader's framing of *Katsakati* as a means for maintaining territorial autonomy and asserting their status as an independent nationality. Scholars have shown that, far from being a neutral means of communication, language can serve not only as a vehicle for the production and maintenance of power in social relations but also in their transformation (Avineri *et al.*, 2019; López-Gopar *et al.*, 2021; Riley *et al.*, 2024). Language practices can potentially influence people's awareness of social injustice, and become a form of social action to effect change (Avineri *et al.*, 2019). In the case of Indigenous languages, linguistic rights discourses have often been at the core of Indigenous struggles against state oppression (Patrick, 2007). This resonates with the situation in the Amazon, where many Indigenous livelihoods are highly dependent on natural resources, making territorial interests central to language mobilization. In a context marked by government extractivist interests, participation in market-based conservation programs, and political disputes with neighboring nationalities, *Katsakati* has become a potent tool for Andwa leaders to claim territorial autonomy and assert their voice in Indigenous politics.

This contribution examines how leaders of the Andwa Nationality of Ecuador, employ linguistic resources associated with *Katsakati*, along other symbolic means, to represent their Indigenous alterity and claim Indigenous rights, particularly, in front of other Indigenous actors who police their claims of authenticity. Through the strategic use and representation of *Katsakati*, leaders "authenticate" (Bucholtz, 2003; Bucholtz and Hall, 2004, 2005) themselves as belonging to the Andwa community, thereby constructing a "genuine" Indigenous otherness by asserting linguistic continuity from an ancestral past. Moreover, these self-representation practices, beyond being mere emblematic performances, are interpreted as acts of "linguistic citizenship" (Stroud, 2015, 2018, 2024; Stroud and Kerfoot, 2021) by which Andwa leaders articulate themselves and their communities as subjects "with the right to claim rights" (Stroud, 2015, p. 24). By delving into the complexities of Andwa leaders' self-representation practices, this study highlights the multifaceted ways in which language can be wielded as a tool for Indigenous resistance and resilience in the face of historical marginalization.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. Becoming authentic

Building upon social constructivist theories, social identities have been conceptualized not as fixed categories or a reflection of an inherent inner self but are the product of socially and linguistically mediated behavior (Bucholtz and Hall, 2004). Within this relational framework, Bucholtz and Hall (2004) delineate three sets of relations generated through identity work. Among these, authentication and denaturalization. Authentication encompasses "the agentive processes by which claims to realness are asserted" (2004, p. 385). Thus, rather than being inherent to social groups, authenticity is the outcome of constantly negotiated social practices. The complementary relationship to authentication is denaturalization, which "is the process whereby identities come to be severed from or separated

from claims to 'realness'" (Bucholtz and Hall, 2005, p. 602). Denaturalization occurs when the authenticity of an identity is challenged due to its perceived disruption. This approach does not deny the ideological force of the notion of authenticity, but instead, focuses on the fact that authenticity is socially achieved rather than given in social life, even though the underlying processes may appear invisible (Bucholtz, 2003).

2.2. Indigenous authenticity and Indigenous languages

In recent decades, in the midst of global ideological and political changes, cultural diversity has shifted from being viewed as an issue of assimilation into nation-states to being recognized as a valuable asset worthy of protection (Graham and Penny, 2014; Niezen, 2003). This change mirrors a broader shift in language policy, where linguistic diversity has transitioned from being perceived as a "problem" to be constructed as a valuable resource for the social and economic benefit of a community in public discourse (Ruíz, 1984).

In the Latin American context, Indigenous otherness has been endowed with a powerful symbolic capital for minority groups to claim citizenship, rights and justice at the national level (Canessa 2007; Postero 2013). To secure these benefits, Indigenous peoples often face the requirement to demonstrate their otherness in tangible ways to various local and global actors that regulate dominant understandings of indigeneity (Harris *et al.*, 2013; Sissons, 2015). Beyond the State and supranational institutions, Indigenous peoples themselves are among those who arbitrate, validate, and legitimize competing claims to authenticity (Lucero, 2006). Thus, Indigenous identities emerge through multi-scalar and intersubjective processes across local, national, and international levels and in relation to other Indigenous groups.

Language plays an important role in shaping notions of Indigenous authenticity. In Ecuadorian cultural politics, speaking Indigenous languages has often been elevated to a primary criterion to index Indigenous alterity and supposed lack of "cultural contamination" from western society in (Viatori, 2007). This perspective assumes a direct link between language and ethnic identity, suggesting that the disappearance of an Indigenous language signals the decline of the associated culture.

Despite criticism that challenges the view of languages as closed systems tied to specific cultures and territories (Heller and Duchêne, 2007; Muehlmann, 2008), this language ideology remains influential in popular understandings of indigeneity, producing an impact on national and international cultural policy. Scholars have explored the strategic role of Indigenous languages, along other semiotic means, to enact cultural difference in ways sanctioned by national and supranational actors. This includes emblematic uses of Indigenous languages with extra-local audiences, the use of interpreters, oratory performances of mythic narratives and shamanic chants, or even the adoption of distant related Indigenous languages as own to instantiate indigeneity to outsiders (Ahlers, 2017; Limerick, 2023; Muehlmann, 2008; Ramos, 1995; Wroblewski, 2019). By analyzing how language constitutes a means by which Andwa leaders construct their Indigenous authenticity in front of other Indigenous actors, the purpose of this paper is to contribute to this body of work, through a critical reflection on the liberating and oppressive potential of these identity-making practices.

2.3. Linguistic citizenship

Linguistic citizenship refers to "cases when speakers exercise agency and participation through the use of language (registers, etc.) or other multimodal means in circumstances that may be orthogonal, alongside, embedded in, or outside of, institutionalized democratic frameworks for transformative purposes" (Stroud, 2018, p. 4). Thinking about language and citizenship as entangled opens up the possibility of critically reflecting on how language has served as an apparatus of discrimination and exclusion in restrictive forms of citizenship, while also considering its potential for claiming agency (Stroud, 2024). Thus, linguistic citizenship functions as a useful lens to understand how in the midst of structural constraints, minority language speakers take action to "craft new, emergent subjectivities of political speakerhood" (Stroud, 2018, p. 4) and to constitute themselves strategically a those "with the right to claim rights" (Stroud, 2015, p. 24).

Central to agentive action is how speakers "prefigure a better world" for themselves and their communities. Stroud refers to this quality as the "utopian surplus" underlying acts of linguistic citizenship, which conveys "a better way of living that is foreshadowed in the present (and past) but is yet unrealized" (2015, p. 25). The utopian dimension of linguistic citizenship refers to how the hope of modifying social relations oftentimes is the motivation behind peoples' actions with and around language. When considering this utopian dimension, it is possible to better understand not only the transforming potential that language may have on social reality, but also how linguistic struggles mirror the needs of minoritized communities in the present and the hopes they may have for the future.

2.4. The Ecuadorian Plurinational State and National Linguistic Policies

Since its early days, cultural repression and political exclusion have marked national life, particularly to the detriment of Indigenous and Afro-Ecuadorian populations. For instance, during the colonial and early republican period, oppressive economic measures against Indigenous peoples materialized in the encomienda and concertaje systems, which obliged remittances to the crown or landowning classes, often in the form of forced labor (Wasserstrom and Bustamante, 2015). Regarding political rights, most Indigenous peoples were denied access to political participation until 1978, when the Ecuadorian government extended voting rights to the illiterate population. The consequences of centuries of oppression remain evident in the deep disparities characterizing Ecuadorian society today. For example, in 2021, Indigenous peoples were the most impoverished sector nationally, with 59 % and 43 % of their population living in poverty and extreme poverty respectively, compared to 22 % and 6 % of the mestizo population in the same conditions (Ponce *et al.*, 2022, pp. 5-8).

Despite the measures that have hindered full Indigenous participation in national life, Indigenous peoples have historically mobilized various strategies to demand equity and justice. In the last decades of the 20th century, Indigenous mobilizations achieved notable advances in cultural and political recognition. The founding of the *Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador* (CONAIE) in 1986, Ecuador's largest and most powerful Indigenous organization to this day, marked a pivotal moment by advocating for a plurinational state. The decision of Indigenous groups to designate themselves as "nacionalidades" intended to question the colonial logics instituted in the modern state and assert the territorial, cultural and economic autonomy of the original settlers prior to

colonization. In 1998, the self-definition of Indigenous peoples as "nacionalidades" gained official recognition. Later in 2008, the new Constitution established "plurinacionalidad" as a fundamental principle of State organization (Constitución de la República del Ecuador, 2008, Art.1), providing an outcome to decades of Indigenous struggle.

In addition to territory, Indigenous legislation has positioned languages as fundamental to the definition of "nacionalidades" (Secretaría de Gestión y Desarrollo de Pueblos y Nacionalidades, 2022, p. 4). The centrality of language as a marker of distinct ethnic identity is evident in the requirement that, during the formation of the plurinational state, the legal recognition of a nationality was granted by *Consejo de Desarrollo de las Nacionalidades y Pueblos del Ecuador* (CODENPE), based on providing "proof" of ancestry through a historical, linguistic, and cultural scientific study, along with the creation of a statute in the nationality's own language (SGDPN, 2022, p. 4). To date, Ecuador officially recognizes 14 different Indigenous nationalities, each with its own language and territory. The recognition comes with the accreditation of special collective rights that encompass varying degrees of cultural, economic, and territorial autonomy, as well as direct representation before the state through CODENPE. However, as of 2014, CODENPE has been replaced by *Consejo Nacional para la Igualdad de Pueblos y Nacionalidades* (CNIPN), the government body responsible for Indigenous public policy.

The importance that Indigenous groups attach to their languages as evidence of their continuity in the present is undoubtedly a reaction to violent historical cultural repression. Until the mid-20th century, linguistic diversity was largely perceived as an obstacle to national modernization, leading to language policies that promoted Spanish and, to some extent, *Kichwa*, while suppressing Indigenous languages through "civilizing" education and religious missions (Haboud, 2019). In response, language rights have been at the center of Indigenous struggles for decades. A remarkable achievement was the foundation of *Dirección Nacional de Educación Intercultural Bilingüe* (DINEIB) in 1988, an autonomous institution responsible for integrating Indigenous languages in a national education program for Indigenous children. Twenty years later, Indigenous movements secured constitutional recognition of *Kichwa* and *Shuar* as languages of "intercultural communication," although Spanish remains the sole "official" language.

While Indigenous efforts have significantly impacted Ecuadorian society, including the incorporation of Indigenous languages into politics and public spaces traditionally dominated by Spanish, these achievements have also led to contradictory outcomes. The demand for plurinationality has also institutionalized language as the utmost expression of cultural identity. While many Indigenous peoples use their languages to varying degrees of fluency, this principle established by Indigenous leaders themselves has proven problematic for groups like the Andwa, whose national languages have become virtually extinct due to centuries of linguistic repression. For such groups, the emphasis on linguistic difference in Indigenous identity politics presents challenges when they lack a fully functional ancestral language.

2.5. The Andwa Nationality of Ecuador

The Andwa Nationality of Ecuador was the last Indigenous nationality to be granted jurisdiction by CODENPE in 2003. According to official figures, the Andwa are constituted by approximately 552 people, distributed along five communities, in a territory of 65.000 hectares in the Amazonian

province of Pastaza (Secretaría Técnica de la Circunscripción Territorial Especial Amazónica , 2021, p. 52).

Today, the primary language of the Andwa is *Kichwa*, with varying degrees of Spanish fluency present in the communities. The rise of *Kichwa* among the Andwa dates back to the 17th century, when it was introduced as *lingua franca* by Jesuit and Dominican missions operating in the region (Gómez, 2013). The Andwa social and cultural fabric has also been significantly impacted by the effects of slavery during the Amazonian rubber boom in the 19th century and territorial fragmentation caused by the Ecuador-Peru war in 1941. This war led to the separation of Andwa families for nearly 70 years, with a bi-national reunion only taking place in 2008 after decades of division.

The *Katsakati* language was declared officially "extinct" in 2012 with the death of the last speaker in Peru (Gómez and Salazar, 2015). Peeke (2023), a linguist from the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) who worked among the Andwa between 1951 and 1952, noted that *Katsakati* was nearly absent from daily use by then, with only sporadic use among the oldest community members, suggesting the language had become dormant around that time. Despite this, *Katsakati* revitalization is at the core of Andwa leaders' political concerns.

The Bilingual Intercultural Education system has been the primary framework for linguistic revitalization, incorporating *Katsakati* into school curricula since 2011. However, limited linguistic documentation has led to new speakers achieving only basic proficiency. From 2012 to 2013, Ecuadorian linguists and Andwa leaders held five workshops to train teachers in *Katsakati*'s lexicon and grammar and to develop effective teaching methods (Gómez and Salazar, 2015). Despite the challenges posed by a lack of documentation that may hinder language reconstruction and advanced proficiency in the long term, Andwa leaders and linguists have also focused on implementing teaching models that emphasize the functionality of the language by incorporating it into culturally relevant contexts, such as traditional pottery-making (Salazar, 2019). The latest initiative, the *Katsakati* dictionary published in 2022, includes around 500 entries and is now the most comprehensive source of information on the language known to this date (Gómez *et al.*, 2022).

3. Methodology

This article analyses a corpus of twelve semi-structured interviews conducted between 2022 and 2023 with both founding and contemporary leaders of the Andwa Nationality of Ecuador. These interviews are part of a larger research project implemented at the initiative of Andwa leaders and researchers of the University Friedrich-Alexander Erlangen-Nürnberg, with the goal of understanding the sociolinguistic situation and ethnobotanical knowledge in Andwa territory, the results of which are intended to support local language revitalization and cultural preservation efforts. The interviews, conducted in Spanish, centered on the processes of consolidation of the nationality, the linguistic situation in Andwa territory, and the nationality's political life. The transcriptions were coded using an inductive data-driven approach (Kuckartz and Raediker, 2019), leading to the emergence of numerous narratives in which leaders emphasized the pivotal role of *Katsakati* in authenticating their Indigenous identity. These specific narratives were then targeted for in-depth analysis in this article. The interviews have been carefully translated into English, striving to remain as faithful as possible to the original content. To ensure the privacy and confidentiality of the participants, personal names have been anonymized using pseudonyms. Additionally, the interpretation of the

interviews is complemented by ethnographic data gathered during two research stays in Andwa territory, between March and November 2022, which allows for a more contextually grounded and culturally sensitive interpretation.

4. Analysis

4.1. Self-Representation practices of Andwa leaders in interactions with Andwa communities in Peru

When asked about the origins of the nationality, leaders often point out that it was in fact the awareness among Andwa elders of the existence of a pre-*Kichwa* linguistic past that motivated younger generations to reformulate their collective identity as a distinct Indigenous nationality. According to the founding leaders, during the 1990s, when other Amazonian nationalities were gaining official recognition, elders in the Puka-Yaku and Killu-Allpa communities brought to their attention that, during their childhood, they witnessed that some people had knowledge of a language known as "Andwa," although they stopped speaking it due to the violent repression perpetuated by religious missions.[2] By recalling this linguistic past, the elders motivated younger generations to mobilize in the political arena and seek recognition as a separate nationality, or as one leader recalls "start a big struggle" for the well-being of their communities as reflected in the following account :

> (2) My father used to say the elders spoke another word. They used to say that our language was Andwa. They had another way of speaking, and the priest took them like into slavery and ordered them never to speak that language again [...] The mission made him understand Kichwa; otherwise, we would have spoken Andwa [...] One day, he said: "son, the Andwa must rise up because they are going to start a big struggle. They are not going to be a Kichwa Puka-Yaku community, but they will be as Andwa". That's what he used to say. I did not believe him. (Alberto, Senior Andwa leader, interview by the author, Puka-Yaku, April 2022)

The Andwa case is an emblematic example of how minority languages have been an object of oppression, while at the same time have the potential for individuals and groups, historically captured in circuits of invisibilization, to demand recognition and lay claims to dignity (Stroud and Kerfoot, 2021). Despite enduring violent linguistic repression, it is precisely the learned awareness of a shared linguistic heritage that drives the Andwa towards a complex journey of identity re-definition and recognition. Nevertheless, achieving official recognition required leaders not only to navigate unfamiliar bureaucratic structures but also to provide "objective" evidence of linguistic difference. This was initially accomplished with the assistance of Ecuadorian anthropologist Carlos Duche Hidalgo, who, alongside Andwa leaders, submitted a list of words believed to be of Andwa origin to Indigenous authorities, which ultimately led to the nationality's official recognition in 2003.

After the nationality was established, cultural restoration efforts did not cease. In 2008, the Andwa intensified efforts to document the *Katsakati* language, seeking residual speakers in Peruvian Andwa communities with the support of Ecuadorian linguists (Gómez and Salazar, 2015). As expressed by a leader in an interview, the motivation for these journeys was to gather stronger evidence of linguistic difference in response to the State's cultural policies:

2 In the communities, the glotonym used for the language is either Andwa or Katsakati. Authors have speculated that the name Katsakati began to be used as the language reached a critical stage of endangerment. Its referential meaning, "what are you saying?" suggests that younger generations may have adopted the term as a synonym for the language, reflecting their limited familiarity with it (Gómez, 2013, p. 95).

(3) The government used to say: 'if you don't have a language, we are not going to allow there to be nationality.' So we started to look for a language because here they didn't know how to speak that Andwa language. (Elias, Senior Andwa leader, interview by the author, Puka-Yaku, April 2022).

To gather linguistic proof, the communities organized a delegation of leaders for a days-long expedition downriver to Peru in hopes of finding *Katsakati* speakers. However, upon arrival, they faced several challenges, as their self-identification as Andwa was carefully scrutinized, particularly due to the Spanish origin of some leaders' surnames:

(4) Then, we began searching for Andwa language there in Peru. Andrea Pazmiño, Daniel Santana and the late Carlos Castillo went to look in Viejo Andoas [...] I think they asked them their names and were told: "we are not going to give you this language because you are not Andwa, you have a Spanish surname" [...] They do not have their own surnames, but they are true Andwa, I think those surnames were gifted to them [...] but only to two of them, Andrea Pazmiño was from outside. So, they came back to talk to me and said: "Can you help us because they don't want to give it to us" [...] I am Manya, so, there are a lot in Peru [...] so, I went to talk to my families, my cousins there in Peru. That's when they gave me this language [...] So we are Andwa ourselves. "We want to help, but not the mestizos, we are not going to give it to them, because they are in for the money". That's what they used to say. (Elias, Senior Andwa leader, interview by the author, Puka-Yaku, April 2022)

The leader recounts how, during their encounter with the Andwa of Peru, Ecuadorian representatives were dismissed as inauthentic due to their Spanish surnames, forcing them to return to Ecuador for the help of a leader with an Indigenous surname. Scholars have noted that Ecuadorian elites have historically perceived mestizo identity as an indicator of departure from indigeneity, and in the frame of national modernization projects, as the ideal to which Ecuadorian citizens should aspire to overcome perceived Indigenous "inferiority" (Silva, 2004). Although the boundaries between Indigenous and mestizo identities are fluid, shaped by a mix of factors such as physical appearance, language, clothing, and rural versus urban residence, surnames often serve as powerful indicators of cultural belonging. The association of Indigenous surnames with Andwa "authenticity" reflects an essentialism tied to notions of "racial purity" and exclusionary binarism, which have had great prominence in dominant imagination of indigeneity with perceptible material consequences. For instance, the notion of "purity" has had great prominence in Ecuadorian elites' discourses to exclude Indigenous peoples from legislation, as they do not belong to the "mestizo" character of the nation (Viatori, 2005). Moreover, ideologies of "Indigenous purity" often extend to biological regimes of "blood quantum" that regulate Indigenous experience around the world (Sissons, 2005). While Ecuador does not officially employ blood quantum policies to determine Indigenous status, scholars have noted that Indigenous groups have strategically adopted this notion as evidence of their cultural continuity in the face of historical and cultural change (Viatori, 2005; Valdivia, 2009).

In response to their authenticity being questioned, the leaders resort to the symbolic power of the Indigenous last name of another leader (Manya), as a tactic of authentication to their Peruvian counterparts. Identities are contingent and contextually situated, shaped by larger ideological

processes and material structures relevant to interaction (Bucholtz and Hall, 2005). In this regard, aspects that were previously deemed irrelevant to Andwa cultural identity, such as surnames, compel them to reassess their ethnic identity in terms of degrees of "purity," which reflects in the distinction that the leader makes between "true Andwa" and outsiders (*from outside*). The leader authenticates the genuine indigeneity of some companions, claiming that they do not have their "own" surname, referencing common colonial practices in the region whereby missionaries imparted their last names to evangelized Indigenous people (Tobón, 2016, p. 188; Reeve, 2022, p. 36). During the research stays in the territory, it was evident that several leaders were aware of the denaturalizing potential of their Spanish last names, often emphasizing that their "real" names could be traced back to a period prior to evangelization and highlighting their kinship ties to those with Indigenous surnames.

The constructed dichotomy between "authentic" Andwa and mestizo also carries a moral distinction. Being Andwa is often associated with a disinterested and ethical stance, in contrast to mestizos, who are perceived as motivated by personal interests (*they are in for the money*). During my visits to the territory, this ethical distinction was pervasive, as evidenced by the suspicion of corruption that many people in the communities held toward a former leader, commonly attributed to their mestizo identity despite previous acceptance as Andwa in the nationality. While ethnic identity is not inherently linked to moral behavior, it is important to reflect that the reported concerns of the Peruvian Andwa about safeguarding their cultural knowledge from perceived "outsiders" may be based on legitimate concerns. In many cases, academic engagement with Indigenous cultures has relied on asymmetrical and exploitative research practices, where knowledge is extracted, systematized, and retained in the Global North with minimal or scarce retribution to cultural practitioners (see Burman, 2018; Davis, 2017). The protective stance of the Peruvian Andwa regarding their linguistic knowledge, along with the efforts of Ecuadorian Andwa leaders to assert control over their language, may be responses to these issues and simultaneously acts of linguistic citizenship. In these acts "new actors, seeking recognition in the public space to determine a new course of events, shift the location of agency and voice" (Stroud, 2018, p. 21). By documenting and revitalizing their language, the Andwa are shifting the location of linguistic authority and ensuring that their voices guide the preservation of their own cultural heritage.

Through the founders' efforts in linguistic reclamation, *Katsakati* has evolved from being nearly unknown in Andwa communities to having a substantial symbolic importance for upcoming generations of leaders. Thanks to language documentation, leaders have successfully incorporated emblematic expressions in *Katsakati* into their linguistic repertoires, serving as a proof of their "authenticity" when engaging with other Indigenous actors. This is evidenced in the following excerpt from an interview, where a leader narrates an instance in which the use of *Katsakati* served to index his authenticity to his Peruvian counterparts:

> (5) Many times, as a teacher I travelled to Peru [...] I would use that time to go to the wisest families. I talked to them, I told them I was Andwa and spoke *Katsakati*, so they would say "speak *Katsakati*," so I did. They would respond to me. But now, those grandmothers who answered are no longer with us. We have been to Peru more than five times, sharing the craftsmanship, demonstrating the language, which we must continue to instill in young people. That experience impacted me and I fell in love with it. I say "*Kichwa* is not my language, but this is my language." I am going to continue this process [...] I am going to fall in

> love. A wise woman said: "if you want to revitalize the language, which is dead, if you want to revive it, you just have to fall in love. That's the only way we're going to bring back the language." So, I am in that process. (David, Andwa leader, interview by the author, Puka-Yaku, April 2022)

As Indigenous languages are emblems of indigeneity in national and transnational arenas, the leader relies on the symbolic value of *Katsakati* for authentication when encountering Andwa elders in Peru. However, while this strategic use may be emblematic, it also constitutes an act of linguistic citizenship.

Acts of linguistic citizenship encompass the ways in which speakers use and reshape their languages to create new understandings of the self and achieve epistemic justice (Stroud and Kerfoot, 2021). In the process of political reorganization initiated by the leaders, they engaged in a radical reformulation of the narratives that have historically influenced attitudes towards Indigenous peoples and their languages. Colonial encounters led to Indigenous peoples being constructed as "less than human," and their languages as "bestial" and "grammarless," justifying their suppression (Jansen and Rosado, 2023; Veronelli, 2015). This colonial mind-set has excerpted profound effects in postcolonial Ecuador, influencing assimilationist cultural policies (Haboud, 2019), but also in widespread negative attitudes towards Indigenous languages, contributing to the halt of linguistic transmission due to linguistic shame and discrimination (Aguilar *et al.*, 2020). The leader's reflections on *Katsakati* being his "true" language (*Kichwa is not my language, but this is my language*) and his emotional commitment to it (*I am going to fall in love*), challenge normative views on Indigenous languages as worthless in postcolonial contexts, restoring *Katsakati*'s positive value and reaffirming his community's right to reclaim a language once aggressively suppressed by religious missions and other external actors.

4.2. Self-Representation practices of Andwa leaders in interactions with other indigenous groups in the region

Although *Katsakati* reclamation has been instrumental in the consolidation of the nationality in the past, it continues to be relevant for Andwa leadership in the present as in Ecuadorian Indigenous politics language is essential to claim political legitimacy and is a tactical resource in the struggle for political authority and territory. In this sense, Gómez and Proaño (2015) have described *Katsakati* as "a language supported by identity politics, but communicatively dysfunctional as it is already an extinct language" (p. 112). In the contested political climate of the Amazon, *Katsakati* is key to Andwa self-representation as reflected in the following account:

> (6) Sometimes we have faced a lot of problems with other nationalities [...] They have said "The Andwa don't speak their language." But we do have our own culture, customs, traditions and way of life. So we say, "the Andwa do have a language." So when we speak the language they say "that language we have never heard." Sometimes when we go to meetings and congresses, we say "the Andwa nationality exists," and once, an elder of the Kichwa people of Sarayaku said: "the Andwa nationality has existed for many years and we the Kichwa of Sarayaku are the descendants of the Andwa nationality" [...] Then other nationalities realized that the nationality does exist [...] Then the Sapara comrades also said "Andwas exist, Sapara exist. We do exist." Those who were telling us these things were the Shuar, Achuar, the Shiwiar [...] We made them silent because I don't know which

> of the three nationalities is the original one because Shiwiar, Achuar, Shuar almost speak the same language.[3] So from that moment they said "we are always going to respect the brothers of the Andwa nationality". (Manuel, Andwa leader, interview by the author, Puyo, November 2023)

Indigenous political arenas are spaces where the contest over the meaning of indigeneity and who has the right to claim this identity unfolds. Evidently, the connection between linguistic difference and Indigenous authenticity is not managed solely from the state, but also reproduced by Indigenous leaders themselves. In this context, the emblematic use of *Katsakati* becomes a strategic tool for asserting Indigenous identity amid political struggle. This use is also an act of linguistic citizenship, where speakers make use of their linguistic resources to challenge institutionalized authority for the production of counter-hegemonic subjectivities (Stroud, 2024). By using fragments of the *Katsakati* language, Andwa leaders not only reaffirm the continuity of their culture in the present but also challenge the political and linguistic authority of dominant groups in the region. However, it is important to recognize that Indigenous identity politics are often multivalent, encompassing parameters and expectations that can be both liberating and oppressive (Graham and Penny, 2014). In this case, the same disempowering narratives that restrict Andwa agency, are appropriated by the leaders in a process of denaturalization of the collective identities of those who question their authenticity. Upon observing that the Achuar, Shuar and Shiwiar speak closely related languages, the leader questions the legitimacy of their existence as distinct nationalities, reflecting some of the contradictions at the core of Indigenous self-representation practices.

Leaders' concerns about maintaining political legitimacy in the region are deeply rooted in the significance of territory for Andwa communities. When asked about the potential consequences if *Katsakati* revitalization efforts failed, leaders often reflect on territorial loss as the most catastrophic outcome. This is because Indigenous language mobilization is intertwined with complex material struggles and "the common underlying drive to gain 'territory' or a land base is at the root of the language mobilization" (Patrick, 2007, p. 366). In the Ecuadorian context, language and territory lie at the heart of Indigenous nationalities' self-definition and are often regarded as essential for the preservation of Indigenous cultures and knowledge systems (Gómez-Rendon, 2022). During fieldwork, the centrality of territory for the continuation of Andwa livelihoods was consistently emphasized, given that they depend heavily on fishing, agriculture, and the economic benefits derived from enrolling officially recognized lands in market-based conservation programs. Language reclamation in the context of territorial struggles has then led to a profound resignification of *Katsakati*. This is often evident in leaders' framing of the language as tied to natural resource conservation, as illustrated in the following account:

> (7) The worldview and the language go hand in hand with the terms, the words, the ancestral knowledge [...] There lies the wisdom, the care of the territory, the forest, the rivers, all that is involved in our worldview of the territory [...] So the *Katsakati* language is projected in that direction. Our ancestors did not allow the entry of oil companies or mining, and that same thought is held by our fathers, mothers and grandmothers. They say "here we live free without contamination,"

3 The Shuar, Achuar, and Shiwiar languages belong to the same linguistic family, Aént Chicham (formerly known as "Jívaro"). Scholars have noted that these languages share many similarities, sparking ongoing debate about whether they should be considered dialects of a single language (Alvarez and Montaluisa, 2007; Valeš, 2013). Shuar is the second most spoken Indigenous language in Ecuador, with approximately 35,000 speakers (Haboud, 2006, p. 16). Furthermore, both Shuar and Kichwa have been granted special official recognition as "languages of intercultural communication" in the Ecuadorian Constitution.

> and that is part of protecting and rescuing the language, and safeguarding our environment. Everything is part of a single vision that we have. (Manuel, Andwa leader, interview by the author, Puyo, November 2023)

As the leader states, *Katsakati* goes hand in hand with the ancestral memory of the community, which as reported, consists of a wisdom related to the sustainable management of nature, preserved in the values of elders. Acts of linguistic citizenship involve articulating "the potentials for living otherwise" and providing substance "to the awareness of past and present 'realities,' pregnant with possible novel ways of living in shared futures" (Stroud, 2024, p. 149). In the case of groups that have historically been stripped of their right to self-determination, linguistic activism represent these people's desires to "repatriate the future," through linguistic revitalization or mother-tongue education programs. Amazonian history has been marked by violent processes that have radically impacted Indigenous peoples relationship with the land and natural resources. These processes include forced agricultural labor imposed by "civilizing" religious missions and commercial enterprises, territorial displacement, and, in more recent decades, the State's persistent attempts to advance its extractive agenda on Indigenous lands (Esvertit, 2012; Muratorio, 2008). By reimagining *Katsakati* as a gateway to an ancestral ethos of harmonious coexistence with nature, the leader challenges State imposition as well as uses language as a medium to express his visions of a future shaped by the Andwa community itself (Stroud, 2024, p. 149).

At last, *Katsakati* is strategically employed by the leaders as an authentication tactic, especially in contexts in which factors of physical appearance, such as skin color, are perceived as defining of Indigenous authenticity. This is reflected in the following account, in which a leader describes how Andwa cultural identity is negotiated in a public cultural event:

> (8) In May we organize the day of the nationalities for the great march of 1992 [...] Each organization selects seven princesses. Since we have to cover the girls' flights and allowances, it's expensive, so we usually choose girls from the city. They are very white girls and they always complain to us, they say "but you're not Andwa. She is not Andwa." So they respond "I am Andwa. I speak Andwa". Before presenting, they come to me, and I share with them the greetings in Andwa. They also dance with drums [...] Recently, we had a girl from here whose father was a military man and whose mother was Kichwa. She was very fair-skinned and tall, and we presented her because they asked us for Andwa models. So we took a well painted girl [...] and they disqualified her saying that she was mestizo and I had to go against it because I said "Why are they going to do this if she is Andwa? Just because she lives here in the city they say that". That's why we Andwas are so present in the city, in the territory, and across the border. (David, Andwa leader, interview by the author, Puka-Yaku, April 2022)

The leader highlights how in the encounter with other Indigenous leaders, Andwa identity is challenged by the physical appearance and place of residence of its representatives, in particular, the urban fair skin girls who participate in Indigenous beauty pageants. In popular imagination, indigeneity is frequently expected to manifest through perceptible phenotypic differences in hair, skin tone, or facial features, which "are assumed to be indices of 'genuine' racial and, by extension, cultural levels of belonging" (Sissons, 2005, p. 43). Additionally, in the Latin American context,

indigeneity and urbanization have tended to be placed at opposite ends of a spectrum that sees rural Indigenous peoples gradually transformed into urban mestizos (Brablec and Canessa, 2023).

While Andwa representatives perform authenticity through embodied action, such as body painting and musical and dance performances, their Indigenous identities are denaturalized because they do not meet dominant expectations regarding skin color and being of a rural condition. The mention of participants asserting their identity by saying "I am Andwa, I speak Andwa," underscores the importance of *Katsakati* as a fundamental marker of ethnic and cultural belonging at sites of struggle. By emphasizing *Katsakati* speakerhood, the participants offer "concrete proof" of Andwa membership, challenging superficial judgments based on appearance or place of origin that destabilize their claims to Indigenous authenticity.

In acts of linguistic citizenship "speakers move beyond being used by language to affirm the status quo towards using language to (radically) reimagine selves on their own terms" (Stroud *et al.*, 2023, p. 141). While many Indigenous populations have deep connections to their land, the ideological link between indigeneity and territory often overlooks the history of territorial displacement and the ability of Indigenous peoples to adapt and redefine their cultures in contexts of geographical mobility (Brablec and Canessa, 2023). Faced with questions about their authenticity, the use of *Katsakati* enables Andwa leaders to challenge dominant understandings of indigeneity and assert their cultural presence not only in their traditional territory but also in urban and international spaces. By doing so, the leader questions hegemonic notions of cultural authenticity, redefining what it means to be Andwa beyond the local.

5. Conclusions

This contribution has revealed how Indigenous leaders of the Andwa Nationality of Ecuador strategically employ linguistic resources associated with their ancestral language, alongside other symbolic means, to construct their communities as "culturally authentic" in interactions with other Indigenous peoples. These authentication practices are not merely performative; they constitute acts of linguistic citizenship enabling leaders to assert the voice and agency of their communities in the face of historical oppression.

By employing various linguistic strategies, such as leveraging the symbolic capital of Indigenous surnames and incorporating *Katsakati* fragments into different communicative contexts, as illustrated in the interviews with Elias and David, Andwa leaders authenticate their indigeneity in relation to their Peruvian counterparts. These strategies have been central to the formation of the Andwa Nationality as a distinct political identity, allowing for more direct participation in national and regional politics, and thus, broadening avenues for exercising agency and making their voices heard. Moreover, these efforts have played a significant role in restoring the positive emotional value of *Katsakati*, representing a transformative shift in the perception of Indigenous languages in post-colonial contexts.

The data also indicate that *Katsakati* revitalization efforts are crucial for authenticating Andwa identity in interactions with external Indigenous groups, as demonstrated by Manuel and David, who highlight how enunciating discourse in *Katsakati* during public events, such as political avenues

or public celebrations, is a strategic tool to index authenticity. As acts of linguistic citizenship, these authentication practices enable Andwa leaders to assert their presence, contest political power, and pursue long-term goals of securing political recognition and territorial control. It is essential to recognize that, in claiming authenticity, Andwa leaders also engage in processes of denaturalization, both in relation to and from other Indigenous groups. This underscores how indigeneity exists as a contested space, where Indigenous peoples actively mediate and shape notions of authenticity, often in ways that can be both liberating and oppressive.

Although not the focus of this paper, it is important to acknowledge the role of other actors, including researchers, in shaping processes of Indigenous authentication. During the research process, despite my lack of fluency in *Katsakati*, it was common for Andwa leaders to introduce themselves in this language before interviews or when addressing academic audiences where we shared a platform. This highlights the significant role that academia has played, and continues to play, in shaping notions of Indigenous authenticity, which in turn influences how Indigenous peoples represent themselves in academic settings. Further critical research could explore these dynamics in greater depth to better understand the political and material implications of academic discourse on Indigenous self-representation.

Furthermore, analyzing the authentication strategies of Indigenous leaders through the lens of linguistic citizenship has proven valuable in understanding how language can empower marginalized communities. This concept carries methodological implications for researchers engaged in future studies on language and Indigenous identity politics, particularly, the importance of highlighting and amplifying the voices and agency of those situated on the margins, as well as the ways in which they reimagine their communities through language. In the context of the Ecuadorian Amazon, future research could extend beyond Indigenous leaders to explore grassroots engagements with language within communities, with the end of examining how these practices serve the goals of speakers on their own terms.

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Annexed

Abbreviations used

CONAIE	Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador
CODENPE	Consejo de Desarrollo de las Nacionalidades y Pueblos del Ecuador
DINEIB	Dirección Nacional de Educación Intercultural Bilingüe

Contribution of the author

Erika Rosado carried out the complete writing of this manuscript, including conducting interviews, performing fieldwork, coding and interpreting the data. Some interviews were conducted in collaboration with Prof. Silke Jansen in the frame of the project "Unraveling the effects of market-based conservation on the cultural capital of indigenous peoples in the Amazon rainforest" funded by the German Research Foundation.

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