

## PROJECT SUMMARY

The natural assumption is that bilinguals know which language they are speaking at a given time, and similarly that they can recognize and distinguish the same languages in processing, but the means by which such acknowledgment and recognition take place are not always clear. It is generally accepted that for bilingual speakers the mental representations of the languages are not entirely independent of one another, and that bilinguals do not completely inhibit the non-target language in production or processing. In many—perhaps most—instances, there are substantive morphosyntactic, lexical, and phonotactic differences between the languages to ensure quick and unambiguous identification. The present project examines data from a bilingual environment involving two languages that are not only morphophonemically similar, but effectively identical, while at the same time sharing identical morphology and syntax, including all system morphemes. The languages are Ecuadoran Quichua and the mixed language known as Media Lengua, which consists of Quichua morphosyntactic frames with all content word roots relexified from Spanish. The existence of small speech communities of Quichua-Media Lengua bilinguals provides a typologically unique linguistic environment in which to determine the extent to which lexical differences alone can keep two languages apart. The same configuration allows for scrutiny of purported restrictions on intra-sentential code-switching in the absence of morphosyntactic differences that may mask the effects of specific grammatical categories on constraining language switching.

**Intellectual merit.** This project provides an innovative research environment involving languages which have previously not been studied from a psycholinguistic perspective, and in which answers to the following questions can be sought: (1) Is the lexicon alone enough to ensure accurate recognition of languages among bilingual speakers? (2) Do specific grammatical categories such as pronouns, interrogatives, negators, and auxiliary verbs enjoy a “special” status in disfavoring intra-sentential code-switching in the absence of morphosyntactic differences between the languages, or are observed restrictions crucially linked to language-specific incompatibilities? As a corollary, the project will address the following question: (3) Can a relexified (mixed) language be stably maintained indefinitely while still in contact with both of its source languages? The investigation will employ experimental procedures most often used only in laboratory settings, modified and adapted for field environments with non-literate participants who have not been exposed to prescriptive grammar teaching and who have no familiarity with social and psychological research methodology. This will facilitate the study of language in the absence of factors often taken for granted in laboratory-based studies, and will broaden the knowledge base of cognitive processes in seldom-studied languages. This project contributes to psycholinguistics (bilingual lexical access), to the intersection of psycholinguistics and syntax (code-switching constraints), and to contact linguistics (long-term stability of mixed languages in contact with their source languages).

**Broader impact.** In adding a new dimension—psycholinguistic research—to the study of Andean language contact environments, this project embodies a call to arms for a greater appreciation of the scientific research potential of sociolinguistically marginalized and under-represented speech communities. By showing that data from a language spoken in small villages and rarely taken seriously even by its own speakers can play a crucial role in addressing major issues in language processing, this study will aid in efforts to legitimize other languages and peoples struggling for acceptance. The incorporation of teachers and other leaders from the indigenous communities will aid in dispelling negative views towards the languages held by the speakers and their neighbors. The project will supplement Penn State’s superb graduate student preparation in experimental psycholinguistics with training and practice in a field setting.

