

I+D joint project:  
Critical linguistic  
awareness and  
speakers' agency:  
action-research for  
sociolinguistic  
equality (*EquiLing*)

Luisa Martín Rojo



# EquiLing(s): 2020-2024

**Catalunya**  
*Galicia*  
**Madrid**  
**País Vasco**



- **Diversity of sociolinguistic situations:** monolingual/multilingual Madrid and the officially-bilingual regions of the Basque Country, Catalonia and Galicia.
- **Transdisciplinary teams:** senior and junior scholars (pre- and postdoctoral) as well as internationally recognized researchers.
- **Co-participants in the research and stakeholders** from non-governmental organizations and citizen groups, and policy makers.

## Madrid

- Luisa M. Rojo (PI)
- Clara Molina
- Hector Grad
- Adil Moustau
- Livia Jiménez
- Júlia Llompart
- Paloma Elvira
- Anna Tudela
- Marta Castillo
- Katrin Ahlgren
- Noelia Fernández
- Alexander Dûchene
- Virginia Unamuno
- Junger Jaspers

## *Galicia*

- Gabriela Prego (PI)
- Luz Zas
- Adil Moustau
- María Souto
- Beatriz Taboada
- Ana Andrade
- Miguel Angel López
- María José Caamaño
- Ofelia García
- Ana Pano
- Bernardo Penabade
- Israa Allahan
- Pablo Montaña Prieto
- Xin Xyue

## Euskadi

- Esti Amorrortu (PI)
- Ane Ortega
- Jone Miren Hernández
- Jone Goirigolzarri
- Elixabete Pérez Gaztelu
- Jaime Altuna
- Iñigo Beitia
- Maite García
- Hanna Lantto
- Jacqueline Urla
- Paula Kasares

## Catalunya

- Joan Pujolar (PI)
- Maite Puigdevall (PI)
- Alba Colombo
- Kamran Khan
- Gergely Szabó

## *A totalizing vision of inequality:* integrating two main currents of thought

- (a) the domination of some languages over others based in a territorial logic, paying special attention to the so-called European “minority languages” and the indigenous languages of territories colonized by European powers (Fishman 1999);
- (b) the discrimination for linguistic reasons of social groups not linked to territories, focusing especially on migrant, refugee, or diasporic collectives (Creese & Blackledge 2018);
- Exploring in both context possibilities of social and linguistic transformation.

We have prioritized the **social field of education (formal and informal)**, a social field not only of reproduction (Bourdieu & Passeron 1990), but also one of transformation of the social conditions of existence for both individuals and social groups.

## Madrid

- Towards a new linguistic citizenship: **action-research** for the recognition and the egalitarian participation of speakers in the Madrid **educational context**.

universities, and students' associations.

## *Galicia*

- Spaces of **sociolinguistic transformation** in the Galicia **educational context**: speakers' agency, multilingual repertoires and (meta) communicative practices.

secondary schools and teenagers' social networks

## Euskadi

- **Sociolinguistic transformation** processes in the Basque context: speakers, practices and agency.

universities and teenagers and linguistic activism networks

## Catalunya

- New speakers as agents of **sociolinguistic transformation** in Catalonia.

language academies and linguistic volunteering and cultural associations)

# A transformative goal

1: to understand, through action-research, and through sociolinguistic methodology and theory, how language creates, sustains and replicates inequities in society.

2: to explore how speakers can reverse the processes that are involved in the construction of language-mediated inequality and how we, as sociolinguists, can be part of this transformation.

- Both of these goals converge in a far reaching task: to develop and operationalize a general theory and practice of sociolinguistic justice.



Due to time limitations, I'm going to focus on the context I know the best, which is the research developed in our group in Madrid with the title:

## EquiLing Madrid

- Towards a New Linguistic Citizenship: action-research for the recognition of and equal participation for speakers in the Madrid educational context

I have organised this presentation into the following sections:

# Structure

- 1- The research context
- 2- Theoretical challenges that arise in this approach with a transformative goal
- 3- Methodological challenges that arise in this approach with a transformative goal

CATALUÑA, CON  
Nº DE ESPAÑA.

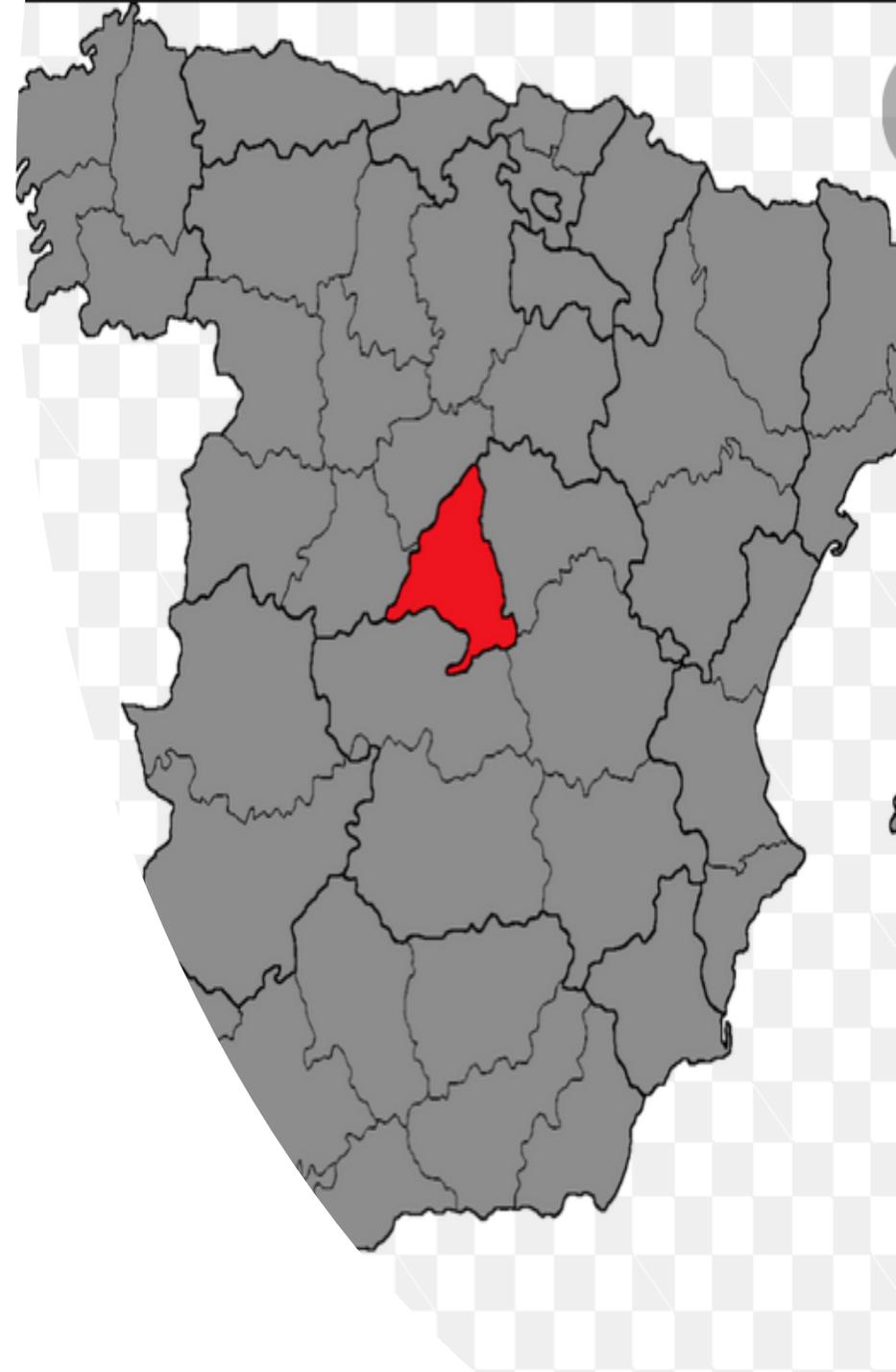
.OBOEò

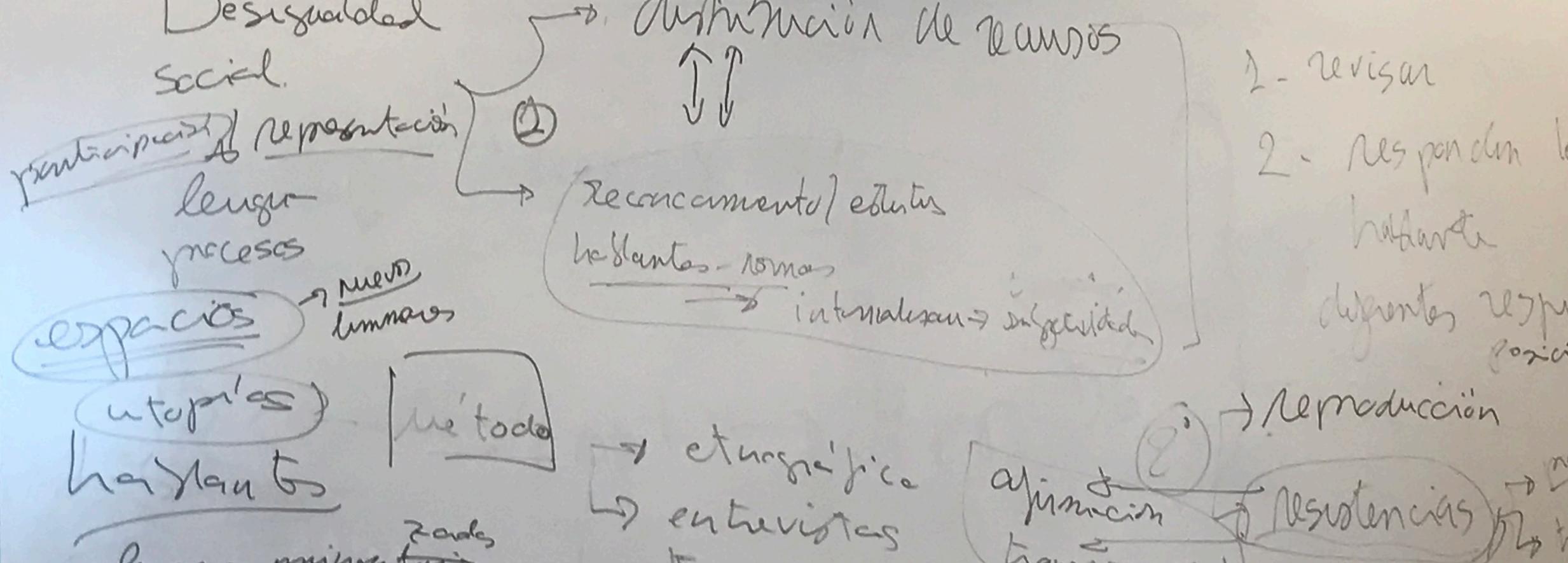
NEW

1-The research context

## Key sociolinguistic processes in University communities in Madrid

- (1) the prevalence of monolingual practices in Spanish, and monolingual ideologies, linked to the (centralist) national project of this autonomous Region; other languages are erased;
- (2) the increase of linguistic and cultural diversity in the student body, produced by (inter)national mobility;
- (3) English as the language of instruction for degrees as an attempt to confront economic globalization and to increase employability of college graduates (also a result of the processes of internationalization of the universities);





# 2-Theoretical challenges

- activistas
- 2. high → no se lio

LUISA MARTÍN ROJO

## Constructing Inequality in Multilingual Classrooms



MOUTON  
DE GRUYTER



473 x 355

Axes of social inequality that are mediated by  
language in universities in 2020

---

# How speakers experience language-mediated inequality in this context?

- Participatory ethnography (previous years and now): Accompaniment in class connected to the program (Bucholtz, Casillas, Lee, Sook 2016);
- Sharing critical incidents (narratives): how the way we speak has allowed us to obtain some kind of differential treatment (positive or negative)
- The target of the activity was to increase:
  - Speakers' critical awareness linked to the content of the syllabus
  - Reflexivity related to power techniques (normalisation and self-care techniques)
  - Individual and collective agency
- we have also collected speakers' reactions and even proposals for transformation of the sociolinguistic context

# Ejemplo (1)

- Cuando era pequeña usaba muchas expresiones latinoamericanas ya que mi madre es colombiana y mi padre argentino y muchos compañeros se reían de mí y me llamaban “panchita” o cosas por el estilo. Desde pequeña me sentía avergonzada e intentaba dejar de decir aquellas expresiones para que no se rieran de mí y encajar mejor.
- When I was little, I used many Latin American expressions since my mother is Colombian and my father is Argentinian, and many classmates used to laugh at me and call me “panchita” or something like that. Since I was a child, I felt embarrassed and tried to stop saying those expressions so that they would not laugh at me and I could fit in better.

# Unequal distribution of linguistic resources :

- Decapitalization: community languages and Latin American varieties are not considered symbolic capitals
- Gatekeeping to access to elite degrees, or particular subjects: some prevent students of Chinese origin to have access to Spanish language subjects; in some degrees, an English certificate is demanded to obtain the final certificate
- Erasure: co-official languages in Spain are completely erased

## Unequal recognition or misrecognition

- Speakers feel mistreated because of their accent (from southern Spain or Latin America), and their interventions in class are not equally valued: their classmates mock their accent, make comments or are corrected by the teachers.
- For speakers of other languages, their Spanish skills are not valued, which raises a racialization issue:
  - Teachers and classmates continue to hear an accent that they do not have because they were born in Madrid.
- Speakers of other co-official languages are often seen as Spanish monolinguals: differences are often erased, to the point that their names are often “castellanizados”.

# Equal Participation

Working together both of these axes tend to **reduce parity participation** in education.

Exclusion and self-exclusion in the education classes and activities, and at the institutional level

Some students' association denounce the unequal participation in universities, not often considered the role of language in this exclusion:

- Asociación de Estudiantes Latinoamericanxs Abya Yala
- Asociación Afrodescendiente Universitaria Kwanzaa
- Asociación Achime (Estudiantes Musulmanas en Madrid)
- Asociación de Estudiantes Chinos de la UCM
- Asociación Cabemos Todas

## Self-surveillance and self-exclusion

- Internalisation of the lack of symbolic capital, and of the lack of recognition as “speakers”, because of the prevalence of speakerhood models they do not fit: native/legitimised/local speakers .
- These models of speakerhood are a disciplinary power technique that goes beyond the mere imposition of a standard.
- The aim of these mechanisms is to “conduct” speakers to follow the models, to correct themselves and allow others to be corrected them.

## Example 2

- Iona (estudiante). No lo sé es que realmente puse mucho esfuerzo y no sabría decirte por qué, o sea, tenía tantas ganas de aprender a hablarlo bien, [pausa] no sé a lo mejor por este miedo al rechazo, por este miedo a la marginación de decir jolín es que no quiero no quiero pasar por lo que tienen que pasar otras personas que estén tres años sin saber hablar, sin poder entenderse, que se rían de ellos, a lo mejor fue por eso, que realmente lo que te digo no vivía esta discriminación en ese sentido pero como que a lo mejor le tenía miedo a eso.

# Transformation (instead affirmation)

As sociolinguists: our work should not be limited to observing and systematizing knowledge about these situations; the point is to change them.

- Following Nancy Fraser (1999):
- The target is not to achieve speakers' or even language affirmation but social **transformation**: disturbing the underlying structures that produce inequality
  - Challenging the patterns of:
    - ownership of linguistic resources
    - cultural patterns of value assigned to linguistic resources
    - models of speakerhood and linguistic citizenship
- These actions result in producing new linguistic knowledge and promote the voice of relatively marginalised people through the recognition of mixed/non-standard language practices and their sociolinguistic awareness and agency.

# Linguistic Citizenship

- i) putting democratic participation first, emphasising cultural and political ‘voice’ and agency rather than just language on its own
- ii) seeing all sorts of linguistic practices – including practices that were mixed, low-status or transgressive – as potentially relevant to social and economic well-being, accepting that it is very hard to predict any of this if you are just watching from the centre
- iii) stressing the importance of grassroots activity on the ground, often on the margins of state control, outside formal institutions.

# Awareness & agency

- **Those who can transform the current sociolinguistic order are speakers (citizens).**
- **Giving the lack of linguistic activism, we need to reinforce:**
- **Critical language awareness:** creating the conditions for a reflexive activity on language and inequality.
- Speakers' **linguistic agency** (Ahearn 2001; also see Kockelman): affective agency
  - we trace co-participant's affective agency around specific instance of linguistic inequality (critical incidents) by examining,
    - first, their initial emotional encounter;
    - second, their mobilization of this affective experience through critical reflection;
    - and finally, their political use of her persistent affects around this experience to call for social change.
- Agency is also collective at the core of communities of practice (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet 1992); in this way, "the speaker is the group" (Hernández, Altuna & Beitia 2018).



## Examples

- [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0O\\_3MoJnpXg&t=228s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0O_3MoJnpXg&t=228s)



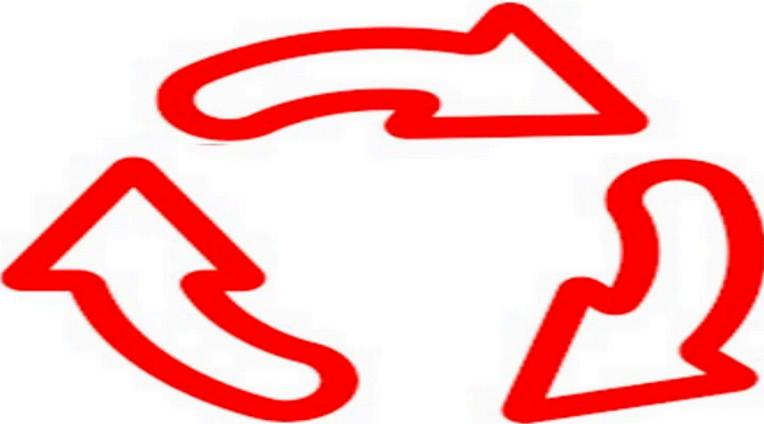
# Methodological challenges

- How to transform the conditions that produce inequalities: maldistribution, misrecognition, unequal participation?
- How to do so by incorporating speakers' agency, knowledge, and awareness?
- These two questions show the need to address some of the methodological challenges of this type of research



**PARTICIPATORY**

**RESEARCH**



**ACTION**

102 x 828

**PRAXIS**

# 3-Methodological challenges |

# How to fight for sociolinguistic justice?

- From a methodological point of view to transform the way language is involved in the production of inequality we need to redefine the relations between researchers and co-participants:
  - Co-participants Working together in co-labour (Unamuno)
- Participatory action research (PAR): aimed to design and plan together actions with the participants in the research.
- *Citizen sociolinguistic* approach (Rymes): to air speakers' points of view, experiences, and linguistic concepts and ideologies that otherwise might not be heard, to foreground local forms of expertise, and to build common ground.
- Transformations don't have to only focus on language:
- we need to involved not only individual but collective agents that share a transformative goal: such students' associations: group agency: anti-racist, feminist associations; cultural & linguistic association: Muslim women students, Latino American associations.

# PAR: Participatory Action Research

- This qualitative methodology that responds to the objectives of intervention & transformation, planned in different phases:
- We are now planning Phase 1

Phase 1: a) participant observation and intervention; b) through socially transformative learning creation of **epistemic communities** and mobilise affective agency. These communities will also help form a critical mass and working groups for Phase 2.

`epistemic communities', in which researchers and coparticipants contribute together to the production of knowledge and actions (Estalella y Sánchez Criado, 2018).

Phase 2: With a PAR approach, the participants in the working groups design and become **agents in the transformation** of the sociolinguistic order.

# PAR: Participatory Action Research

- This qualitative methodology that responds to the objectives of intervention & transformation, is planned in different phases:

Phase 1: a) participant observation and intervention; b) creation of epistemic communities of critical reflection. These communities will also help form a critical mass and working groups for Phase 2.

`epistemic communities' with a collaborator, that is, spaces in which researchers and coparticipants contribute together to the production of the very things they study (Estalella y Sánchez Criado, 2018).

- In this phase Students' Associations are also co-participants

Phase 2: In the PAR approach, participants in the working groups design and become agents in the transformation of the sociolinguistic order

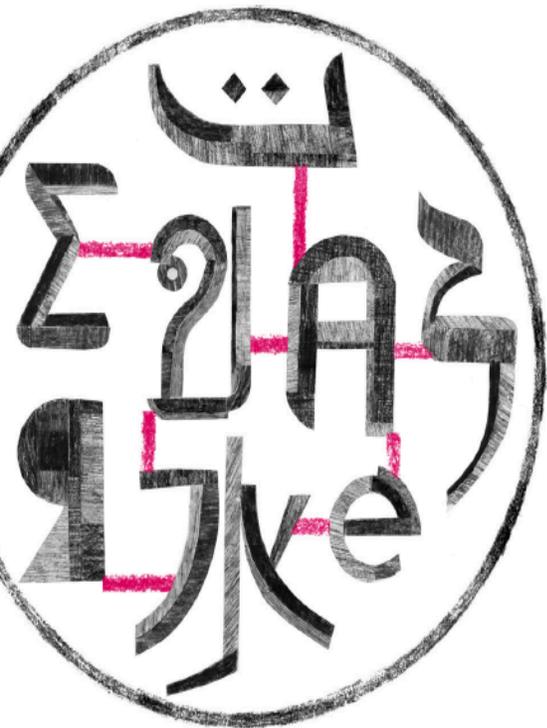
- 3. Phase 3: Analysis of the **effects of the actions**, carried out in relation to redistribution, recognition, and participation, the forms of agency registered, and the circulated knowledge will be evaluated.
- 4. Phase 4:
  - 1) **Immediate-effect proposals in collaboration with co-participants:**
    - a) Development of innovative proposals for formal and informal linguistic education: documentaries, transformation guides for educational spaces, workshop design;
  - 2) **Multiplier-effect proposals in collaboration with stakeholders**, oriented to change language education in the context of Spain, and of the 4 Autonomous Regions: linguistic and educational policies.

# Potential actions

- Targeting:
- Institutions: to achieve a more equitable distribution of language resources.
  - Making languages visible, and monitoring gatekeeping in degrees' access and certification
  - Creating circles of speakers of unrepresented languages to gain public presence and act together: the Commons paradigm
  - Join forces with student associations: to reinforce social and individual agency
- Knowledge about language : share experiences, podcasts, documentaries, textbook reviews, showing the role of language in misrecognition and in weakening social participation
- Individual subjectivities and group identities: workshops for self-care, **impaired** identities, and self-empowerment
- Education beyond the university: developing recommendations with stakeholders that can be implemented at different educational levels

# Claves para entender el multilingüismo contemporáneo

de la mano de Martín Rojo y Joan Pujolar Cos (coords.)



## References

Ahearn, L.M. (2001) Language and agency. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 30.

Fraser, N. & Honneth, A. (2003) *Redistribution or recognition? A political-philosophical exchange*. Verso.

Ferrada, J. S., Bucholtz, M., & Corella, M. (2020). “Respetar mi idioma”: Latinx Youth Enacting Affective Agency. *Journal of Language, Identity & Education*, 19(2), 79-94.

Martín Rojo, L. & Pujolar, J. (2020). *Claves para entender el multilingüismo contemporáneo*. U. Zaragoza/UOC.

Rampton, B., Cooke, M., & Holmes, S. (2018). Sociolinguistic Citizenship. *JSSE-Journal of Social Science Education*, 17(4).

Stroud, C. (2015). Linguistic citizenship as utopia. *Multilingual Margins: A journal of multilingualism from the periphery*, 2(2), 22-22.

Unamuno, V. (2019). N’ku Ifweln’uhu: etnografía en co-labor y la producción colectiva de la educación bilingüe intercultural desde la lengua y la cultura wichi (Chaco, Argentina). *Foro de Educación*, 17(27), 125-146.

# Questions

- Considering that bad distribution and misrecognition have their roots in economic systems and in political rationalities, can there be a margin of action?
- Are practices targeting change as transformative as expected?
- Can interventions at school transform society in any significant way?
- How can society's critical linguistic awareness be increased so that the linguistic dimension in the production of inequality is recognized by the population?
- How linguistic knowledge can be generated taking distance from coloniality and current political rationalities (neoliberalism)?