



Linguistics

with Dr Kate Bellamy

Traditional Purhepecha blouses and shawls for sale in a market © Kate Bellamy

Talking points

Knowledge

1. Where is P'urhepecha spoken, and approximately how many people speak it?
2. What is a language isolate?

Comprehension

3. In what ways does the structure and grammar of P'urhepecha differ from Spanish?
4. How can a P'urhepecha speaker indicate the subject of sentence?

Application

5. If you were interviewing P'urhepecha speakers in Mexico and the USA, what sort of questions would you ask to observe language variation between the different regions?

Analysis

6. How are Spanish and English influencing the structure and vocabulary of P'urhepecha? Why do you think this is?
7. Why do you think P'urhepecha speakers assign different genders to P'urhepecha nouns in Spanish sentences, depending on the type of task?

Evaluation

8. Why do you think it is important for linguists to study language isolates, like P'urhepecha? What do you think we can learn about human culture by documenting and describing languages that have no known relatives?

Activities

1. Design a linguistics research project

Kate's first linguistics project involved comparing how her Jamaican uncles spoke when talking to each other or to her. Design your own project to investigate an aspect of linguistics. Examples could include:

- Whether your friends use different words, phrases and sentence structures when they talk among themselves compared to when they talk to teachers or parents.
- What similarities and differences you can find in spoken vs written communication, and also how this varies between different generations (e.g., among your friends and among adults you know).
- How pronunciation of words varies between your friends, and whether this relates to the language(s) they speak at home or where they or their parents grew up.
- How you or your friends combine words and phrases from the different languages or dialects that you know.

2. Investigate a language isolate

Use online resources to learn about a language isolate. Examples include Basque (Spain/France), Ainu (Japan), Haida (Canada/Alaska) and Sumerian (ancient Mesopotamia). Note key details about your chosen language, such as where it is spoken, how many people speak it and any distinctive features that make it different from surrounding languages.

Then consider the following questions:

- How do you think the environment, culture or community influences the way a language develops?
- Why do you think some language isolates have survived for hundreds or thousands of years, while others have disappeared?
- How might learning about language isolates change the way you think about your own language or the languages around you?
- Why do some regions, such as Amazonia, have an especially high number of language isolates?

More resources

- Visit Kate's Futurum page to read her article in Spanish: futurumcareers.com/how-purhepecha-changes-across-communities
- Listen to Kate discussing P'urhepecha on the *A language I love is...* podcast: open.spotify.com/episode/6bMmrvLyltnY4wwiYiS7wl
- Read about when Kate introduced P'urhepecha speakers in Chicago to historical P'urhepecha texts held in the Newberry Library: staff.universiteit leiden.nl/news/2024/06/kate-bellamy-exciting-to-put-purhepecha-community-in-touch-with-written-heritage