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Writing Quechua: The case for a Hispanic orthography. By **David John Weber**. (UCLA Latin American studies 87.) Los Angeles: UCLA Latin American Center Publications, 2005. Pp. xii, 164. ISBN 9780879030865. \$30.

Reviewed by Karen Steffen Chung, National Taiwan University

Quechua has an estimated ten million speakers scattered across Peru, Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Argentina, and Chile. Perhaps the most representative point of contention is how to design an orthographic system that will aid in the literacy development of Quechua speakers. In developing an orthography for Quechua, one of the issues that arises is how many vowels should be given a separate symbol: three /a, i, u/ or five /a, e, i, o, u/. Exposition of the thinking behind each side of the argument is one of the main attractions of this book since similar issues appear with many other languages.

One factor to consider when making this choice is that Quechua is not a single language but a collection of diverse dialects. Some claim that [e] and [o] are only allophones of /i/ and /u/ and should not be assigned separate symbols. W, however, demonstrates that all five vowels do in fact exist as separate phonemes in some varieties of Quechua, further pointing out that the rarity of /e/ and /o/ is related to the merging of /q/ and /k/ in some dialects. W challenges the appropriateness of using a deep orthography which incorporates a number of etymological and morphophonemic forms (as is the case with the three vowel scheme) and would thus be accessible to only a small élite. Using a more phonemic orthography would impose less of a processing burden on new learners. Many Quechua speakers are already not very supportive of learning to write their lower-prestige home language, believing that it can hinder learning to read in Spanish, the prestige language. Use of a deep orthography would make literacy education all the more arduous and unpopular.

From this perspective, W develops his main argument in which he advocates the adoption of a Spanish-based orthography for Quechua. This involves, for example, choosing 'j' over 'h'. Although the Quechua sound is not a fricative, Quechua speakers know that 'h' is silent in Spanish. Therefore, by using the familiar 'j', Quechua speakers can arrive at the Quechua sound [h] more intuitively, thus lightening their learning burden.

The book also explores the question of whether there could be a monolithic variety of Quechua, and concludes that recognition of dialect differences in the orthography must come before people can aspire to a unified and standardized written form of Quechua. Potential learners would be unable to identify with an artificial or composite variety of Quechua and would only be further discouraged from learning it. This argument is actually another aspect of the deep orthography question.

Quoting the Spanish proverb, *Lo perfecto es el enemigo del bueno* 'Perfect is the enemy of good', W supports lexical borrowing over coinage. Purism, he claims, can in fact accelerate language death.

One worthwhile message that can be taken from this book is that pragmatism should come before ideology. Cultures and languages, including minority and endangered ones, can win in the process. Although this book appears at first glance to be a highly esoteric one with a limited potential readership, it is a strong candidate for use in a general linguistics class or any number of specialized courses, such as ones on writing systems, phonemic transcription, sociolinguistics, linguistic anthropology, bilingual education, language planning, or even an English composition course stressing argumentation.