

# ‘MINING THE DATA’ ON THE HUANCAYO-HUANCAVELICA QUECHUA FRONTIER

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## ABSTRACT (337 WORDS)

The traditional view of the linguistic prehistory of the Quechua family is founded on the assumption of a fundamental split between two deep branches, Quechua I and II. The validity of this classification is increasingly disputed, however, with critics arguing that the Quechua ‘Continuous Zone’ shows not a split pattern but a dialect continuum, with the ‘missing link’ to be found between the Central (‘QI’) and Southern (‘QIIC’) poles. Nonetheless, the region between Huancayo (southernmost ‘QI’) and Huancavelica (northernmost ‘QIIC’) provides the strongest evidence for a sharp QI-QII split, in the form of a relatively distinct linguistic frontier (or ‘isogloss bundle’).

This paper first briefly surveys linguistic arguments for the transition being rather more gradual than is usually imagined. It then considers how in practice an originally more continuous dialect transition in this region could later have been disturbed so as to leave the brusquer modern frontier. One scenario that could explain such an effect would be a late and significant demographic movement into the region just south of the frontier, of populations drawn from regions further to the south-east. What historical reality might fit with such a scenario? We here recall and develop an original insight of César Itier, that the colonial *mit’a* for the mercury mines at Huancavelica, just to the south of this frontier, may provide the key.

To investigate our hypothesis in detail we examine colonial draft and census records to assess three key questions. Just how significant was the demographic impact of the drafts? Over which periods within the colonial era? And which regions contributed the highest proportions of draftees to the Quechua-speaking population mix of the Huancavelica area? The result is a case-study in just how much both history and linguistics stand to gain from a fuller understanding of the very different data sources that constitute the other discipline’s independent ‘window on the past’. By converging these separate perspectives we frame a more complete and holistic vision of the Andean past, a cross-disciplinary whole greater than the sum of its parts.