CHAPTER 2

Pointing in Space and Time: Deixis and Directional Movement in Schoolchildren’s Quechua

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1 Introduction

In this chapter I will consider the grammar of Quechua verbal derivation at the interfaces of pragmatics, semantics and syntax in the developing mind. In particular, I will study rural highlands Quechua-speaking children’s oral mastery of five verbal suffixes, -yku, -rqu, -ku, -pu and -mu, all but one of which currently have directional movement among their meanings attested in the literature on adult usage by Adelaar (1997), Bills (1972, 1975), Calvo (1993), Cerrón-Palomino (1987), Cusihuamán (1976), van de Kerke and Muysken (1990), van de Kerke (1996) and Torero (2005).

More specifically, I will examine the interaction of directional suffixes with the syntax and semantics of verbal roots, with other directional affixes, and with extra-linguistic elements. I will demonstrate that children as young as five years old have mastered a highly-nuanced system for expressing a range of objective and subjective meanings, and show that the distribution and significance of directional suffixes in their stories resembles those of adults. These findings have implications for linguistic researchers as well as educators in the Andes, because they document systems of mental representation children have already mastered by the time they reach school, intellectual capital that is too often ignored or mischaracterized.

Data from the experiment reported here come from the elicited narratives of ten children ages 5–11 and two adults ages 17 and 36 in Ccotatóclla and Jayubamba, communities in rural Cuzco, Perú. These narratives were elicited as part of a larger study of Quechua-speaking children’s oral comprehension and production of sentences containing third person and reflexive arguments conducted in Quechua and Spanish among more than 200 children, beginning in 2000.

The organization of this chapter is as follows: section 2 contains an overview of the pragmatics and semantics of utterances containing historically directional morphemes in the adult grammar, with a discussion of controversies and unanswered questions about them in the literature, particularly relating
them to recent findings about evidential morphemes and other deictic elements (Hintz 2007, Howard 2012, Nuckolls 2008, Mushin 2001). Where needed, newly elicited adult data is introduced, illustrating in particular the interpretation of these elements in clusters of derivational suffixes as well as appearing singly. Section 3 considers the aesthetics of Andean narrative discourse and the contribution of directional morphemes thereto. Section 4 presents an original experiment investigating the distribution and meaning of these morphemes in child narratives, with conclusions and implications for further research in section 5.

2 Directional Movement in Cuzco-Collao Quechua

2.1 Overview of the Directional Movement Suffixes

Verbal suffixes encoding directional movement, especially the suffix -mu, appear in texts dating back to 1584 (Durston, 298) and are mentioned in many works on Southern Quechua, including Adelaar (1997), Bills (1972, 1975), Calvo (1993), Cerrón-Palomino (1987, 2003), Cusihuamán (1976), Hintz (2011), van de Kerke and Muysken (1990), van de Kerke (1996) and Torero (2005), to name only those consulted most frequently for this study. Despite careful diachronic reconstruction and comparative synchronic work on some of these suffixes, a precise understanding of their multiple functions and meanings is extremely complex. As a class, derivational suffixes are considered to belong to the least understood part of Quechua morphosyntax (Hintz 2011, 8). Although Hintz’ (2011) study is based on a Quechua I, Central Peruvian language variety which is mutually unintelligible with Cuzco-Collao Quechua, his insights on how derivational suffixes work within Quechuan languages can be applied productively here. Hintz (2011, 4) notes that the semantic features of Quechua derivational suffixes overlap with each other and with those of other suffixes. Similarly, there is no clear single meaning associated with a particular suffix.

Suffixes with current or historic directional meaning in Southern Quechua interact with the semantics of verb roots, other derivational, inflectional and evidential markers and with periphrastic elements to influence the interpretation of the verb’s tense, mood, aspect and manner. No single one of these elements fully determines the expression of deictic and subjective meanings within a discourse, but rather, they act in concert with non-directional elements to do so. Although some of their meanings overlap, and they may appear in clusters with each other, affecting each other’s phonological form, their meanings remain largely analytic. There are 31 logically possible combinations