Chapter 3
Demonstrative Deixis in Two Dialects of Amazonian Quichua

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1 Introduction

Deixis is a universal category in the world’s languages, found in forms that shift their reference to time, space, and person. Examples of deictic forms include pronouns, demonstratives, tense and evidential categories (Nuckolls 2012), discourse markers (Fraser 1999), and honorific forms (Irvine 1998). Following Peirce (1955), Roman Jakobson (1971) considered deictic forms to be shifters that combine both conventionally symbolic as well as indexical modes of meaning. For example, if we encounter in discourse a personal pronoun such as ‘I’, we understand that it both refers by a conventional rule, as well as points to a context-specific speaking subject of the speech event or of a narrated speech event. If we expand our consideration of deixis to such discourse entities as contextualization cues, especially rising or falling intonation, and the kinds of expressive performances involving analogical gestures that occur in ideophonic simulations (Nuckolls 1996), however, we are forced to see the conventionalized meanings of deixis along a continuum from extremely conventionalized to minimally conventionalized.

Demonstrative usage in Quichua is, for the most part, concerned with communicating, by a conventional rule, notions of physical proximity and distance (e.g. ‘this’/‘that’, ‘here’/ ‘there’), as well as related discourse notions such as anaphora (e.g. ‘this’/‘that’ already referred to) and backchanneling (e.g. is ‘that’ so?). However, Quichua demonstratives may, at times, exhibit speaker-specific contextualizing and expressivity that would place them a bit farther away from the conventionalized end of a hypothetical continuum. For example, expressive lengthening would allow speakers to communicate personal perceptions

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1 Ecuadorian Quichua is now officially written as Kichwa in materials produced by the Ecuadorian Ministry of Education. In that context, the term Kichwa generally refers to the standardized Kichwa Unificado. We retain the older spelling ‘Quichua’ both because of its long history of use and because materials written in the Pastaza and Tena dialects have traditionally used the spelling ‘Quichua’.
of greater duration or spatial expanse. As will become apparent in our paper, some demonstrative usages do exploit the possibilities for intonationally-communicated, subjective perceptions of distance by using expressive lengthening to communicate an idea of greater distance from a speaker. Although there is a growing literature on the discourse characteristics of demonstratives in a variety of languages, and even one attempt to typologize the discourse use of demonstratives (Himmelman 1996), there has, as yet, been no study of the discourse characteristics of demonstratives in Ecuadorian Quichua.

This paper, then, will examine a form of referential deixis, that of demonstratives, in two dialects of Ecuadorian Quichua, both of which are spoken in Amazonian Ecuador. These two dialects are quite similar, mutually intelligible, and spoken in contiguous provinces. When attempting to identify a text as belonging to either one of these dialects, the most obvious indicators are the past tense suffixes. Additionally, there are some differences in lexical usage and in phonological inventories. (See Nuckolls, Stanley, Nielsen and Hopper (forthcoming), and O’Rourke and Swanson 2013.)

We refer to these dialects as the Pastaza dialect, after the province in which it dominates, and the Tena dialect, after the capital city of the adjacent province in which this dialect is spoken. However, we must be extremely cautious about assuming that these dialect divisions are unproblematic. Because they are geographically contiguous, speakers are related to each other through complex kinship networks. In fact, identifying our own consultants as belonging to one dialect versus another is complicated by the fact that one person may have a spouse, a parent or grandparents from another dialect. The term ‘dialect’ as used here, therefore, is shorthand for a complex and dynamic sociolinguistic environment.

Following Diessel (2006, 464), we note the intrinsically interesting qualities of demonstratives, which not only indicate the location of something relative to a speaker, but also “serve to coordinate the interlocutors’ joint attentional focus” (2006, 469). This and other discourse functions of demonstratives in Quichua have not been given any attention by grammarians, who tend to focus on their spatial, locative functions. Consider, for example, that there is a general consensus among many grammarians of Ecuadorian dialects of Quichua that there is a two-way contrast between proximal and distal demonstratives. Such claims have been made in Catta Quelen (1994, 55), Cole (1982, 132), Lema Guanolema (1997, 42), Múgica (1967, 24), Ross (1979, 14–15) and Vásquez Suárez (1992, 62–64). Ross (1979, 14–15), for example, states the following:

There are only two commonly used demonstratives in Quichua:

*Cai* “this” used to describe anything fairly close to the speaker

*Chai* “that” used to describe anything not quite close to the speaker