Chapter 6

Discourse Deixis in Southern Quechua: A Case Study on Topic and Focus

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1 Introduction

This paper examines discourse deixis in Southern Quechua. Specifically, it investigates the syntactic, morphological and prosodic marking of focus, and to some extent, topic, in the variety of Quechua spoken in the department of Cochabamba, Bolivia. While there are several studies on discourse deixis (in particular topic and focus) in Peruvian varieties of Quechua (i.e. Muysken 1995, Sánchez 2010), Bolivian varieties have not been studied extensively.

In 2009, the number of Quechua speakers in Bolivia was estimated at 2,530,985 (Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores y Cooperación, FUNPROEIB Andes and UNICEF 2009, 517). Bolivian Quechua forms part of Quechua IIC in Torero’s classification, which also includes Ayacucho Quechua and Cuzco Quechua (Torero 1964). Phonologically, Bolivian Quechua is similar to Cuzco Quechua; importantly, both varieties have glottalized and aspirated consonants. Morphologically, however, Bolivian Quechua is quite different from Cuzco Quechua (Adelaar and Muysken 2004, 188). A distinction is sometimes made between a northern and a southern variety of Bolivian Quechua, which are spoken in non-contiguous areas (Landerman 1991). The variety of Quechua spoken in the department of Cochabamba belongs to the southern Bolivian variety.

Discourse deixis refers to the use of expressions that signal a relationship between an utterance and the prior or subsequent discourse (Levinson 1983, 2004). According to Levinson (1983, 2004), discourse deixis includes temporal deictic terms (next, before, last week), spatial deictic terms (in the last paragraph), utterance initial expressions that indicate a relationship with the preceding discourse (but, however, in conclusion, well), and the use of demonstratives (this, that) to refer to the preceding or following discourse. In Quechua, a variety of morphemes encode reference to the prior or preceding discourse, such as topic markers, focus markers and relational markers (see Introduction). This work specifically focuses on topic and focus markers. According to Levinson (1983, 88), topic markers can be classified as discourse deictic elements, as
... a major function of topic marking is precisely to relate the marked utterance to some specific topic raised in the prior discourse, i.e. to perform a discourse-deictic function.

Levinson (1983, 2004) does not specifically mention focus markers as discourse deictic elements, but like topic markers, focus markers draw the attention to an element and establish a relationship between that element and the prior discourse. Specifically, a focus marker indicates the new or non-presupposed information of the sentence, and in the case of contrastive focus, it contrasts an element in the utterance with some other element in the prior discourse or context.

This relationship that morphological topic and focus markers establish between an utterance and the prior discourse can also be encoded through other means in different languages, such as syntactic or prosodic means. As Levinson (1983) points out, changes in word order in English have a similar function as morphological topic markers in some other languages. In the following example, the left-dislocated element is the topic of the sentence:

(1) *That blouse, it’s simply stunning* (Levinson 1983, 89).

Moreover, in some languages a particular prosody is associated with topic or focus (see below). As pointed out in the Introduction, Quechua speakers have different morphological, syntactic and prosodic means to encode topic and focus, thus relating an utterance to the prior discourse or context.

Topic and focus marking are briefly mentioned in grammars of Bolivian Quechua (e.g. Solá and Lastra 1964). However, to my knowledge, there have not been any in depth studies of the different strategies used to encode the discourse deictic notions of focus and topic in this variety.

This chapter mainly addresses focus, but topic is also briefly discussed. Topic is what the sentence is about; the rest of the sentence expresses what is said about the topic (Rizzi 1997). Following Chomsky (1971) and Jackendoff (1972), focus is defined in this work as the new information in a sentence while the rest of the sentence is presupposed. The focus structure of a sentence can be examined by means of question-answer pairs, where there is a clear relation between an utterance and the prior discourse. The focus of a sentence is the part of that sentence that replaces the *wh*-phrase in the corresponding question. There are different types of focus. A first distinction is made in the literature between broad focus and narrow focus. In broad focus, the entire sentence is new information, as in (2) below. In narrow focus, on the other hand, one constituent is focused, e.g. the subject (as in (3)) or the object.