

On reporting intra- and inter-speaker variation in grammatical description

Rodrigo Becerra

Intra- and inter-speaker variation is a key component of language, although it is usually obscured in grammar description (Barlow 2013). Grammars aim to provide generalizations, usually an inventory of the existent forms and the contrasts behind them, disregarding heterogeneity. In addition, by its historical nature and scholarly tradition, grammars depict a particular and crystallized picture of a language in time.

In this presentation I deal with three cases of intra-subject and inter-subject variation in Mapudungun, a language isolate spoken in Chile and Argentina. The three cases are studied from conversational data gathered at a single indigenous community, Llaguepulli. The objective of this presentation is to advocate for the importance of reporting variation in grammars, even if the variation seems meaningless at first sight. Across the examples, it will be shown that variation has the potential to be meaningful and, even if the patterns are not well understood yet, they could be explained by future researchers.

The first phenomenon studied is variation on stress placement in Mapudungun disyllabic nouns. It has been long attested that many disyllabic words in the language can be stressed in either syllable (mainly for words ending in a light syllable), phenomenon called “non-stable” stress by Lenz (1895-1897) (see also Febrés 1765; Salas 1992; Echeverría & Contreras 1965). The exact patterns of variation had not been fully understood and its specific realization in words is usually not reported. However, I show that at least three principles operate together to determine the placement of stress: (i) a tendency favouring final stress, (ii) attraction of stress by heavy syllables, and (iii) information structure categories.

Secondly, the particle *ta* was traditionally described as “ornamental” in Mapudungun (Valdivia 1606/1684; Febrés 1765; Augusta 1903). More recently, while some grammars almost do not mention the particle *ta* (Salas 1992; Harmelink 1996), others have characterized it as optional, assertive, and emphatic (Malvestitti 2002; Díaz-Fernández 2003; Zúñiga 2006). Interestingly, Smeets (2008) offers a wide variety of examples of *ta* and describes inter-subject variation in terms of frequency of use. Speakers also alternate between chunks with and without the particle *ta*. From my perspective, this variation is related to the “assertive” and emphatic work this particle performs. I analyze the particle *ta* as a linker at different syntactic levels, at which it explicitly signals the connection between two linguistic elements. Moreover, since most of the tokens of *ta* are dispensable, its mere presence is an explicit insistence on the fact that two units should be interpreted as linked to each other.

Thirdly, I report intra-subject variation in the usage of temporal adverbials referring to time intervals. In Mapudungun two sets of time interval adverbials can be distinguished: (i) an older set of event-based intervals (Sinha et al. 2011), conceptually organized in relation to natural cycles, such as *tripan antü* ‘coming out sun (i.e. sunrise)’ and *pewüngen* ‘there being sprouts (i.e. spring)’; and (ii) a newer set of time-based intervals (Sinha et al. 2011) referring to an extrinsic frame of reference (Evans 2003), lexicalized in loanwords borrowed from Spanish, such as *eneru* ‘January’, *mierkole* ‘Wednesday’, and *ora* ‘hour’. It has been described that, although varying according to context, older people do use Western adverbials, while younger and specially politically active people tend to avoid this usage and make efforts to frame their discourse in relation to Mapuche traditional concepts (Soto 2015).

I claim that including intra- and inter-speaker variation in grammatical description can improve not only the product but also the process of understanding a particular grammar in the long run, by allowing the discovery of linguistic patterns that otherwise would remain unknown. There are surely some tensions in this endeavour, for example, between time and goals (Rice 2006), conciseness and completeness (Nagy 2009), and community-shared forms and heterogeneity

(Benor 2010). However, the attestation of apparent cases of variation can provide data for the better comprehension of multiple phenomena.

References:

- Augusta, F. de (1903). *Gramática araucana*. Valdivia: Imprenta Central J. Lampert.
- Barlow, M. (2013). Individual differences and usage-based grammar. *International Journal of Corpus Linguistics*, 18(4): 443–478.
- Benor, S. (2010). Ethnolinguistic repertoire: Shifting the analytic focus in language and ethnicity. *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, 14(2): 159–183.
- Díaz-Fernández, A. (2003). El mapuzungun de las comunidades de Lago Rosario, Sierra Colorada y Nahuelpán (Departamento Futaleufú, Provincia de Chubut, Argentina). Fonología, morfología, sintaxis y textos. Volume 1. [PhD Dissertation]. Universidad Nacional del Sur, Bahía Blanca, Argentina.
- Echeverría, S., & Contreras, H. (1965). Araucanian Phonemics. *International Journal of American Linguistics*, 31(2): 132–135.
- Evans, V. (2003). Temporal frames of reference. *Cognitive Linguistics*, 24(3): 393–435.
- Febrés, A. (1765). *Arte de la lengua general del Reyno de Chile, con un diálogo chileno hispano muy curioso*. Lima: En la Calle de la Encarnación.
- Harmelink, B. (1996). *Manual de aprendizaje del idioma mapuche*. Temuco: Universidad de la Frontera.
- Lenz, R. (1895-1897). *Estudios Araucanos. Materiales para el estudio de la lengua, la literatura i las costumbres de los indios mapuches o araucanos*. Santiago: Imprenta Cervantes.
- Malvestitti, M. (2002). Marcadores discursivos en el mapuche de la Línea Sur. In A. F. Garay & L. Golluscio (comp.), *Temas de lingüística aborigen II*, 209-224
- Nagy, N. (2009). The challenges of less commonly studied languages. In J. Stanford & D. Preston (eds.), *Variation in indigenous minority languages*, 397-417.
- Rice, K. (2006). A typology of good grammars. *Studies in Language*, 30(2): 385–415.
- Salas, A. (1992). *El mapuche o araucano. Fonología, gramática y antología de cuentos*. Madrid: Mapfre.
- Sinha, C., Sinha, V., Zinken, J., & Sampaio, W. (2011). When time is not space: The social and linguistic construction of time intervals and temporal event relations in an Amazonian culture. *Language and Cognition*, 3(1): 137-169.
- Smeets, I. 2008. *A grammar of Mapuche*. Berlin/New York: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Soto, A. (2015). *Interacciones cara a cara en mapudungun: Indexicalidad en el estudio de las conceptualizaciones del tiempo y sus significados culturales*. [Unpublished bachelor's thesis]. Universidad de Concepción, Chile.
- Valdivia, L. (1606/1684). *Arte y Gramatica General de la Lengva qve corre en todo el Reyno de Chile, con un Vocabulario y Confessionario*. Seville: Tomás Lopez de Haro.
- Zúñiga, F. (2006). *Mapudungun. El habla mapuche*. Santiago: Centro de Estudios Públicos.