

Tipití: Journal of the Society for the Anthropology of Lowland South America

ISSN: 2572-3626 (online)

Volume 12
Issue 1 *Amazonian Quichua*

Article 4

7-26-2014

Earthy Concreteness and Anti-Hypotheticalism in Amazonian Quichua Discourse

Janis B. Nuckolls
Brigham Young University

Tod D. Swanson
Arizona State University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.trinity.edu/tipiti>



Part of the [Anthropology Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Nuckolls, Janis B. and Swanson, Tod D. (2014). "Earthy Concreteness and Anti-Hypotheticalism in Amazonian Quichua Discourse," *Tipití: Journal of the Society for the Anthropology of Lowland South America*: Vol. 12: Iss. 1, Article 4, 48-60.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.trinity.edu/tipiti/vol12/iss1/4>

This Special Topics is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @ Trinity. It has been accepted for inclusion in Tipití: Journal of the Society for the Anthropology of Lowland South America by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ Trinity. For more information, please contact [jcostanz@trinity.edu](mailto:costanz@trinity.edu).

Earthy Concreteness and Anti-Hypotheticalism in Amazonian Quichua¹ Discourse

Janis B. Nuckolls

Brigham Young University

Tod D. Swanson

Arizona State University

This paper attempts to weave together a number of strands of research conducted by the authors among Amazonian Quichua-speaking people in the Napo and Pastaza provinces of eastern Ecuador. We are attempting to elucidate something that we have both observed, which we are calling an earthy concreteness in the orientation of Runa, which privileges the contextualization of utterances, thoughts, and ideas to such an extent that statements about typical behaviors and generalizations are perceived to be both morally and aesthetically objectionable. This orientation is therefore highly problematic for hypothetical questioning, which is a major tool for social scientific research. In addition to describing this concrete orientation, we explain how it is made sense of, by recourse to the framework articulated by Viveiros de Castro's concept of "perspectivism" (1998).

Historical Background

We are not the first to have noticed this earthy concreteness. Dissonance between the concrete emphasis in native Amazonian discourse and lexical structures and the abstractions of western speech have fascinated and frustrated missionaries and visitors who have encountered the Shuar, Quichua, and Zápara languages of Amazonian Ecuador at least since the 19th century. Consider the following account from Frank Drown. In their 1961 book, *Mission to the Head-Hunters*, Frank and Marie Drown describe the difficulties they encountered in learning Jívaro:

We did not gain facility in this language as quickly as we had done in Spanish.... There were no words for salvation, grace, belief, or peace. After long and patient work Ernest had discovered only a few which approximated thoughts of joy, comfort, patience gentleness goodness, and the many other virtues named in the Bible. When we spoke of the righteousness of God we had to employ the same word the Indians used to describe a well-cleared garden patch. We had to face the fact that since the Jivaros did not know these things they felt no need to talk about them. But the more we studied the more we loved this strange jungle tongue (1961: 53-54).

What is it exactly that frustrated the Drowns? We would suggest that it was the near impossibility of communicating abstract Biblical concepts in the Shuar language. Biblical thinking is dependent on Greek concepts like "peace" or "grace" or perfect righteousness, concepts that are believed to exist timelessly in the mind of God, quite apart from any particular historical instance. Like platonic forms, they are abstract and free of perspective. Evidently, the Drowns' Shuar interlocutors simply refused to think or to speak in these terms. The closest they would come to contemplating what the Drowns meant by the righteousness of God was to compare it to the comportment of a respected grandmother who, as a *sinzhi chagra mama*, which we translate as a "strong gardening mother," kept her manioc garden free of

weeds.

Amazonian ideas of speaking well (*abi rimana*) also have an aesthetic quality. To speak beautifully is to speak with skillful analogies to nature using the sounds and movements of forest species to evoke concrete memories for interlocutors that, in their turn, give rise to memories of key life experiences. To illustrate a European response to this quality of speech in the Amazonian Ecuador, we turn to a much earlier French Catholic missionary, Father Francois Pierre. Like the Drowns, Father Pierre had difficulty communicating the abstract ideas of the Gospel so he allowed a Zápara-speaking *curaga* to speak for him. What impressed Pierre was the eloquent way in which the Zápara chieftain held the attention of the people by using concrete analogies from nature.²

This elder, who does not know how to read or write, this Zaparo converted from infidelity, this savage confined in the deepest part of the woods, who does not have anyone with whom he could converse about holy things, who barely sees the missionary except once every two years, explains without erring, difficult truths which are often inaccessible to reason alone. The terms, the formula are not things that interest him: nor would he even know what the words “define” or “distinguish” mean: he sees everything materially. But it is surprising how the idea shines resplendent through the painterly colors with which he dresses it. He makes the great trees and the rivers speak, he takes examples and comparisons from the flowers, the birds, and the savage beasts which turns the idea concrete until it is visible and palpable. A murmur of approval lets itself be heard throughout the meeting; the Indians who had understood nothing of the abstract explanations of the Priest have understood their cacique (Pierre 1983: 83).

What is remarkable in these passages is the similarity in the comments by the Drowns and by Father Pierre, almost one hundred years earlier, about native speech in Amazonian Ecuador. Both agree that in order to communicate Biblical abstractions like peace or righteousness, these have to be translated into the earthy concreteness of native experience with rivers, plants, birds, and garden patches.

Contemporary Examples

In our own work we have encountered the same preference for the concrete among Quichua speakers that Father Pierre encountered among Zápara speakers in the 19th century and the Drowns encountered among Shuar in the mid-20th century. What follows is an example transcribed from a recorded interaction during Nuckolls’ fieldwork, involving an attempt to elicit a definition for the verb *astana* (to load).

1. Nuckolls: Ima-ta “astana”?
 what-INT to load
 “What does “*astana*” mean?”

2. Cadena: Ñaupá kanoa-wan ri-k a-ra-nchi Piwi yaku-ma,
 before canoe-INST go-AG be-PAST-1PL Piwi pond-DAT
 ñukanchi tambu-gama.
 we shelter-until
 “At an earlier time we used to go by canoe to *Piwi* pond, as far as our shelter.”

3. Cadena: Chay –ma puri-ngaw, ñukanchi asta-k a-ra-nchi aswa-ta
 there-DAT walk-PUR we load-AG be-PAST-1PL aswa-ACC
 puñuna-ta; chi-guna-wan polannng ri-k a-ra-nchi
 bedding-ACC those-PL-INST IDEO go-AG be-PAST-1PL
 “In order to travel there, we would load *aswa*, and bedding; and with those (things)
 we would go *polannng* (gliding across the water).”

4. Cadena: Chi-manda, Piwi yaku-ma pakta-nchi. Palanda-ta piti-nchi;
 that-from pond-DAT arrive-1PL plaitain-ACC cut-1PL
 Sara-ta piti-nchi
 corn-ACC cut-1PL

“Then we arrive at *Pimi* pond. We cut plaintains, we cut corn.”

5. Cadena: ashanga-ma, ashanga-ma chura-nchi; yand-ta tsali-nchi
 basket-DAT basket-DAT put-1PL wood-ACC split-1PL
 “In baskets, in baskets, we put them; (then) we split wood.”

6. Cadena: chi-ta shuk wangu-ta tsali-nchi. Tukwi-ta kanoa-ma asta-nchi.
 that-ACC one bundle-ACC split-1PL every-ACC canoe-DAT load-1PL
 “We split a bundle of it; (and) we load everything into the canoe.”

7. Cadena: Chi ma-n ‘astana’.
 that be-3 astana.
 “That’s what loading is.”

Nuckolls’ consultant, Luisa Cadena, gives a vivid portrayal of the actions, the details, and the setting involved in describing how the verb *astana* is understood. Although this description is most likely a distillation of more than one past experience of loading things into a canoe, it is still very concrete, as it is situated within personal experiences and memories, as well as within a specific place. Also of interest, is the speaker’s use of the ideophone *polang*, which is an illustrative, ideophonic word that is used for the purpose of simulating the gliding motion of a canoe across the surface of water (Nuckolls 1996:155-158). This gliding motion has no direct relevance to the action of loading the canoe. Yet, it gives listeners a vivid image of the scene. This very concrete and personal way of defining a word could easily function as an object lesson for a lexicographer trying to teach students what *not* to do when writing a dictionary entry according to Anglo-western cultural norms. Nevertheless, it communicates effectively from the speaker’s point of view and is not an isolated anecdote. It represents a recurrent pattern that was observed in attempts to elicit over two hundred definitions of verbs by Nuckolls.

Questions about Language and Identity

We turn now to the matter of how a concrete orientation made it difficult to ask meaningful hypothetical questions about language and identity. Consider, for example, Nuckolls’ attempts to come to terms with Runa attitudes regarding the Quichua and Spanish languages. Five years ago, Nuckolls, together with a graduate student Brad Miller, attempted to do surveys that were supposed to gauge peoples’ attitudes and perceptions about their language. First of all, they had a very difficult time getting people to essentialize their language from other aspects of their life. A question like: “To be Runa is it necessary to speak Quichua?” therefore resulted, in one case, in a person telling us about various activities that Runa are involved in, such as making *aswa*, applying black vegetable dye all over one’s body, planting one’s own food, hunting for meat, and even laughing in a certain way. Not once, however, was language mentioned as an essential aspect of Runa identity.

Another hypothetical question illustrates more difficulties: “If people give up speaking Quichua, are they still Runa?” A number of the responses we got either refused to accept some aspect of this question, or just denied the question altogether. The following utterances were originally given in Quichua and they represent a sample of our responses:

- “Yes, how will they be highlanders when they are Runa?”
- “Yes, how will they not be Runa?”
- “Yes, how will they forget?”
- “No matter how much one leaves off speaking it, one knows it.”
- “It won’t happen like that. They won’t forget it.”
- “Runa cannot be destroyed. We will always be Runa.”

Swanson has noticed numerous instances of peoples’ antihypotheticalism, even about life cycle events that we, in an anglocentric way, think of as universally valid. Runa tend to feel that planning beyond the immediate future is risky. For example, when one of his chil-

dren had turned 5 years of age, he began to speculate about possible future college and career plans. The reaction from a member of his Runa family was to say: “Oh no! ‘Poor thing!’ ‘We don’t know if he will even live that long!’” To Runa parents, hypothetical speculations about the future seem dangerous. They tempt fate.

Questions about Language Structure

In addition to questions about language attitudes, we would also like to call attention to the ways in which people responded to questions about language structure. We found a marked difference between the responses of people who were comfortable in their antihypothetical, concrete perspectivism, and those who’d been trained, in educational settings, to acknowledge a hypothetical question. In the summer of 2011, we worked with a student, Matt Young, to try to discover why there are two different forms of imperatives for this language. Nuckolls interviewed Quichua consultants who had little or no experience with formal educational institutions, and, with the assistance of Swanson, Matt Young interviewed Quichua speakers who were employed within a Field School setting, where they often served as linguistic consultants in addition to their day jobs. Most of the people interviewed by Young and Swanson, were literate and had a good deal of experience working with North American students as linguistic consultants.

Our hypothesis was that one imperative form was being used for immediate orders and the other was for non-immediate orders. For example, we hypothesized, if you encounter a friend unexpectedly when you are away from home, you would most likely use the non-immediate form -ngi to invite them to come to your house at some future, unspecified time:

1. Pasy-ak shamu-**ngi!**
pass-AG come-IMP
“Come for a visit (**sometime!**)”

When telling someone to come and eat, however, you would most likely use the immediate form suffixed with -i since the situation requires action at that moment.

2. Miku-k shamu-**i**
eat-AG come-IMP
“Come and eat! (**now!**)”

We came up with a list of hypothetical scenarios to test our hypothesis. For each scenario, we very briefly explained a possible situation, and then, using a sentence judgment task, asked which of the two imperatives would be used, giving people one of two possible choices for their response. For one verb, Nuckolls asked her consultant Elodia, what she would say to her husband if she were dying of hunger. Since men are responsible for providing their wives with meat, it was an appropriate question to ask. Elodia was given two possible choices to pick from, the immediate and the nonimmediate. Rather than simply telling Nuckolls in a straightforward way that it was one versus the other, however, she gave a complex response, which included contextualized, concrete details about the situation:

Nuckolls: Kan raykaywan wanusha, imata ninga rawngi (kamba kusa-ta)?: ‘lomochata apamungi’o, lomochata apamui?’

“If you are dying of hunger, what are you going to say (to your husband): ‘Bring me (non-immediate) a paka’, or ‘Bring me (immediate) a paka?’”

3. Elodia: Lomochata asta apamui, tuta risha, purigrisha lomochata asta apamui; nuka raikai wanuni, nuka kasna wiksa tiyani, aswa yaku cuarto upisha, nisha, nuka karita pi nasha
“Please bring me (immediate) a *paka*. Going trekking tonight, please bring me a *paka*; I am dying with hunger, I have just a quart of *aswa* in my stomach’ saying (this) I (would) speak angrily to my husband.”

In another instance, Nuckolls asked the same consultant, Elodia, about what a child spontaneously asking for candy that is displayed at a store might say: buy me (immediate) or buy me (nonimmediate) some candy:

Nuckolls: Shuk mishki niru wawa asha, karamelota munan. Imatata ninga raun: ‘Karamelota randiway’ o ‘karamelota randiwangi?’

“There is a child with a sweet tooth who wants some candy. What is he/she going to say: ‘Buy me (immediate) some candy’ or ‘Buy me (non-immediate) some candy?’”

This was her answer:

4. Elodia: “‘Karamelota randisha kuwai’ niwaun, nukata, mishki niru wawa.

‘Imawata munangi kan karamelota? Winmi kiru tukuringi, nisha mana randisha kuti, kulki ilvan nisha.”

“Buying, give me (immediate) some candy’, he will say to me.

‘Why do you want candy? Saying ‘You are going to rot all of your teeth, I won’t buy it, and anyway, I have no money (for it) (I will say to him).’”

So again, she’s answering with quite a lot more information than was requested.

When we compared these types of responses with responses that were obtained by Matt Young and Swanson while interviewing people with some formal education as well as experience interacting with North American students, we noticed a striking difference. In the vast majority of cases, they were able to elicit simple one word answers to the specific targeted questions, with no secondary elaborations or contextualizations.

This pattern of responding in a concise way was characteristic of 8 out of the 10 consultants who helped Matthew Young. The remaining two, women with no formal education or prior experience with North American student interviews, responded in the lengthy, contextualizing manner that we’ve just described.

Use of ideophones to simulate a concretely contextualized experience

We turn now to a type of language practice that has preoccupied most of Nuckolls’ research, the practice by Quichua people of using extended stretches of imitative language, often onomatopoeic. A lot of this imitative language is concentrated in a class of words called ideophones. Ideophones are words that use sound to depict, illustrate, or simulate a concrete experience of some kind.

In Quichua discourse, these simulations are evident through: foregrounded intonation, multiple repetition, anomalous stress patterns, and unusual word structures. Ideophones are a critically important category of expression for the achievement of native fluency in Quichua. Yet, the pragmatics of their usage can cause speakers of Standard Average European languages a certain level of discomfort, the end result of which is that linguists and some anthropologists often underestimate their significance. The following is a fairly ordinary ideophonic description:

1. Taras taras taras panda-sha, witat-ta shamu-shka-una

IDEO IDEO IDEO be lost-COR weeds-ACC come-PERF-3PL

“Being lost they’ve come through the weeds (sounding) *taras taras taras.*”

A not unreasonable response from our own cultural vantage point to such a description would be to feel some pragmatic discomfort, since repeating something three times could be seen to violate the Gricean maxim of brevity. In addition, one might think that when people take the trouble to imitate sounds of rustling shrubbery or any other impression, they are expressing a fairly trivial observation about happenings in their immediate environment, possibly for dramatic and descriptive effect.

What we believe, however, is that when speakers are articulating ideophonic depictions like this one, they are engaging in another kind of earthy, concrete, contextualizing behavior. The fact that this is done so often and that it is not restricted to any one genre of discourse, but omnipresent in all discourse, makes it difficult to believe that they consider their descrip-

Runa, by contrast, engage in what Viveiros de Castro calls multinaturalistic perspectivism, which means that there are many natures, or forms of life, but only one culture, human culture. Human culture therefore becomes a way of projecting categories of personhood not only onto other human groups, but onto other species as well. Other species may have physical forms or natures that are different from human forms, but they all have a common culture (1998:470-471).

In sum, animals are people, or see themselves as persons. Such a notion is virtually always associated with the idea that the manifest form of each species is a mere envelope (a ‘clothing’) which conceals an internal human form, usually only visible to the eyes of the particular species or to certain trans-specific beings such as shaman. This internal form is the ‘soul’ or ‘spirit’ of the animal: an intentionality or subjectivity formally identical to human consciousness, materializable, let us say, in a human bodily schema concealed behind an animal mask.

This has significant implications for how knowledge of these other natures can be appropriately represented in speech. Because other species have fundamentally different natures, a given speaker cannot truthfully claim to express knowledge of them in summary statements. He or she cannot speak for them. However, because they experience their different worlds like Runa experience theirs, it is possible to evoke the perspectives of these other natures by letting them speak for themselves. Ideophones are, we believe, one way of allowing nonhuman species to speak from their own ‘perspectives.’ Since trees, as a non-human form of life, share, nevertheless, in a common mode of being, that of human culture, it is not problematic for a tree to ‘cry’ when it is being chopped down.

This perspectivism cannot be overestimated in importance. It is not simply a case of animals being endowed with a human perspective. It is a matter of all beings selectively endowed with personhood:

...the Amerindian words which are usually translated as ‘human being’ and which figure in those supposedly ethno-centric self-designations do not denote humanity as a natural species. They refer rather to the social condition of personhood, and they function...less as nouns than as pronouns...For this very reason, indigenous categories of identity have that enormous contextual variability of scope that characterizes pronouns, marking contrastively Ego’s immediate kin, his/her local group, all humans, or even all beings endowed with subjectivity: their coagulation as ‘ethnonyms’ seems largely to be an artifact of interaction with ethnographers (1998: 476).

The emphasis on having a perspective by which all beings may express themselves is, we believe, at least part of the problem we encountered when trying to elicit summary statements such as definitions and answers to hypothetical questions. These kinds of questions were, in some instances, resisted. When asking for a definition of a verb, a personal narrative was reconstructed. When asked about what would happen if everyone stopped speaking Quichua, several people denied that that was possible, saying in effect: ‘That will never happen’ or ‘How can we forget it?’ When asked for a simple response to a set of choices by which to reply, speakers felt it necessary to add many details of context.

There is evidence for perspectivism in grammatical conventions as well. Runa norms of speaking require that speakers articulate the perspective from which a statement is made (Nuckolls 2012.) Sentences can be marked with the suffix -mi as being uttered from the perspective of the speaker or with the suffix -shi (in the Napo dialect: *nishka nin*) marking the perspective of someone else who has recounted their experience. We want to turn now, to some recorded interviews which, by their thematic content, reveal further examples of peoples’ perspectivist thinking.

In the first video, the perspective of trees is again relevant. This example comes from a recording session done by Swanson while teaching an ethnobotany class in Ecuador in 2011. The featured speaker is Carmen Andi, who is Swanson’s sister-in-law. She explains that when harvesting medicinal bark from a tree, she must ask the tree for its medicine, explaining to it that people get sick and need it. This is because the medicinal tree is a kind of person whose medicine works best if it is given willingly. Carmen’s narrative begins at 46 seconds into the video which is available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jmN-tb9Z45o>

(Swanson 2013). The transcription of what she said, which is also available on the video, follows:

My husband, also my parents say that, when we go to the forest to harvest medicine bark, arriving at the base of the tree, whether it is a chalvua tree, or an anaconda tree, or a balsa tree, when we arrive at any tree, we should stand and talk with him, speak to him. On this morning we have come to this forest to take its bark. We don't take its bark needlessly. We who are called humans get sick and we have a lot of pain in our stomachs. And we have pain in our bones. It is for that reason that we come to take his bark this morning. And so I have been speaking to, to this anaconda tree. I have been asking his permission (saying) 'Now we are going to take your bark. Therefore give us your medicine so that we may drink it.'

She then describes a process of walking around the tree (at 1 minute, 55 seconds), tapping it at various places on its bark, to 'wake it up' and asking it to heal her family. She taps it with the handle of her machete, not with the blade, so that one can hear the tree's sound, in other words, its own perspectival 'voice,' when it is tapped in this way.

The examples we have discussed which concern the personhood of trees are of particular interest regarding statements by Viveiros de Castro. He has stated that the spiritualization of plants and meteorological phenomena are of secondary importance compared to the spiritualization of animals (1998:472, 2012:59).³ We would speculate that such a statement might need to be recast into gender-specific frameworks. Perhaps it is true that animals', especially game animals', spiritualization is more important for men who are hunting. We have found, however, in discussions with women and men, that plants are actively perceived to have 'personhood' as well. For an analysis delving into the rich mythological life of plants in Runa culture see Swanson 2009. Moreover, as the first video demonstrates, relations between people and other life forms do not have to be viewed within a predatory framework, which is another important claim by Viveiros de Castro, who considers the hunter in relation to the hunted as of primary importance (2012:59): "It is also worth pointing out that Amerindian perspectivism has an essential relation with shamanism, and with the valorization of hunting as the archetypal mode of practical interaction with the nonhuman world."

As is clear from the recorded comments of the women, there is a very different, non-predatory kind of relationship being enacted by the women with respect to the tree. When they are harvesting the tree's bark, they have to ask it for its bark, it has to be given willingly, and the taking of its bark does not sacrifice the tree's life. The tree will recover from this trauma and regenerate its bark, according to the women taking it.⁴

One final video provides another example of this concrete contextualization and perspectivism very nicely. In this video, Swanson interviews a woman, named Elodia, asking her about a design painted on her face. Rather than explain that it is a general, abstract design of a snake, she describes an experience she had, as a fourteen-year-old girl, with a particular snake, and tells about that experience, concluding that the design on her face is the design of that particular snake she encountered. This video is titled: "A memory painted on a Runa woman's face: How a concrete event is evoked through an Amazonian design." <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2FVzJh69jyQ>

Swanson: "Tell me what is painted on your face."

Eulodia Dahua: "Here on my nose is ... (the design of) the agouti snake (called) *punz'hana palu*. When I was a child the orioles hatched in the lake...When they had babies I used to love to raise those chicks. That is when I deceived my mother and went off, telling her that I was just going to gather leaves."

As she was going to find the oriole chicks she heard an agouti sounding "*h'aw h'aw h'aw*". This can be heard at several places throughout the video. Looking for an agouti she circled around a tree and saw, instead, a large snake which she described as follows:

"Raising its neck it said *h'aw h'aw h'aw h'aw*...just like an agouti.....It was calling to deceive the agoutis... (so that it could lure them in order to catch and eat

them). Remembering that (event) I have painted (this snake).”

We can consider this example to be illustrative of a doubly embedded set of perspectives. Elodia adopts the perspective of the snake, which she endows with the perspective of a hunter attempting to capture its prey. To make the snake-as-hunter’s perspective plausible, however, the snake must also adopt a special perspective, that of its prey. It must imitate the sound of what it is trying to prey upon, so that its prey is tricked into thinking that there is a harmless ‘other agouti’ nearby rather than the snake. It accomplishes this trickery by giving voice to a fictive agouti, through the ideophonic simulation *bwaw bwaw bwaw bwaw*. The ideophones assist, then, in concretely recalling and reproducing this experience.

Conclusion

We would like to conclude with a different kind of a story which only hints at the possibilities for a study of perspectivism as a mode of knowing. In the summer of 2011, at the Andes and Amazon Field School where Swanson and Nuckolls teach students during summer classes, a student had gone to an agricultural field to learn about swidden horticulture. This particular student was trying to use a very sharp machete and accidentally sliced his finger to the bone. The woman whose image we saw in the first video clip, Carmen Andi, was present when this happened and immediately plucked a number of leaves from a manioc plant, put them in her mouth and quickly chewed them into a pulp. She then took the chewed up leaves and packed them into this student’s wound, which responded so well to this quick fix, that it didn’t need to be stitched and there was hardly any scarring. What we would like readers to take away from this anecdote is that Quichua speakers’ tendency to concretely contextualize their experiences may be tied with a sharpened awareness of nature, which may in turn have implications for speakers’ ecological skills, knowledge, and success in managing their lives in relation to their complex biosphere, and that we should take this form of knowledge more seriously, searching for a possible common ground by which to explore our divergent cultures of knowledge. We should be cautious, however, in assuming that Runa use the same kinds of conceptual tools and strategies that we use. Mignolo has, for example discussed the possibilities for a new kind of university in Ecuador, the Universidad Intercultural, which is not grounded in a Kantian-Humboldtian model which formed the basis for European universities (2003:103):

The radical difference here is that we are talking about the “inclusion” of Western civilization within a curriculum grounded in indigenous philosophy and not about the “inclusion” of indigenous knowledge within the state (and corporate) university, whose foundations remain in the Renaissance and the Enlightenment types of universities.

Our research reveals that attempts to formulate an indigenous philosophy may need to be approached very carefully, and with full knowledge of the pitfalls that would plague such an attempt. In Amazonian Ecuador, it is not uncommon for indigenous families to foster positive friendships with foreign academics while privately expressing skepticism about their work, sometimes playfully characterizing it with words like *bubana* (to lie) or *lalana* (to exaggerate). Such characterizations of anthropological work seem not to reflect a personal antipathy toward the anthropologist but rather a fundamental difference between indigenous and social scientific beliefs about what can be known, about how knowledge proceeds, and about what it means to speak or write well (*abi rimana*). This is evident by the fact that when pressured to answer the abstract questions posed by scholars, Runa consultants sometimes later describe their own answers as *lalana* or *bubana*. One such said the following to Swanson:

Pay shina tapukpi ñuka yanga lʼulʼasha imaras kwintakakani.

“Since he asked like that I also, lying for no reason used to tell him any old thing.”

In making this claim, the Runa consultant probably did not mean that he deliberately gave false information, but rather, that under pressure he made generalizations that went beyond the acceptable limits of Runa perspectivalism to engage in *yanga rimana* or purposeless speech. We have therefore come to the conclusion that *bubana* and *lalana* refer to a Runa

moral judgment of something that goes to the core of anthropological method itself. Our hope is that reflection on this dissonance may lead to a deeper understanding.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank Mike Uzendoski and Norm Whitten for the invitation to contribute this paper and especially for organizing the panel. We are also grateful to them and to our reviewers for their careful reading and very helpful comments on earlier versions of this paper. Nuckolls would also like to express a particular debt of gratitude to Norm Whitten and the late Sibby Whitten for early help in her dissertation fieldwork that made the bulk of her future work possible.

Notes

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.”

² The English translation was done by Swanson from the following Spanish translation by Jose Maria Vargas: “Este anciano, que no sabe leer ni escribir, este záparo convertido de la infidelidad, este salvaje confinado en lo mas profundo del bosque, que no tiene nadie con quien conversar de cosas santas, que no ve el misionero sino apenas una vez cada dos años, explica sin errar las verdades difíciles, y con frecuencia inaccesibles a la sola razón. El término, la fórmula no son cosas que le preocupan: ni aun sabe lo que querran decir las palabras definir ni distinguir: ve las cosas materialmente. Pero sorprende cómo la idea resplandece al través de los colores pintorescos con que la reviste. Hace hablar a los grandes árboles y a los grandes ríos, saca de las flores, de las aves y bestias salvajes ejemplos y comparaciones que vuelven concreta la idea hasta tornarla visible y palpable. Un murmullo de aprobación se deja oír en toda la reunión; los indios que no entendían nada de las explicaciones tan abstractas dadas por el Padre, han comprendido a su cacique.”

³ It is true that Viveiros de Castro (2012:60) does admit that plants can be significant for people who use hallucinogens, as do Runa. In this regard, he states the following in a footnote: “In the cultures of Western Amazonia, however, especially those in which hallucinogens of botanical origin are widely used, the personification of plants seems to be at least as important as that of animals.” Yet, the main body of his paper asserts the importance of animals and of the hunting relationship between people and animals. The spiritualization of plants is clearly in need of more attention from ethnographers, as is the matter of other kinds of relationships than predator/prey.

⁴ We do not wish to convey the impression that we are establishing a distinction between non-pedatory female relationships with plants in contrast to male predatory relationships with animals. This would essentialize women as nonviolent care givers and men as predatory. Ethnographic evidence from Runa everyday life suggests otherwise. Women hunt with dogs and small traps and are expected to support their men’s hunting by helping them observe dietary restrictions which facilitate their prowess. Women are also involved in predatory aspects of hunting insofar as they cook the game animals hunted by men.

Abbreviations

- 1 first person
- 2 second person
- 3 third person
- ACC accusative
- AG agentive
- COR coreference
- DAT dative

IDEO ideophone
 IMP imperative
 INST instrumental
 INT interrogative
 PAST past tense
 PERF perfective aspect
 PL plural
 PUR purposive

References

- Descola, Philippe
 1994 *In the Society of Nature: A Native Ecology in Amazonia*. Cambridge Studies in Social and Cultural Anthropology 93. Nora Scott (trans.). Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Drown, Frank, and Marie
 1961 *Mission to the Headhunters*. New York: Harper and Row.
- Kohn, Eduardo
 2007 How dogs dream: Amazonian Natures and the Politics of Transspecies Engagement. *American Ethnologist*, Volume 34: 3-24.
- Mignolo, Walter
 2003 Globalization and the Geopolitics of Knowledge: The Role of the Humanities in the Corporate University. *Nepantla: Views from the South*, vol. 4, Issue 1: 97-119.
- Nuckolls, Janis B.
 1996 *Sounds Like Life: Sound-Symbolic Grammar, Performance and Cognition in Pastaza Quechua*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Nuckolls, Janis B.
 2010 *Lessons From a Quechua Strongwoman: Ideophony, Dialogue and Perspective*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press.
- Nuckolls, Janis B.
 2012 From Quotative Other to Quotative Self in Pastaza Quichua Evidential Usage. In: *Evidentiality in Interaction*, Special Issue of *Pragmatics and Society* 3:2: 226-242. John Benjamins Press, Amsterdam.
- Pierre, Francois
 1883 *Viaje de Exploracion al Oriente Ecuatoriano 1887-1888*. Translated by Jose Maria Vargas (from *Voyage d'exploration d'un missionnaire dominicain chez les tribus suavage de l'equateur*, Paris 1889). Quito, Ecuador : Ediciones Abya-Yala.
- Ruskin, John
 1856 *Modern Painters* (volume iii, pt. 5).
- Swanson, Tod
 2013a A memory painted on a Runa woman's face: How a concrete event is evoked through an Amazonian design. YouTube video, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2FVzJh69jyQ>
 2013b We are to talk to him nicely: Amazonian Quichua women harvest medicinal bark. YouTube video, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jmNtb9Z45o>
 2009 Singing to Estranged Lovers: Runa Relations to Plants in the Ecuadorian Amazon. *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture* , vol. 3, no. 1: 36- 65.
- Uzendoski, Michael
 2005 *The Napo Runa of Amazonian Ecuador*. Urbana: The University of Illinois Press.
- Uzendoski, Michael and Edith Felicia Calapucha-Tapuy
 2012 *The Ecology of the Spoken Word: Amazonian Storytelling and Shamanism Among the Napo Runa*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Viveiros de Castro, Eduardo
 2012 *Cosmological Perspectivism in Amazonia and Elsewhere*. HAU Masterclass Series:45-168.

1998 Cosmological Deixis and Amerindian Perspectivism. *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, Vol. 4, No. 3: 469- 488.

Whitten, Norman E., Jr.

1985 *Sicuanga Runa: The Other Side of Development in Amazonian Ecuador*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press

1976 *Sacha Runa: Ethnicity and Adaptation of Ecuadorian Jungle Quichua*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

Whitten, Norman E., Jr. and Dorothea Scott Whitten

2011 *Puyo Runa: Imagery and Power in Modern Amazonia*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.