

The Poetics of Evidentiality in South American Storytelling

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This paper compares reportive evidential marking in the context of two South American storytelling traditions: Brazilian Nheengatú (Tupian *língua geral*) and Ecuadorian Quichua (Quechuan). Both languages use a reportive marker in association with second-hand information, and in both cases evidential marking is an important grammatical feature of the artistic genre of the traditional story, understood as a broad category including myths, folktales and community histories (but excluding personal narratives, which are first-hand experiences). Although it is common for indigenous languages of the Americas to evidentially frame stories as reported information, it is notable that Quichua and Nheengatú do so in ways that contrast with the other members of their respective language families. Both languages arrived in northwestern South America relatively recently, an area where evidentials are widespread, and over time Nheengatú and Quichua developed their particular present relationships between grammatical marking and poetic performance, probably influenced in part by processes of transmission and translation of stories from the areas they were imported into.

By focusing on evidentiality in storytelling I hope to illustrate the importance of the role of South American discourse forms and verbal art traditions in mediating language contact and change at all levels, from the social to the grammatical, and to show how storytelling can be one of the mediums through which linguistic features are adopted, adapted, modified and integrated into new contexts.

Amazon case study: storytelling and reportives in Brazilian Nheengatú

The Tupian language Nheengatú is often considered an oddity when compared to the other members of its language family; adopted by both *mestiços* and non-Tupí Indians, it was dispersed far from its coastal origins into Amazonia beginning in the 17th Century (Moore, Facundes and Pires 1994). This unique history has allowed modern Nheengatú to develop features uncommon in Tupí languages, including evidential marking.¹ Rodrigues writes this about evidentials in Tupí languages:

“Evidentiality is a pervasive feature of parts of Amazonia. On the information available, it is not a major characteristic of the Tupí family, being found in only a few languages.”

Rodrigues (1991:119)

In Nheengatú speakers frequently use a reportive marker (*paá*) to manage information, distinguishing what is hearsay from what is firsthand experience. The following example illustrates reportative marking in everyday conversation:

(1)

1. I see Aldevan go fishing.

2. Aldevan's aunt Marcilha arrives at the house and asks where he has gone.

3. I say: u-sú u-piniatika
 3sg-go 3sg-fish
 He went fishing.

4. A friend comes to visit and asks Marcilha where Aldevan has gone.

5. She says: u-sú u-piniatika paá
 3sg-go 3sg-fish REP
 He went fishing (they say/I was told)

Perhaps because attempting to translate *paá* into Portuguese commonly yields a speech verb like *dizem* or *contam* (“they say” or “they tell”), some sources mistake the reportive for a verb. Cassasnovas, a Catholic priest who wrote a useful reference booklet on Nheengatú, glosses the particle as a verb, calling it:

“An irregular form, unconjugatable, with a certain dubitative sense; the person who relates the information does not affirm it, but attributes it to those who told it before him” (2000:40)

This is an excellent description of the reportative in discourse, but it mis-categorizes it as an irregular verb; it is better described as an evidential marker.²

Although evidentials are rare in Tupian languages, modern Nheengatú speakers are the neighbors of speakers of Tucanoan, Arawak, Makú and Yanomami languages, all which have evidential systems with reportive markers (Epps forthcoming, Aikenvald and Dixon 1998). The Nheengatú speakers in the Middle Rio Negro community where I collected data self-identified with a range of Upper Rio Negro ethno-linguistic categories, including Tucanoan, Arawak and Makú groups. Many community members could relate histories of migration from upriver areas over the last two or three generations; the adoption of Nheengatú had accompanied this migration. Given this context of language contact with and shift from languages with evidential systems, it is not surprising to find reportive evidential marking in Nheengatú discourse.

The following example illustrates how speakers use the reportive marker to manage information in a personal narrative. The speaker uses the marker two times (lines 3 and 4) when she mentions the supernatural monster “*mira akanga*,” disavowing all knowledge of whether such a creature exists:

(2)

1. Ya-studari waá tempo kariwa,
 1pl-study that time whiteboy
 In the days when we studied (in elementary school), whiteboy,

2. maá tempo ya-yupirú ya-studari waá,
in.that time 3pl-begin 3pl-study that
in the time when we began to study;
3. ape pituna ramé u-sika-wera mira akanga paá.
then night during 3sg-arrive-HAB person head REP.
at that time, during the night the “people head” used to arrive, they say.
4. Aé paá pituna ramé ya-sendu-wera sasemu
3sg REP night during 1pl-hear-HAB shout
He - they say - we used to hear his cries at night.
5. mĩ kaá-kití u-sasemu-wera u-sika-wera.
there forest-DIR 3sg-shout-HAB 3sg-arrive-HAB
There in the forest (something) used arrive and to cry out.
6. Ti a-kwó maá taá aé.
no 1sg-know that INT 3sg
I do not know what it was.

In most kinds of discourse the reportive is invoked selectively in association with the reported or doubtful information³, and might be heard only rarely, depending on the topic of talk. In traditional stories, however, where all of the information conveyed is repeated from an earlier source, the evidential marker occurs with notable regularity, usually about once per line of transcript.

The following example shows three short excerpts from a Nheengatú story whose teller noted at the outset was a translation from a story in Tucano that she had presumably heard as a girl from her Tucano-speaking parents or grandparents. The story, about a woman who has a deer baby with a forest devil, exists in a number of different local languages.

Most lines in the following example begin with the word *ape*, “then,” followed by the reportive in second position: [I provide notes about the story to connect the three excerpts.]

(3)

[There was a woman who every day told her three children “You go down to the river and bathe, blowing bubbles ‘foo, foo, foo,’ in the water.” “Why does she send us away?” they asked. Every day it was the same, so one day the children decided to sneak back home early. They saw their mother take a baby deer out of a bundle in the rafters and nurse it. When she finished and went to the field to work, the children stayed behind and went to look at the deer baby. It did not have any legs.]

1. Ape paá u-yuka "puxa" unheé paá,
then REP 3sg-get wow 3sg-say REP
Then, they say, they got it and said “wow,” they say.
2. "Se-mú-miri-tá puranga retã yande mu nungara puranga-ikú."
1sg.POSS-brother-DIM-pl excellent very 1pl brother similar excellent-CONT
“My little brother is really great our little adopted brother is great.”
3. Tambem paá ta-pisika ta-maá puranga; ti u-puamu, u-wari-ntu.
also REP 3pl-arrive 3pl-see excellent no 3sg-stand 3sg-fall-only
Then, they say, they picked it up and looked it over well; it would not stand, only fall over.

4. "Ya-sú ya-maá wirandé kuri."
1pl-go 1pl-see tomorrow POT
"Let's go see tomorrow again."
5. Tayana paá ta-mu-yupiri.
3pl-run REP 3pl-CAUS-climb
They ran, they say, and climbed up.
6. Amú ara paá i-manha u-sika, "Pe-sú pe-yasuka."
other day REP 3sg POSS-mother 3sg-arrive 2pl-go 2pl-bathe
Another day, they say, their mother arrived. "You go and bathe."
7. Tasu-ã garapá-kití-tê iri ta-semu iri ta-peyu iri fu fu
3pl-go-COMP shore-towards-EMPH again 3pl-go.out again 3pl-blow again fu fu
They went down to the shore again. They went out again and blew (bubbles) again, foo foo.

[One day the children decided to make the deer baby some legs out of an embaúba plant. The deer baby began to wander around the yard.]

8. Ape paá u-mu-puamu-ã
then REP 3sg-CAUS-stand-up-COMP
Then, they say, they made (the deer child) stand up,
9. aikwé paá batata tia, kwe akwó (ba?) terero-pé.
exist REP potato plant like.that 1sg-think garden-inside
and there was a potato plant (nearby) I think inside the garden.
10. Ape paá u-puamu suasú raíra
then REP 3sg-stand-up deer child
Then, they say, the deer child stood up,
11. yuruparí raíra wasú. u-sú u-mbaú batata rawa.
devil child big 3sg-go 3sg-eat potato leaf
the big devil child, he went eating potato leaves.
12. Puu yande mu nungara puranga retã u-mbaú batata rawa.
wow 1pl brother similar excellent very 3sg-eat potato leaf
"Wow, our little adopted brother eats potato leaves really well!"

[The deer baby ran off into the forest. When their mother returned she was very angry. Later the devil (*yuruparí*), the deer child's father, arrived at their house with some with a freshly-killed *inambú* bird. He cooked food for himself.]

13. Ape paá yuruparí r-imbiú manikwera.
then REP devil 3sg POSS-food sweet-manioc
Then, they say, (they put it) in the devil's food, his sweet manioc.
14. Ape paá ta-timiaro ta-xari.
then REP 3pl-mix.poison 3sg-leave
Then, they say, they mixed in the poison and left it.
15. Ape u-nheé paá xupé "Ti puranga u-ikú," u-nheé a-kwó.
then 3sg-say REP OB no excellent 3sg-be 3sg-say 1sg-know
Then, he said to them, "It doesn't look good," he said, I think.

[The devil fell dead. The children were not able to reconcile with their mother. “We fought with our mother,” they said, and then they grew feathers, turned into birds, sang “tutireeee” and flew away.]

Writing about reportive marking in Hup discourse, Epps describes an almost identical scenario to that of Nheengatú, as shown in the last two examples.

[The reportive] can cliticize to any focused constituent of a clause . . . In narrative, the reportative marker is much more likely to occur in second position in the clause than on the verb.

(Epps forthcoming:14)

Likewise, the Nheengatú reportive marker is associated with focus in most kinds of discourse, and its positioning becomes more regularized, in second position, in storytelling. Similar patterns hold for other area languages. An example from of the same story told in Tariana also regularly marks verbs with a reportive suffix (Aikhenvald 1999b) creating a register that resembles the regular repeated evidential marking in the Nheengatú version. As seen in the following example from a late 19th Century collection of Wanano and Tariana stories told in Nheengatú, people have been translating Upper Rio Negro stories into Nheengatú for many generations. Representative of all of the tales in the collection, the example shows the same repeating second position usage of the reportive as seen in the modern story above.

(4)

Aikué paá iké Mauhiti-Kuri Kaxiuerupé iepé kurumiuasu
There was, they say, here on Mauhiti-Kuri rapids, one young man.

Aé paá puranga iepé, maaiué aé ntyo omuapý ipuranga maanungara mimbÿ kunhãetá ntyo omaan i xupé.
He, they say, was handsome, but he since he could not play memby well, none of the girls looked at him.

Sasyara paá aé ouatá, upanhé aé osu opinaityka kaxiuerapé . . .
Saddened, they say, he always went alone to fish in the rapids . . .

(Brandão de Amorim 1926:267)

Taylor, investigating Nheengatú on the Rio Negro in the mid-eighties, noted the importance of the reportive’s rhythmic affect in storytelling:

“The reportive *paá* appears frequently in stories with a function that is more prosodic than semantic.”
(Taylor 1985:16)

I would argue, however, that the function of the reportive in storytelling is neither more nor less prosodic than it is semantic, and that in fact it represents an integrated expression of poetics and information management. The storyteller creates a repeating, rhythmic and parallel line structure while simultaneously reminding listeners that the information has been handed down from person to person over generations.

New generations of storytellers use the prosodic affect of repeating reportive marking as a model for aesthetically pleasing storytelling, and simultaneously affirm their place in the chain that passes down oral knowledge. In the following example a young girl retelling a favorite story of her grandfather faithfully reproduces the second position reportive marking, a key ingredient of a Nheengatú story’s line structure. In line 5 she

repeats the line-initial storytelling device *ape paá* twice, as if she knows how the line is supposed to start, even as she stalls, trying to remember the rest:

(5)

1. Yepé viagem paá yepé pigá u-mbeú kunhá xi-mirikú xupe rã que u-sú ayuri kití
 one trip REP one man 3sg-tell woman 3sgPOSS-wife OB for that 3sg-go shore DIR
 One time, they say, a man told his wife that he was going down to the river.
2. Ape paá até kunhá u-sendú barulho no garapá kiti
 then REP until woman 3sg-hear noise in port DIR
 Then, they say, the woman heard some noise by the port.
3. Ape u-sendú que, até taína u-mbeú ti u paya aé até kunhá u-nheenga que imena paá
 then 3sg-hear that until child 3sg-tell NEG 3sg father 3sg until woman 3sg-speak that husband REP
 Then she heard, the children said “that’s not father” she said it was her husband, they say.
4. Ape paá, ape paá u-yatimun u-yatimun u-yatimun até u-wari.
 then REP then REP 3sg-roll 3sg-roll 3sg-roll until 3sg-fall
 Then, they say, then, they say, they rolled and rolled and rolled and fell.

Evidential marking, which is a particularly contagious feature, has been noted to spread from language to language around the northwest Amazon; storytelling is an important medium for such spread. As Nheengatú probably adopted/adapted reportive marking, both in its semantic and prosodic capacities, from the languages it came into contact with when it was brought to Amazonia, now Nheengatú may be influencing the regional variety of Portuguese, where a frequent usage of dubitive phrases like *dizque*, “they say,” and *parece que*, “it seems that” are common in the context of stories and other second-hand information. Similar adaptations to evidentiality have been noted in Latin American varieties of Spanish and Portuguese (Aikhenvald 2004).

The following excerpts are from a Portuguese version of the *mikura* story (a.), told by the same girl who related it in Nheengatú (in example 5) and a Portuguese version of the story about the deer child (b.) (in example 3), told by the son of the woman who narrated it in Nheengatú:

(6)

- a.
 1. Aí ele perguntou para onde dizque estava
 Then he asked where do “they say” she was,
 2. e falarom que um homem matou, que o nôme dele era mikura dizque.
 and they said to him that a man killed (his wife) and his name was *mikura*, “they say.”
- b.
 1. Até dizque um dia, ne? que os filhos, parece que já olharam, ne?
 Until “they say” one day, right? that the children, “it seems that” they already saw, right? . . .
 2. tinha umas batatas assim que tinha dizque na frente da casa
 There were some potatoes that they had, “they say,” in front of the house . . .
 3. Até um día que, parece que (?) a perna parece que estava mais forte, ne?
 Until one day that, “it seems that” (?) the leg(s) “it seems that” they were stronger, right? . . .

The special relationship between storytelling and information management is re-invented and maintained as traditional stories are translated from other Rio Negro languages into Nheengatú, and perhaps to some extent as Nheengatú stories are translated into Portuguese. Both the grammatical and poetic functions of evidentials, as an integrated package in discourse, are adapted into new linguistic contexts through the retelling of stories. The following section leaves Brazil to describe a different scenario for indigenous discourse in Ecuador.

Andean case study: line structure and reportives in Ecuadorian Quichua stories

Quichua, the Ecuadorian variety of the Andean Quechua languages, has a reportive marker which is pragmatically very similar to that of Nheengatú. In most cases second-hand information is obligatorily marked, a zero marker being equivalent to claiming first-hand experience:

(7)

- a. Huasha-man cunug yacu tia-n.
 behind-towards hot water be-3sg
 On the other side (of the ridge) there are hot springs; (I have been there and seen them).
- b. Huasha-man cunug yacu tia-n nin.
 behind-towards hot water be-3sg REP
 On the other side (of the ridge) there are hot springs; (I have been told).

Despite this pragmatic similarity to the Nheengatú reportative marker, the Quichua marker is quite different syntactically and grammatically. The word *nin* is a third person form of the verb “to say,” making the reportive explicitly a quotative. Quechuan languages are SOV and the reportive’s verbal origins appear to explain why it frequently appears in phrase-final position – contrasting with Nheengatú reportives which usually prefer second position, as noted earlier.

Aside from these structural differences, however, reportive marking in Quichua traditional stories shows many poetic similarities to Nheengatú’s prosodic use of evidential marking in storytelling discourse. As in Nheengatú, the reportive appears fairly regularly, about once per line, in a consistent position. In the case of Quichua, the storytelling pattern ends most lines (except for dialogue; see lines 7-10, 11, 19) with a past participle that expresses the main action of the sentence, and the reportive *nin*, technically in the role of main verb. The following example shows an excerpt from a longer story, showing a parallel structure created by repeated reportative marking:

(8)

1. Ña cutishug tiempo-pi tupa-ri-shca nin, cutin.
 now another time-LOC meet-REFL-PART REP again.
 Now another time (rabbit and wolf) met, they say, again.
2. Chay-ca ni-shca nin:
 DEM-FOC say-PART REP
 Then (rabbit) said, they say:

3. Tio ima-ta-tag rura-shpa cay-pi shaya-cu-ngui ni-shca nin.
uncle what-DO-INT do-GER here-LOC stand-CONT-2 say-PART REP
“Uncle what are you doing standing around here?” he said, they say.
4. Sanja jahua-pi shaya-cu-shca ni-n, lobo-ca.
ditch above-LOC stand-CONT-PART REP wolf-FOC
Above the ditch he stood, they say, the wolf.
5. Atug rucu-ca. Chayca ni-shca nin:
wolf old-FOC DEM-FOC say-PART REP
The old wolf. Then he said, they say:
6. Huambra, can ima-ta rura-cu-shpa cay-pi shaya-cu-ngui, ni-shca nin.
boy 2sg what-DO do-CONT-GER here-LOC stand-CONT-2 say-PART-REP
“Boy, what are *you* doing standing around here?” he said, they say.
7. Imata rura-shpa shaya-cu-ngui huambra?
what-DO do-GER stand-CONT-2sg boy
“What are you doing standing around, boy?”
8. Tio ucu-pi-ca oro-huan cullqui-huan-mari tia-cu-n.
uncle inside-LOC-FOC gold-with silver-with-AF exist-CONT-3SG
“Uncle, underneath (the water) there is gold and silver.”
9. Ima ri-y-ta na usha-ni-ca. Chay-ta japi-ngapag-mari muna-ni
what go-INF-CO NEG be.able-1sg-FOC that- DO grab-in.order.to.AF want-1sg
“But there is no way for me to get it. I want to get it.”
10. Ricuy ricuy ucupi-ca oro-huan cullqui-huan-mari tia-nacu-n, ni-shca nin.
Look look inside-LOC-FOC gold-with silver-with-AF exist-REC-3sg say-PART REP
“Look, look, underneath (the water) there is gold and silver together,” he said, they say.
11. Chay-ca, ñuca-pag huicsa-gu-mari uchilla, tio-ca jatun huicsa-ta-mari char-ingui
DEM-FOC 1sg-POSS stomach-DIM-AF small uncle-FOC big stomach-DO-AF have-2sg
“And my stomach is too small, but you uncle have a very big stomach.”
12. Can yacu-ta upya-shpa chupa-y oro-ta japi-ngapag, ni-shca nin.
2sg water-DO drink-GER suck-IMP gold-DO grab-in.order.to say-PART REP
“You can drink up all the water in order to get the gold,” (rabbit) said, they say.
13. Chupa-cu-gri-y-lla ñu-ca japi-sha-lla ni-scha-mi nin.
suck-CONT-FUT-IMP-LIM 1sg grab-1sgFUT-LIM say-PART-AF REP
“Go ahead and drink it up, and I will get (the gold),” he said, they say.
14. Chay-manta-ca tonto-ca ari nishpa yacu-ta chupay calla-ri-shca nin.
DEM-from-FOC idiot-FOC yes say-GER water-DO suck-NOM begin-PART REP
So then the idiot said yes and began to drink up the water, they say.
15. Ri-cun yacu-ta. Chay-manta-ca ña huicsa-ca tugya-shca nin.
go-CONT3sg water-DO DEM-from-FOC now stomach burst-PART REP
The water goes (down). Then his stomach was ready to burst, they say.
16. Ña yacu-ca siqui-manta llugshi-shca nin.
now water-FOC backside-from leave-PART REP
Now water came out of his backside, they say.

17. Singa-cuna-man-pash llugshi-shca nin.
 nose-pl-to-also leave-PART REP
 And water came out of his nostrils, they say.
18. Pero por dios oro ima (?) mayta japi-sha? Chay-ca ni-shca nin:
 but by god gold what where-DO find-FUT-1sg DEM-FOC say-PART REP
 “By god, where (?) will I find the gold?” Then rabbit said, they say:
19. Apura-y tio, tio, tio, upya-y-ta, ñuca-ca japi-cu-ni,
 hurry-IMP uncle uncle uncle drink-DO 1sg-FOC grab-CONT-1sg
 “Hurry uncle, uncle, uncle, drink up, I will get it,”
20. japi-ngapag chapa-cuni-mi ni-shca nin.
 grab-in.order.to watch-CONT-1sg-AF say-PART REP
 “I will watch out and get it,” he said, they say.

This storytelling structure is common for many dialects of Ecuadorian Quichua, including both highland and lowland varieties (see Carpenter 1985 for a lowland example from Ecuador). It is not, however, common in other Quechuan languages (see examples of Ankaash Quechua in Howard-Malverde 1989 and Cuzco Quechua in Pantigozo 1992), as Salomon notes when reviewing a collection of Cañari stories from central Ecuador:

“Since the presence of *nin* (He/she says/they say), a word functioning to set the whole sentence at a reportative or hearsay level of experiential validity, seems to have the effect of subordinating the rest of the sentence, some informants continually produce sentences like *Chaymanta shamuna nin kutin kutish chasinallata* (They say that after that she came again returning in the same way, p.124). Such unfamiliar syntactic devices, which are not commented on will cause readers familiar with other Quichuas or Quechuas more problems than the lexical borrowings and variant morphemes which Howard annotates copiously.”

(Salomon 1982:141)

Why should Ecuadorian Quichua differ so much from other Quechuan languages with respect to evidential marking in narrative discourse? Quichua shares a set of evidential suffixes with its southern Quechuan neighbors (Weber 1986, Howard-Malverde 1988) which, as bound morphemes that can be attached to different parts of speech, bear little resemblance to the Quichua reportative *nin*, with its verbal origin and phrase-final positioning. The Quechuan evidentials are more like those of Aymara and the other Jaqi languages, which also manage information sources with a set of suffixes (see Hardman 1988; Quechua and Aymara share many areal traits). The Quechua system largely consists of epistemological markers of certainty and doubt; some Quechua dialects do include a reportive suffix⁴, but the Peruvian Quechua reportive suffix is not recognizably traceable to a speech verb, contrasting with the Quichua *nin*. Usage of the reportive in discourse also shows some contrast between Quechua and Quichua; with respect to line-by-line marking of reported information, Quichua storytelling poetically resembles Nheengatú discourse more than it does discourse in other Andean languages.

It would appear that Quichua’s reportive marker is a more recent development than the set of evidential markers it shares with other Quechuan languages. Perhaps it was grammaticalized from its verbal origins as speakers of local Ecuadorian languages

learned Quichua, a process which began with the Inca conquest in the 15th Century, continued throughout Colonial times, and is even ongoing today in some areas of eastern lowland Ecuador. If the speakers of these languages paid special attention to reported information, then they may have used the verb “to say” to create this effect in Quichua, similarly to how the example of a Portuguese translation of a Nheengatú story above used *dizque* from Portuguese to approximate the evidential marker. Frequent use of *dizque* is common in Ecuadorian rural Spanish, in long term contact with Quichua, and it is likely that Romance languages, when adapting to South American evidential marking, might resort to speech verbs to translate this level of meaning. While forms of the expression *dizque* are common in many dialects of Spanish, in dialects that have had intense contact with indigenous languages, such as Ecuadorian rural Spanish, reportive marking seems to have a more obligatory character so that, as in Quichua, unmarked statements are often understood as personal experience.

Storytelling could have been a particularly important vehicle for processes of formation of new evidential forms. There is evidence that the narrative tense combination of a subordinated verb in a past participle, followed by the third person “they say” in the syntactic role of main verb – quite different from other Quechuas – may be further incorporating into the Quichua tense system, combining the past participle with the reportative *nin* to form a new suffix – more friendly to agglutinative Quechuan morphology. Even though Quichua has a strict penultimate stress rule, some storytellers stress the final syllable of the participle suffix –*shca*, evidence that the following *nin* is being treated as an affix rather than a separate word:

(9)

Cay-ta paska-g-pi-ca, quiru-ca iri-n-lla,
DEM-DO open-AG-LOC-FOC tooth-FOC go-3sg-LIM
Opening this (hair on the monster’s neck) up,

quiru-ca cay-man shug shimi rucu tiyashcá nin. <shift in stress
tooth-FOC this.to one mouth oldDIM exist-PART REP
teeth went, teeth like this, a little mouth was there, they say.

Chay-ca uchilla cuytsa-hua-ca manchari-shpa-ca
That-FOC little girl-DIM-FOC scare-GER-FOC
Then the little girl, getting frightened,

ña casi casi saqui-shpa-mi yanga-ta fuerza-ta vola-shcá nin. <shift in stress
then quietly quietly stay-GER-AF just-DO force-DO fly-PART REP
quietly quietly leaving, just quickly flew off, they say.

The reportive in Quichua is a relatively new innovation and is not part of the older set of suffixed evidentials shared by most other Quechuan languages. Yet Quichua is a highly agglutinative language, and in this context the reportative marker, as the above example shows, is losing its status as an independent verb as it is incorporated into Quichua’s complex system of suffixes. The reportive may have been adopted in the 16th or 17th Century, drawn from the local languages spoken at the time of Inca invasion, some of which had their own evidential systems.⁵ A probable scenario for the early stages of the development of unique Ecuadorian Quichua dialects would have local groups

mixing with Quechua-speaking immigrants, most likely leading to the incorporation of some non-Quechua features into the trade language. Ecuadorian Quichua could have drawn its evidentials from two different sources (if not more), and its modern evidential system shows similarities to both those of the Quechua/Aymara Andean area and to those of northwest South America, including northern parts of the Andean highlands as well as the adjacent parts of the Pacific and Amazon lowlands, perhaps with chains of linguistic contact relationships stretching as far as western Brazil.

The modern distribution of Quichua in Ecuador challenges the division of highland and lowland linguistic areas. Quichua is the only indigenous language spoken today in the Ecuadorian highlands, and is also the most widely spoken indigenous language in Ecuador's eastern Amazon region, currently in contact with a number of languages from different families. Two of these are the closely related Western Tucanoan languages Siona and Secoya, whose speakers inhabit the Ecuador-Colombia border areas, an area which also has many Quichua villages. Language contact between Quechuan and Tucanoan languages in the area appears to have a long history, judging from a 1753 Jesuit manuscript from eastern Ecuador, described in Cipolleti (1992), which along with lexical and grammatical notes about the Cabellado language, related to modern Secoya, includes catechisms in both the Tucanoan language and in "*la lengua del ynca*," that is, Quechua. A contact scenario peripherally including both Quichua and Nheengatú is not entirely far fetched, and it is not surprising that Quichua, a language adopted by speakers of languages from the western fringes of Tucanoan territory, would show a few similar discourse forms to Nheengatú, a language adopted on the eastern geographic limits of the Tucanoan family. Both languages today are geographically closer to each other than either one is to its area of genetic origin, in the southern Andes or on the Atlantic coast, respectively. Tucanoan languages, sandwiched between Quechuan and Tupian territories, may have shared some of their discourse styles and complex evidential system, either through first- or second- (third-, fourth- etc.) hand contact.

Conclusions

To connect the two case studies presented in this paper I will point out a series of similarities between Quichua and Nheengatú. Both languages were imported into northwestern South America relatively recently. Both languages use reportive marking in ways that are uncommon in their respective language families. In traditional storytelling in both languages grammatical evidentiality is important poetically, helping to construct stories with rhythmic, parallel and repetitive line structures. And in both cases linguistic change is ongoing in modern storytelling discourse, in the first through translations from other indigenous languages into Nheengatú and subsequently into Portuguese, and in the second through ongoing morphological and phonological incorporation of the innovated reportive marker into Quichua's agglutinative system.

Discussions of widespread indigenous discourse forms have noted similar types of verbal art like ritual dialogues and wailing are spread for thousands of kilometers across the continent (see Urban 1991, Beier et al. 2002). While the Andes are sometimes

assumed to be separate linguistic area from the lowlands (Aikhenvald and Dixon 1998 doubt Amazon-Andes influence; authors generally refer to “lowland” discourse, excluding the Andes), similarities between highland Quichua and Amazonian discourse can challenge a highland/lowland dichotomy, which may not accurately reflect either historical or current situations of language contact.

The primary aim of this paper was exploratory, and it probably asks more questions than it answers – though I hope that some of the questions are interesting enough to consider in an unresolved state. If I have not exactly proven that the poetics of evidentiality in Nheengatú and Quichua are derived from the same original source, I hope to have shown how a broad scenario of areal diffusion including both languages is at least possible and worthy of investigation. I also hope to have illustrated a methodological point about the importance of poetics and discourse in understanding the social mediums and mechanisms of contact-based linguistic change. As new indigenous languages were brought into northwestern South America – Quichua by conquering Incas in the 15th Century and Nheengatú by *mestiço* colonists and traders in the 17th – local ethnic groups adopted new languages but retained much of their cultural knowledge through the translation of traditional verbal art. When certain grammatical forms in specific patterns such as repetitive evidential marking were important for the construction of traditional genres, then such features stood a good chance of being preserved in some form in the new code. And when speech styles in genetically unrelated Quechuan and a Tupian language can come to resemble each other in interesting ways in storytelling, and in ways that contrast with their closest genetic relatives, it is possible that such similarities are related to patterns of language contact, and to the social events through which stories have been transmitted and translated. A long history of multilingualism in the northwestern South America suggest that the translation of stories with their poetic and grammatical features has been common for a long time, probably well before Quechua, Nheengatú, Spanish or Portuguese entered the region.

It is not really enough to say that certain grammatical features spread from language to language without paying some attention to the kind of interaction through which languages come into contact. Grammatical features do not simply spread around on their own accord but are shared through integrated relationships of social, grammatical and aesthetic concerns. Many indigenous cultures of northwest South America place importance on negotiating responsibility for communicated information, many indigenous languages mark such responsibility grammatically, and traditions of verbal art reflect such relationships between social and grammatical structures. Storytellers do not simply transmit referential content; they attend levels of grammar and poetics as well as to content as they transmit, translate and transform stories through performance.

Notes

¹ I am currently seeking more information on Tupian evidentials. While they *do* appear to be rare, it may be that they are more common than some sources reveal.

² Grammatically *paá* cannot stand alone as a main verb in a sentence. Morphologically *paá* does not take affixes, while Nheengatú verbs are always accompanied by pronominal prefixes, infinitive forms being unknown. Syntactically *paá* never appears in first position, while in Nheengatú, where VSO is a common word order, verbs commonly take first position.

³ In this case reported speech and epistimological (certainty/doubt) marking are conflated.

⁴ The suffix *-si* or *-shi*; it is also a reportive in Colombian Inga – see McDowell and Tandioy 2003 – but has become a speculative interrogative in all Ecuadorian dialects I am familiar with.

⁵ At least one pre-Quichua Ecuadorian language family, Barbacoan, has evidentials; see Dickinson 2001 on Tsafiki. Interestingly, some Barbacoan languages also mark second-hand experience in narrative with a line-final reportive marker based on a speech verb.

Key to Abbreviations

1,2,3	person	OB	object postposition	PAST	past
sg/pl	singular/plural	DO	direct object	PART	participle
HAB	habitual	NEG	negative	NOM	nominalizer
POT	potential	DEM	demonstrative	AG	agentive
COMP	completive	REFL	reflexive	LIM	limitative
CONT	continuative	GER	gerund	DIM	diminutive
REP	reportive	REC	reciprocal	LOC	locative
INT	interogative	IMP	imperative	FOC	focus
POSS	possesive	FUT	future	DIR	directional
CAUS	causative	PR	present	AF	affirmative

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