Metacognitive Diversity
An Interdisciplinary Approach

Edited by
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OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS
Chapter 9

Respectable uncertainty and pathetic truth in Amazonian Quichua-speaking culture

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“The whole problem with the world is that fools and fanatics are always so certain of themselves, and wise people so full of doubts.”
Bertrand Russell, 1957

Introduction

Although Quichua-speaking people living in Amazonian Ecuador are now entering a range of professions, they have, until recently led a subsistence-based life based on manioc horticulture combined with hunting, fishing, and gathering many of their resources. Gardening is accomplished with axes, machetes, and digging sticks. Hunting requires blowguns, spears, and, nowadays, mostly shotguns. Fishing is done with fish poisons, nets, and hooks.

The simplicity of Amazonian Quichua material culture is in stark contrast with the complexity of their knowledge and beliefs, which are drawn from expertise acquired over generations of carefully observing and learning from their environment. For some readers of this chapter, by contrast, the relationship between technology and expertise might be the opposite: they might find that technology for them is enormously complicated but that their expertise about it can be very inadequate or rudimentary at best.

More important differences between Amazonian Quichua people and others, however, have to do with the nature of what is considered possible to know and permissible even to say about what is known. Amazonian Quichua people, who self-identify as Runa, do not feel comfortable with making the kinds of general statements that are the stock-in-trade of academic discourse, such as this very statement being read here.

We know this not because any Quichua person has ever told us so, but rather because we have come to this conclusion after years of observing, inferring, and asking for answers to questions that are sometimes not even recognized as legitimate questions. We have learned, or answered, or been guided by a system of interpretation that is not theirs. Despite the fact that they have no kin to key life phorically or matter.

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learned, when attempting to elicit generic or summary statements, such as definitions, or answers to questions about language use or about hypothetically possible grammatical structures or situations, that these kinds of questions are in many instances resisted. If they are not resisted outright, such questions are replied to with so much contextual detail that it becomes difficult to conclude that the answer was in fact an answer to what was originally asked (Nuckolls & Swanson, 2014, pp. 51–2).

Despite these methodological inconveniences for anthropologists and linguists, we have no problem with the idea that Amazonian Quichua people engage in many of the same kinds of cognitive habits that a formally educated individual engages in. Quichua people reason and make inferences from their perceptual experiences. They act based on beliefs that are not, in a formal sense, rational. They make sense of the present by recourse to key life experiences from the past. Their thought is emotionally imaginative and metaphorically and figuratively rich. They also do make general statements about certain kinds of matters.

When we consider how Amazonian Quichua people assess the validity of their thoughts and realizations, however, we have noticed a pattern that differs from our own. There is, among our Quichua consultants, a far greater tolerance for personal uncertainty, for disagreement with others and lack of consensus about what might be true, and for inconsistent or incomplete explanations. We have also noticed that people are extremely certain about matters, such as ideas communicated through dreams, visions, or signals from nonhuman nature that, in a rational scientific framework would not be considered credible.

We believe that these differences may be understood by recourse to a set of interrelated factors, which include, first of all, the animistic perspectivism that is foundational for Rama thinking. Animistic perspectivism involves a complex set of beliefs, one of the most central of which is the idea that animals, plants, and landscape features have a subjectivity and an intelligence.

Another important dimension of Quichua peoples' metacognitive differences hinges upon the grammatical and pragmatic work accomplished through distinctions encoded by a system called "evidentiality," which, despite its name, has nothing to do with evidence in the legal or juridical sense of the word. The animistic underpinnings of Amazonian Quichua outlooks, combined with a set of grammatical evidential distinctions that require a speaker to register the perspective from which a statement is made, seem to work together with certain discourse practices, such as quoted speech and echo questions, to allow a great deal of uncertainty in linguistic representations of thought processes.

Despite our use of the phrase "a great deal," we are not claiming any quantifiable validity for our argument. Instead, we point to patterns of deliberative thought that are evident in discourse and that are strikingly different from European norms. We want to clarify, moreover, that it is not simply the content of thought that is different, although that is certainly one type of difference: conversations with our consultants reveal that jaguars think to themselves with human language; snakes call out to their prey to deceive them; trees cry when falling to the ground; and birds may warn people about impending disasters.
More significant than the content of peoples' interpretations of the world, however, is the manner in which Runa manage their knowledge and especially, their lack of knowledge or understanding. We argue that for Runa, not knowing or understanding is a stance that makes logical sense, is respectable rather than stigmatized, and is actually preferred over stances that overconfidently make claims. Our evidence for this pattern of differences is derived from spontaneous conversations, elicited interviews, and traditional as well as personal experience narratives.

The second point we will argue is that at least one kind of certainty for Runa may be strongly felt as emotionally salient and empathetic, rather than rationally objective. This chapter analyzes this type of certainty, which is based on assumptions about what humans and one type of nonhuman, a sloth, may be assumed to share with respect to their emotional life.

We begin with a brief discussion of the animistic thought world evident in Runa discourse. We consider evidence for animism in Runa speakers' performative evocations of sound, motion, and other combinations of sensory experience. The animistic underpinnings of Runa thought and discourse help us make our claim about the respectability of a lack of certainty, by showing that animism entails the idea that all forms of life have a perspective. If everything has a perspective, then the possibilities for abstract, decontextualized notions of truth become suspect, and a lack of certainty becomes morally, aesthetically, and logically acceptable.

We then introduce grammatical evidentiality, which, despite what its name might lead one to think, is a system that privileges subjective assessments and perspectives over empirical evidence, and includes, within its set of morphemes, a conjectural suffix that overtly specifies a lack of perspective and therefore implies a lack of certainty.

Next, we consider discourse practices such as the use of represented speech, which facilitates one to express a perspective without committing oneself to the ultimate truth or verifiability of that perspective. We also find evidence for the legitimacy of uncertainty in discourse practices, which include self-directed questions, echo questions, and hedges.

The final section of this chapter analyzes one type of certainty, which is linked with the animistic foundations of Runa thought. Emotional truth, or what is mentioned in the title of this chapter as "pathetic truth," based on Aristotle's term pathos, is one type of truth considered legitimate by Runa. Pathetic truth is articulated by stating, suggesting, or actively demonstrating through narrative performances overt parallels between humans and nonhumans. We demonstrate the existence of this truth by showing how it emerges in a brief narrative about a sloth, which is told for the purpose of persuading us that they are pathos-inducing creatures, like babies, and therefore should not be killed and eaten.

**Animistic perspectivism and sound symbolism in Amazonian Quichua**

Animism is, according to Harvey (2014, pp. 1–11) a "hard-working word" encompassing "an unruly plethora of theories" that include diverse phenomena. For our purposes, the
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kind of animism that we observe among Runa is a relational way of looking at the world, in which relationships between humans and nonhumans are viewed analogically, meaning that nonhuman forms of life may share the kinds of essential qualities that humans have, including agency and the ability to manipulate others, as well as subjective awareness and affective stances.

Evidence for animism has been attested by anthropologists in many ethnographic reports (Viveiros de Castro, 1998, 2012; Descola, 1994; Kohn, 2007, 2013; Nuckolls, 2010; Swanson, 2009; Uzendoski, 2005, 2012; Whitten, 1976, 1985; Whitten & Whitten, 2011). Recently, animism has also been examined in various types of aesthetic productions, such as literature (Curry, 2014; Harvey, 2014), film (Brienda, 2014), and dance (Taiwo 2014).

There is, however, an under-appreciated kind of animistic performance that we consider here, involving a type of linguistic practice that uses imitative, sound-symbolic language.

For Amazonian Quichua speakers, imitative language is concentrated in a class of words with distinctive properties, called ideophones (Nuckolls, 1996; Nuckolls, Stanley, Nielsen & Hopper 2016). When speakers use ideophones, they employ linguistic sounds, not to refer to, but to imitate vivid or concrete experiences, whether of sound, motion, or other sensations.

The significance of ideophones for animacy is that their use allows us to see possible links between cosmological animacy and specific discursive practices. When movement of any kind is imitated, whether it is an observed physical movement or an auditorily perceived movement of sound waves, speakers are enacting a performance of life, broadly conceived. We illustrate a simple example of such a performance of life with the following example, featuring an imitation of the sound of rustling through a dense forest:

1. Taras taras taras pandasha, witata shamushkawma.

Being lost they came through the weeds (sounding) taras taras taras.

This example is, on the face of it, merely an onomatopoeic representation of sounds of rustling shrubbery. As descriptions go, this statement might easily, because of its onomatopoeia, be dismissed as a type of description suitable for a chapter book or early reader, or even a comic book for children.

For a Quichua-speaking person, however, we believe that the use of taras is tied to a cultural disposition to endow all forms of life with a perspective and an ability to communicate (Nuckolls, 2010; Nuckolls and Swanson, 2014). In other words, the bushes are

1 That ideophony might be enlisted to express animacy was first noticed for South American peoples by Basso (1985), who presented a framework featuring ideophonic sounds as part of a continuum of expressive possibilities for animate beings, ranging from music to spoken language to calls and a variety of other sounds. There is reason to think that ideophones may be linked with animistic cosmologies in other parts of the world as well. K. David Harrison (2004) has found that for nomadic herding Tuvan speakers of South Siberia, onomatopoeic ideophones are generally important for interacting with the nonhuman lifeworld through hunting calls and animal domestication songs that employ stylized sounds to bring about a desired mental state or behavior in an animal. Sound imitation is also enlisted by Tuvan to classify, name, interpret, and predict the patterns of their nonhuman natural world.
rustling not just because people walk through them. They are, from a Quichua person's point of view, articulating their own response to the presence of human movement in their midst. In other words, the bushes have their own perspective and, one might even say, their own speaking voice, expressible by a person, through the ideophone *turas*.

In light of the foregoing claims, consider the next example, consisting of a detailed and energetic depiction of the sounds of a tree being chopped down. This example was audio-recorded by Nuckolls while attempting to elicit definitions of the verb *kuchuna* "to cut, chop." The speaker responded by vividly imitating sounds made by a tree as it was falling after being chopped:


(Creaking) *Gwa-waywa-waywa* and (falling) *b'wa-waywa-waywa* it goes and hits (the ground) *put'u-waywa.*

Each ideophone describes a facet of the event: its creaking sound, its falling movement, and its impact with the ground. For the purposes of this chapter, the description is interesting because when Nuckolls asked about the ideophones, her consultant paraphrased *gwa-way* as a sad sound, and described it as a type of crying on the part of the tree.

The description of the tree's falling, with all of the dramatic sound imitation that accompanied it, was not simply a vivid aesthetic description, therefore. It communicated something about that tree's articulated reaction to being acted upon by humans.

Trees do not just react to peoples' actions upon them, however. Swanson interviewed two speakers who related that trees have the ability to call rain. They explained that if there were no trees, there would be no rain:

3. Ruyami kayakta; ruya ilashkaybiga mana tamyanchu.

Trees summon rain. If there are no trees, it won't rain.

When probed further about whether trees felt emotions such as sadness or happiness, the two speakers—an aunt and her niece—affirmed that trees were people and they then asked Swanson whether he had ever heard trees cry sadly, using the same ideophone *gwa-way*, used earlier by the different speaker interviewed by Nuckolls for example 2:

4. Runa manawntutiri,ruyaga runa manawn; urmawsha wakag akta, mana uyag angichi? gyawwnning wakasha uyarin hatun ruyata kuchulpi.

Trees are people, brother, they are people; haven't you all heard how, falling, they cry? Crying *gyawwnning* it sounds, when a big tree is chopped.

Quichua-speaking people are not troubled by endowing human emotions to trees or to any other form of life. Their ideophonic enactments and simulations are often enlisted

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2 The conversation between Swanson and our two consultants may be observed at the following link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=epELex914IE, with example 3 occurring at 15 seconds.

3 Example 4 may be found at the following link, occurring at 1:54 minutes: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=epELex914IE.
to endow nonhuman forms of life with a perspective and an ability to communicate. To understand why this is so, it is necessary to briefly summarize the framework proposed by Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (1998).

Runa engage in what Viveiros de Castro calls multinationality perspective, 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, which is human culture (Viveiros de Castro, 1998, pp. 470–1).

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 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 their human world, 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 nonhuman 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 or plants being endowed with a human-like culture. It is a matter of all life being endowed with a perspective.

We infer from this perspectivism that making across-the-board generic statements about species of any kind is difficult because of the multiplicity of perspectives that exist. This means that uncertainty is a reasonable stance for Runa when considering answers to questions about their world.

We turn now to the grammatical encoding of perspective in Quichua evidentiality.

Evidentiality: not what it sounds like

Although the term "evidentiality" is highly suggestive of legal and official, juridical frameworks which make use of evidence for the advancement of a formal argument or a logical explanation, this is not how evidentials function for Quichua speakers. Rather, evidentials mark the source of knowledge underlying a statement (Nuckolls, 2008, 2014, 2018). Another way of saying this is to say that evidentials establish a perspective on who is speaking. We will briefly discuss three evidential suffixes used in Quichua: -mi, -shi, and -cha to demonstrate how perspective works and how it relates to certainty and lack of certainty.

The suffix -mi is used when a speaker/utterer makes a statement from his or her own perspective. A statement made with -mi may be a positive response to a yes/no question, or it may simply use the -mi suffix to focus on what a speaker wishes to foreground as the most topically interesting or surprising aspect of what is being said. The following hypothetical example states that Pedro left, with -mi suffixed on "Pedro" to emphasize that, from the speaker’s perspective, Pedro, rather than someone else, was the one who left:
5. Pedromi rira

Pedro left.

Although it is most likely true that anyone making such a statement would be certain about Pedro’s departure, it would be a mistake to assume that the certainty was being communicated with evidential -mi. The certainty in example (5) is a byproduct of the sentence’s indicative (rather than interrogative, conditional, or imperative) mood.

Furthermore, even though certainty can be linked to the indicative mood in this example, it is easy to think of cases where certainty can be detached from an indicative statement. For example, the sentence “John got an A on the test” is indicative and would most likely be certain as well, unless a speaker uttered this statement with an intonation of disbelief and skepticism, which would nullify the certainty implied by its statement-like format.

Certainty, then, from a linguistic perspective, is a complex matter. It is not necessarily guaranteed by any morpheme or syntactic mood. It is, nevertheless, a kind of taken-for-granted notion that when we utter statements, we are certain about what we say. If, however, a non-Quichua-speaking person attempted to express the sentence in example 5 with the most literal possible translational equivalent, it would have to include the notion of speaker perspective, and might be rendered as the following rather awkward, example:

6. From my perspective, Pedro left.

With the phrase “from my perspective,” absolute certainty seems suspended, somehow, as if the speaker is acknowledging that there could be other possibilities. We are not claiming that Quichua people who make statements with -mi are consciously aware of any lack of certainty. However, we do believe that the necessity of clarifying a perspective from which a statement is made, does at least pave the way for a certain open-endedness in what passes for knowledge.

The following example, however, offers an additional variation, which makes the perspectivezizing function of evidential -mi more salient through its contrast with another evidential suffix -shi. Here, a speaker states that Pedro left, but in this instance, the speaker is not claiming to be the source of this knowledge:

7. Pedroshi rira.

Pedro left.

In typical discourse contexts from everyday life, a speaker uttering such a -shi-suffixed statement will often add qualifying remarks such as: “Uncle Salva said he was going” or “Somebody told me he was leaving this morning,” which would clarify where the claim originated.

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One need only consider Grice’s cooperative principle called the Maxim of Quality, which specifies the need to say what is true and to only make claims backed by evidence, to appreciate the taken-for-granted-ness of certainty in Standard Average European speaking cultures.
Despite the fact that a -shi-suffixed statement indicates that someone else's knowledge underlies the assertion, there is not necessarily any implication that the statement is unreliable. Numerous examples of evidential -shi used when speakers are unmistakably certain about what they say exist (Nuckolls, 2018).

If, however, a translational equivalent of this statement were attempted in English, it might be represented as any of the following variations: Apparently it was Pedro who left; It is alleged that Pedro was the one who left; or Pedro has, according to someone, left, all of which create implications of uncertainty for speakers of English, even though, as we just stated, they are not necessarily uncertain for Quichua speakers.

We turn now to a third member of the evidential set of suffixes that Quichua speakers may employ when they want to specify an unknown perspective. This third evidential marker does imply a lack of certainty, and may therefore be considered conjectural. When a speaker states something that is not grounded either in that speaker's or anyone else's perspective, the evidential -cha is used.

The following example from a narrative about a vengeance killing features a speculative question uttered by a woman who wonders whether a bird's chirping is, in fact, foretelling her husband's imminent death:


"To you perhaps, it says chi chi chi chi chi chi chi chi chi chi," saying (according to someone) she said.

To contextualize this example, it is necessary to explain that according to several speakers consulted by Nuckolls and Swanson, this particular bird, a squirrel cuckoo, is believed to have communicative habits that involve warning people of imminent disasters, and it is also said to be able to verify the authenticity of what people say, depending on the qualities of its chirping.5

The wife of the man who was about to die was said to have been the first person to notice the bird's chirping right outside their house, and she is described in the narrative as testing various possibilities out on the bird, to gauge its reaction, so that she could understand the kind of disaster it was trying to warn her about.

Another, somewhat less dramatic, example of conjectural -cha is found in a description of a person's puzzled reaction to a sound:

9. Nuka chaki kaypi, imaycha dzararárarararárararárarará

piñarig man ña.

My foot (is) here, (and then) somewhere-ever (is heard)
dzararárararárararárarará (as it) anger.

5 Swanson interviewed a man who stated that the chikwan bird may also trick hunters by discouraging them with its calls into thinking there is no meat nearby, when in fact there is. The interview may be viewed at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rBWtgWwLNg.
The speaker uses -cha in this example because she is uncertain about what the sound was and she is also uncertain about where it came from. In other words, her perspective on its origin and whereabouts was uncertain.

The evidential system of Quichua creates an open-endedness in people's assertion-making habits. Speakers are careful to clarify the sources of their statements not because they wish to be empirically accountable to objective facts that are verified by means of evidence, but rather because there is a cultural preference for contextualizing statements within a perspective. Although being empirically objective and carefully framing a statement's perspective may at times seem to converge with the same end result, namely, a statement that is careful about making any claims at all, the underlying motivations are different.

Speakers wishing to be careful about making only empirically based claims would have to be concerned with an abstract, decontextualized notion of truth. In Amazonian Quichua culture, by contrast, there is a moral and aesthetic preference for articulating the perspective from which a statement is made. This perspectivism is not only part of human communication, it is part of Quichua peoples' animistic cosmology, which allows for the possibility that all life is capable of articulating a perspective.

However, there does not seem to be much interest on the part of Quichua speakers in articulating a synthesis of multiple perspectives to arrive at a final, coherent picture. Instead, people are anxious to avoid a kind of moral presumptuousness, which is how speaking about others' actions and words, without properly contextualized knowledge, is interpreted. Perspectivism for Quichua speakers, then, seems motivated, in part, by a kind of negative politeness (Brown & Levinson, 1987), in that speakers do not wish to impose on others by presuming to speak for them.

The concept of negative politeness does not fully explain things, however, since it is based on an individualized notion of selfhood. The Quichua self is more of a relational self than an individualistic one. A relational self is one that is situated in one's family group or ayllu. There is a professed ideal for speaking well alli rimana, which involves speaking relationally, and which, for Quichua speakers, means speaking perspectival. Someone who does not speak from an acknowledged perspective is a killa, “useless,” a llla “liar,” or a lala “exaggerator.” Because strength is relational and relational speech is perspectival, speaking perspectival is a key quality of being a sinchi runa, “strong man,” or sinshi warmi, “strong woman.” Speaking relationally is considered empowering because it forges bonds of interconnectedness with others.

The inclination to speak perspectival is also related to the concept of “warrant for knowledge” discussed by Hanks (2014, p. 6) and is relevant as well in work on evidentiality by Michael (2014), Mushin (2014), and Sidnell (2014). In other words, claims to knowledge have to be balanced by a person's rights to express that knowledge.

Having shown how the grammar of Quichua encodes perspective, which is highly valued over decontextualized certainty, we turn in the next section to a discussion of discourse practices, which also encourage speakers to attend to perspective by representing what others say.
Represented discourse and perspective in Quichua

A major difference between Quichua and a Standard Average European language like English is in the way discourse is represented. First of all, Quichua is impoverished with respect to illocutionary verbs. Verbs such as "to warn," "to announce," "to proclaim," "to threaten," "to reassure," and "to insist," are just a sample of the many illocutionary speech act verbs that populate everyday English language discourse.

What makes them illocutionary verbs is that they are used to report a locution, or an act of speaking, but they can be used without specifying the actual words that were said. For example, it would be possible for an English speaker to say the following hypothetical sentence without specifying anything else about the words actually spoken:

10. John explained how to grab the turtle with both hands.

By contrast, a Quichua-speaking person, having no comparable verb "explain," would have to use one of the very few verbs for speech acts that their language has, and then represent the words that constituted the explanation:

11. Saying "grab the turtle with both hands" John said.

The difference between example sentences 10 and 11 is that sentence 10 uses the illocutionary verb "explain," while sentence 11 illustrates the act of explaining with represented discourse. Another difference between them is that the hypothetical sentence 10 seems quite acceptable to Standard Average European speakers, while sentence 11 sounds redundant, but would be perfectly acceptable to Quichua speakers.

The redundancy of sentence 11 is necessary because illocutionary verbs in Quichua constitute an extremely small group. They include nina, "to say," which is often used to frame quoted speech; rimana, "to speak, tell," which simply states that speaking took place, but not necessarily anything about the content of what was spoken; kaparina, "to shout," and kaminina, "to insult."

Paradoxically, despite the paucity of illocutionary speech act verbs in their language, Quichua-speaking people use lots of represented discourse in their narratives of personal experience, traditional stories, gossip, and accounts of all kinds of happenings.

In the following example, the narrator, Luisa Cadena, relates an experience of her husband’s and another man he was with. Although Luisa was not present at this happening, she represents the words that were spoken, as reported by her husband:

12. Chiga "chi kucha sapii shayarigrishun" nisha
    riushkawna payna.

    So then, saying “let’s go park (the canoe) at the other end of that pond,”
    they went, those guys.

* This is only a list of primary illocutionary verbs, or verbs that must be accompanied by speech, we have not included secondary illocutionary verbs such as asina, "to laugh" and wakana, "to cry," which may or may not be accompanied by speech. The verb kunana, "to advise," might also be included in the list of primary illocutionary verbs, with the caveat that it is undoubtedly borrowed from Spanish aconsejar, "to counsel."
Rather than simply reporting that the men decided to cross the pond, the narrator tells us about their verbally articulated decision to cross the pond. This is an example of how reported speech functions to move the narrative forward by having the main narrative protagonists announce what they intend to do, especially when significant happenings are about to unfold. As it happens, the crossing of this pond becomes extremely significant because the men realize, while crossing it, that a dark shape lying at the bottom of the pond, which they had thought was simply a rotted log, was in fact an anaconda.

In the next example, from a different narrative, we see how reported discourse is used to answer a question. Luisa Cadena was relating an encounter with a large boa when Janis Nuckolls asked her about what type of boa it was:

13. JN: Ima sami amaruncha ara?
What type of boa, perhaps, was it?

LC: Mashti payna nishpaga lomo amarunshi an ninawra.
Um, saying “It’s a manioc boa” they said (what it was).

Rather than answering the question with a simple response, such as It was a manioc boa, Luisa tells Nuckolls what other people said about the type of boa it was. Moreover, her response represents her knowledge of the boa in terms of words that are carefully phrased to indicate, with evidential -shi, that the assertion about the boa’s identity is made from the perspective of other people.

A final type of reported speech clarifies its significance as more than a report of words that might have been said. The following example consists of reported speech that represents inner thoughts and musings. This example is from the same narrative as example 12, and concerns the actual crossing of the pond by the two men mentioned earlier. While they cross, they notice what they think is a rotted tree trunk lying at the bottom of the pond, not realizing that it is an anaconda:

14. Rikukpiga kasna chuyayga yanang! Kaspi pulu,
Ruku chari ismu kaspi ruku sirium yaranchishi nira.
Looking into the clear water, and seeing a blackness, and thinking “it’s a piece of a big tree perhaps, a rotted big old tree is lying there, we think” he said.

An additional, and very interesting feature of reported discourse for Quichua speakers is that even nonhumans may be represented as articulating human discourse in their thoughts. This is evident in the next example of a jaguar who is represented as thinking, with articulate speech, that the stick he is about to bite into is a person:

15. Payga “runatan kanini” nishashi kaniura chi kaspita.
And as for him, he’s thinking “I’m biting into a person” as he was (about to) bite that stick.

Represented discourse is another type of data that supports our claims for the necessity of perspective, because Quichua discourse is full of it. The link between perspectiveizing
one's knowledge and reporting or representing others' speech is this: If a person's motives are assumed to be known and then described, there is a danger of misrepresentation. If a person's words or thoughts are represented, however, then that person is being allowed to articulate their own perspective.

**Discourse devices for uncertainty: self-directed questions, echo questions, and hedges**

We have so far argued that Quichua's grammatical system of evidentiality creates an open-endedness in peoples' assertion-making habits. This open-endedness means that when people make assertions, they have a kind of escape hatch from airtight certainty. This escape hatch consists of the perspective that is encoded in evidentiality, as that of the speaker, or that of an "other," or that of an unknown source. Perspective is also manifested in represented discourse.

For Quichua speakers, the existence of multiple perspectives does not seem to compel people to search for a final coherent picture. Insofar as they are disinterested in doing this, we believe, they exhibit a lack of discomfort with uncertainty. In the next subsection, we turn to discourse devices that indicate not only a lack of discomfort with uncertainty, but which seem to indicate an embracing of uncertainty.

**Self-directed questions**

The first device is what we call the self-directed question. Self-directed questions occur in narratives, conversations, arguments, and discussions of all kinds. They may occur when someone is in a genuine state of not knowing. In the following example, a man who is about to be attacked by a boa wonders to himself about why his dog is barking so energetically. The narrator draws out this state of not knowing by portraying the man who is about to be attacked as asking himself a series of questions:

16. \( \text{imay rikushata kaparin? imatashi kaparin? Tsawatachu an?} \)
\( \text{Palochu an? ima? amarunchu an? payga nisha rikuushka.} \)
\[ \text{"What is it that he's seeing and barking at? What is he barking at? Is it a tortoise? Is it a snake? Is it an anaconda?" he stared, while wondering to himself.} \]

Self-directed questions may also be used as rhetorical devices for emphasis. In such cases, narrators will emphasize a great extent of duration or quantity by means of such questions. The following example emphasizes extreme temporal duration, by describing the slowness of a sloth's movements through gestures, intonation, and a self-directed question:

17. \( \text{Lakilla sikanga makiwang, making pay chari, ima pundzha} \)
\( \text{paktangay?} \)
\[ \text{Pitifully, slowly, he will climb upwards with his hands, with his hands, he will, and on what day might he get there?} \]
The narrator emphasizes the temporal lengthiness of the sloth's movements by asking herself about the number of days it might take the sloth to reach the top of a tree. The implication is that it is difficult to know for sure, because it would take too long to find out.

In the next example, from a different narrative, the narrator reports self-directed questions used by speakers who were trying to impress upon her the dangers of an anaconda in the area. The speech report uses several self-directed questions to emphasize a numerical lack of certainty:

    Masnata chari miku? Masnabalsata? ninawra
    Masnrunata chari miku kayipi? ninawra

So then they said “Well now, here lies a very angry anaconda. How many perhaps has it eaten? How many balsa [rafts has it swallowed]?” they said. “How many people, perhaps, has it eaten here?” they said.

Self-directed questions are often phrased as unanswerable questions. Their unanswerability lends itself to a variety of rhetorical purposes involving exaggeration and hyperbole, as well as the building of suspense. Yet, they are more than simply exaggerative. We believe that they display a speaker's lack of certainty as legitimate and respectable. In the next subsection, we discuss a discourse form which may be unique to Amazonian Quichua speakers, and which, like self-directed questions, openly acknowledges uncertainty.

The echo question

Amazonian Quichua speakers have a unique form of discourse that has never been discussed in the linguistic literature on questions. They use a type of echo question, which is quite different from the kinds of echo questions that receive attention from linguists. Typical echo questions scrutinized by linguists are usually uttered for the purpose of calling into question some aspect of what has just been said by another speaker, whether it is presuppositional or referential content.

For example, a question such as “What kind of dessert did you bring?” addressed to someone who did not understand that he or she had been invited to a potluck dinner, might be answered with a response such as “What kind of dessert did I bring? I didn’t even know that I was supposed to bring anything!” The response repeats or echoes the
question in order to challenge the presupposition that the listener knew that he or she was supposed to bring something to the dinner.

Other types of echo questions might instead repeat all or part of some utterance for the purpose of clarifying referential content, as happens in the example provided by Noh (2008, p. 1) where one speaker states: "Columbus discovered America in 1492," and another responds with: "Columbus discovered America WHEN?".

What is unique about Amazonian Quichua echo questions is that they are not used for clarification. Instead, they are used when the answer to a question is not known. When speakers use them, therefore, they seem to be adopting the question itself as if it was their own.

In the first example of such a question, Nuckolls asked for clarification during the telling of a narrative that described an encounter with a type of boa, the manioc boa or *lomo amarum*. The narrator was describing how she observed its body to be bulging out because of having consumed a large animal. When she was about to give what it ate, she echoed the question, and also embellished it, as if she also wanted to know the answer:

19. JN: imata mikura?
   *What did he eat?*

   LC: chiga pay imata hapisha mikuray, saksasha? Mana yacharan
   *Well, what did he grab and eat, filling himself with? I don't know!*

The next example of an echo question occurred during a description of shamanic training practices. The narrator described how a novice in training would have smoke blown over him from a wad of burning tobacco by a practicing shaman. Then the shaman would take something from his own mouth and put it in the mouth of the young boy. At that point, the narrator was asked about what was put into the boy's mouth:

20. JN: Imata churanawn?
   *What do they put in?*

   *What do they put in? I don't know either.*

Space does not permit a detailed discussion of the intonation of Quichua echo questions, which is important for communicating a person's sincere state of not knowing. Moreover, many echo questions are preceded by the discourse-marking intonational phrase *hm hm*, which is uttered with a low intonation on the first *hm* and a high intonation on the second. This discourse device seems to add a nuance of wonder, which may be real or feigned, on the part of the person who professes not to know.

In other words, for a Quichua speaker, it may not be enough to simply adopt another person’s question by repeating it as if it were their own. A speaker might also feel compelled

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* Echo questions are not always sincere expressions of uncertainty or perplexity. Their articulated uncertainty may be an evasive maneuver on the part of a speaker wishing to conceal his or her actual knowledge for strategic reasons.
to perform their empathy about not knowing, by uttering *hmn hm*, which communicates an idea of one's own wonder and therefore implies a sincere desire to answer the other person's question.

We interpret echo questions as devices for the expression of uncertainty, which function to ratify another person's question as legitimate. The use of an echo question is, then, a courtesy extended to someone whose question cannot be answered. By echoing that person's question, an interlocutor acknowledges its value, which adds to the positive face needs of the person who asked the question. Echo questions, then, help to maintain the conviviality of conversational culture by putting two interlocutors on the same uncertain footing.

We believe that echo questions are also linked with a cultural predisposition to value and even at times enjoy being in a state of not knowing because it leads to new discoveries. Amazonian Quichua speakers we are acquainted with are often unperturbed by their uncertainties and amused by our desire to be certain. Many of their personal experience tellings reveal an affect of enjoyment about being surprised by new discoveries.

The adverbial hedge *chari*

We end our treatment of uncertainty with a brief discussion of an extremely common hedging device used by Amazonian Quichua-speaking people. The adverb *chari*, which may be translated as "perhaps," "possibly," or "maybe," is found throughout narratives and conversations of all kinds. It accentuates the uncertainty of questions, and allows speakers who are making statements to hedge them with appropriate disclaimers. Unlike the evidential enclitic "-cha," which focuses the uncertainty on a targeted lexical item, *chari* has a scope that is wider. It usually functions as an adverb which modifies a verb or verb phrase.

The following example features *chari* in a speculative statement about a type of boa that is believed to be capable of killing something too big to digest. In this story, the narrator speculates that if this particular boa had succeeded in killing a man it had attacked, it would not have been able to swallow or digest its victim, and may have just left the man after killing him:


Well then killing him, perhaps, and not in any way being able to swallow him, leaving him there, it would just go.

The next example features *chari* in a speculative statement about how the narrator's husband might not be alive at the moment the narrative was told because of almost drowning in a boating mishap years earlier:

22. Nuka kusa unay wãñushkama, mana chari kaskha *pari*shisa tiyaymachu

My husband would have been long dead; not perhaps like this appearing might he be (here now).
Not surprisingly, the disclaimative functions of chari may also be used for a variety of mitigating effects involving speakers attempting to soften the impact of an otherwise harsh statement, as in the following example, where the narrator reports her comment to her husband about a course of action that he and the men he was with should have taken:

23. Kanguna modo chari arangichi!
You all were stupid perhaps!

Pathetic certainty and emotional truth

Having focused in most of this chapter on uncertainty, we turn now to one type of truth that we have observed among Quichua speakers we know. Before embarking on our discussion of pathetic certainty, we want to point out that certainty for Runa may be based on a variety of experiences that a rational, science-based framework would not consider legitimate. Dreams are a type of experience that offers Runa a number of fairly consistent images that are believed to be relevant for actions to be taken, or not, the following day.

People say, for example, that a dream featuring a river that is cresting and very high is a warning about illness to come. If one dreams about a fish hook prickling oneself, it is considered a warning to exercise caution the next day. We have documented instances of people reporting that dreams have affected their decisions to act or to not participate in certain activities. In the example to follow, Luisa Cadena reports that after her husband had killed a poisonous snake, she resisted going to look at it because of having dreamed badly the night before:

24. Nuka mana shamushachu nirani mana shamushachu. Iridzata muskurani, anzelo chugriusha
"I will not come (to look)" I said; "I won't come (because) I dreamed badly, about being wounded on a fish hook."

Another tool for accessing certainty is the use of ayawaska, a vine belonging to the banisteriopsis species, to learn about the source of a difficulty or problem. Luisa Cadena has reported how she used ayawaska to learn about what happened to her husband when he disappeared and was presumed dead by his family, although he did eventually return after two months.

She reported seeing him during an ayawaska-induced state, looking fresh and "just like a flower," sisa shinala, which indicated to her that he was still alive. During the same experience, she also reported having seen her own deceased mother, who, by contrast, appeared ushpa, or "ashen." She explains the difference as follows:

25. Na chiga kawsag runa ña sisa shinala ñawiyuk, sisa shinala
shinhiyuk, mana wañushkaga; wañushkaga, mana chasnachu an,
ruyak, ushpa rikuringaya
And as for people who are alive, well their face and lips will appear (fresh) like a flower if they are not dead. But a dead person will not be like that. They'll appear white and ashen.
We turn now to the type of certainty that is the main focus of this subsection. This is the perspectival use of empathy to make claims about how other species think or feel. We have noticed that Runa narrators often exhibit a much greater confidence in their ability to infer what other species feel or intend than would a western biologist.

We believe that this confidence rests on a widely held cultural assumption that from within the perspective of their different bodies, animals view their lives in the same cultural and emotional way as Runa do. Thus, Runa infer what animals think, feel, or intend from what they themselves would do from within their own cultural patterns. The following example, recorded by Swanson and viewable at https://youtu.be/jL02ti3Jlw, illustrates this confidence. At the base of a tree, Luisa Cadena finds a bromeliad shoot, which she believes has recently been chewed and dropped by a sloth resting invisibly in the canopy. From this one clue, she breaks into a spontaneous tribute to the sloth, full of humor and sympathy. Key to her tribute is an implicit claim that despite how different the sloth may look, it experiences its food culturally just as we do. In describing the sloth’s food, she uses the word yuyu—a term used almost exclusively for greens prepared and consumed by humans.

(1) Pugri indilama, kaygama mukushka rikil payba rasun kiruwa
Poor sloth! It chewed up to here. Look! With its dull teeth!

(2) Kunan away tiawm. Puñunmi payga. Aa aa. Mm mm. L’akila pay...
Now she is up there sleeping. Hmm mmm. Sweetly.

(3) Riki pay mukushkata.
Look what she chewed!

(4) Rikil! Tiay lapi sakishka.
Look how she left it squeezed out tightly!

(5) L’akiya mikun pugri payga
How cute! It eats poor thing.

(6) Pay yuyuwa rasha mikun pay yuyusha.
It makes its greens and eats the greens that it gathered.

(7) Payba yuyu man.
These are its greens.

(8) Pay kunan laqilla puñun pugriga, l’akila mikushkaman,
It is sweetly sleeping now. Poor thing. Sweetly having eaten,

(9) Awamami tiawm payga, payba mikuna chagra ladupi mmm, paywa chagra payba chagra kay
It is up there beside its food garden chagra (manioc garden). Its garden.
This is its garden.

The Quichua pronouns in this passage (pay and the possessive paywa) can mean “he,” “she,” or “it” and so are ambiguous as to animacy and gender. Since a sloth is not human, we initially translate the pronoun as “it.” However, by claiming that the sloth experiences the bromeliads culturally in preparing its “greens,” Luisa intensifies the humanness or animacy hidden in its shaggy body. The word yuyu refers to greens that humans eat, such as salads or vegetables. Hence, when she says that the bromeliads are its yuyu, she means
that from the sloth's perspective the bromeliads are experienced as a humanlike salad
cuisine. The use of verbs for “making greens (yuyuwata rashat)" or "gathering greens
(yuyusha)" suggests a humanlike process of food preparation, as opposed to simple
animal grazing. When Luisa further says that the sloth views the arboreal field of bromeli-
ads as its manioc garden (a highly female space), she evokes the familiar image of a Runa
chagra-owning woman hidden in the sloth's body. In using the words tiny llapi sakishka
("left squeezed out tightly"), she suggests that the moral quality of the sloth woman for
squeezing manioc mash in this way is a culturally recognized sign of a woman who is
not lazy. All of this shifts the meaning of pay from "it" to "she": the sloth is an admirable
woman who prepares her greens and tends her manioc garden in a culturally recognized
pattern.

A few days later, Luisa picked up another bromeliad shoot under the same tree and
made further observations about the sloth. In translating this passage, we will use the
pronoun "she" to suggest that Luisa is evoking a humanlike manioc gardener https://youtu.
be/F1TS0gPYCZo:

(1) L:Manal Pobrega chara tiyawnmi riki! Pay mushuk mikushkata.
No, the poor thing is still around. Look! (Here is) what she's just eaten.

(2) Charak chari chagra mana tukuriun-ya.
Maybe the chagra has not run out yet.

Here, Luisa appears to assume that the sloth will not leave the tree until her chagra is
finished (even though a sloth could presumably wander through the canopy at will, leaving
some bromeliads un eaten). She goes on to suggest how the sloth will harvest her garden
and what she will do when it is finished:

(3) Pay chagray tiyaringa aysanga mikungau, aysangaikungau.
She will sit in her chagra pulling up and eating, pulling up and eating.

(4) Kutillata sapi raykun, rin maskangawa, mikungawa, shuk chagrata mushuk
chagra.
(When it is finished) She goes down to the base of the tree again. She goes
to search for another chagra, a new chagra.

When asked where the sloth would go, Luisa's answer was clear:

where is she going to go search. poor thing? She will go to the place she
knows, her chagra.

In this passage, Luisa predicts what the sloth will do with a great deal of certainty, even
though she will never see this particular sloth. Although some of what she says could be
known from observation of other sloths, we argue that this knowledge is augmented by
empathic analogy to Luisa's own perspective as an elderly manioc gardener. If the sloth is a
chagra mama (manioc gardener), a Quichua audience would expect her to follow certain
admired patterns of behavior. For example the claim that the sloth "will sit in her chagra
pulling up and eating, pulling up and eating” suggests that, like a proper chagra mama, she harvests her garden systematically, moving slowly from one side pulling up the plants and consuming them, leaving the consumed portion of the garden clean until the whole garden is finished. By contrast, to haphazardly pull up plants is shuwa kwinta aysana, to harvest like a robber. Because a chagra mama treats the plants in her garden as her children, she never abandons the garden until it is finished. The sloth follows this same pattern of behavior. It is also likely that it is this fidelity to the chagra that is referred to when Luisa says that the sloth is “asleep beside her chagra.” A further cultural inference from manioc gardener behavior occurs when Luisa says that the sloth will go to her “new garden” (nushuk chagra), “a place that she knows” and that when she gets there she will stay. An experienced chagra mama usually has a new garden prepared to go into production by the time the old one is finished, and she will often move her family to the new location.

To complete the picture, Luisa draws on one further trope to enhance the pathos of the sloth: old age. Because of their very slow movements and shaggy whitish hair, sloths are widely represented as elderly people in Quichua/Quaru tradition. As such, they are deserving of the respect and empathy one would show to an elderly person. This lends an element of humor and pathos to Luisa’s portrait. Luisa envisions the sloth not only as a chagra mama but as an elderly chagra mama like herself.

Imagine the predicament of a respected but elderly grandmother who has to tend her chagra in the top of a giant tree. Like any grandmother, she faithfully tend her chagras until it is finished. But then she has to get down! This is a situation many younger people will recognize because they have helped their own grandmothers climb down steps from their traditional Quichua raised houses when these ladies insist on going to their chagras despite old age. But what if they were alone high up in a tree? This is the situation Luisa envisions when she describes what the old sloth woman will do when she finishes her garden.

(6) Na win tukuchisha, Mamaa! Mamaaaa! Mamaaa! wakanga, shuk puriu uyakpi. Then finishing it all up, someone walking by will hear her going “Mamaa! Mamaaaa! Mamaaa!”

(7) Chiga pay chagra tukurikpi. That means her chagra is finished ...

(8) Tukurikpi lakilla wakan payga raykunata mana ushasha. She cries pitifully when it is finished because she can’t climb down.

The idea that an inherently arboreal creature like a sloth should be afraid to climb down a tree would likely encounter skepticism from a biologist, who might likely attribute some more evolutionary logic such as a mating call to the sloth’s cry.

The purpose of Luisa’s narrative, however, is to evoke empathy for the sloth by helping her audience, which includes her granddaughter, see life from the sloth’s perspective. From within its own perspective, this shaggy slow-moving creature views her bromeliads as Luisa views her own manioc garden. As such, she is deserving of our laki, pity, and respect.

As we have seen, in this process of using her own perspective to evoke how the world might look to a sloth, Luisa feels confident in making a range of statements about the
sloth's inner emotions, motives, and behavior that go beyond what could be known by observation. This is what we call pathetic truth. At the conclusion of the video, Luisa describes what seemed to her to be a brutal killing of a sloth by an acquaintance, in order to eat it.

(9) Chasnata Leticia kaspita ch'uw pitishaga, l'akilla waktakpi.
Well, like that, once, (my friend) Leticia, cutting a stick ch'uw, and mercilessly hitting him.

(10) Kay waktakpi, chi hapirik ara.
When she would hit him here, he would grab himself there.

(11) kayma waktakpi, chi hapirik ara.
When she would hit him over here, right there he would grab himself.

(12) kay waktakpi chi.
(And when she would) hit here, he'd grab himself there.

(13) Pobreta chaki-ta pakisha ña chaki, ña ch'uwuw (bends over)
The poor thing his foot breaking, then he falls forward ch'uw.

(14) chasnaaa (falls back) rawsha urmachisha.
Then making him fall back like that...

Luisa concludes by saying that she was angry with her friend for doing this, because the sloth was so pathetic and helpless. In other words, its actions had induced in her a state of Paki, which, however, was not apparently experienced by her friend.

Nevertheless, her own feeling of Paki for the sloth provides the emotional certainty she needs to conclude that she herself would not kill or eat one. The certainty of her stance is clearly evident in the words she says at 3:04 minutes, and in the intonation and facial expressions she uses to express her disapproval of her friend's actions:

(15) Wañuchin! Payga mikug ashka, ñukaga mana mikugchu ani ñindi'amata.
She killed him! She eats (them). I am not someone who eats sloths.

(16) L'akini, Paki' purik (unintelligible) mana mikugchu ani
I feel pity for them as they go about so pathetically. So I don't eat them.

Significantly, Luisa is not a vegetarian but a hunter who has killed and eaten many animals throughout her life. Her decision to not eat sloths is based on the heightened empathy she feels for this animal. Luisa's narrative examined here is not unique, but rather exemplifies what could be called a Quichua genre of empathic tributes to nature.

**Conclusion**

We have argued that despite their considerable knowledge and expertise about their complex environment, for Amazonian Quichua speakers, it is far better to admit uncertainty
than to make overly general and confident claims. This cultural value of preferring uncertainty may be understood and observed in a number of ways.

The animistic perspectivism of Amazonian Quechua speakers, evident in the cosmological structures of their mythic narratives, is also apparent in their discourse, which makes prolific use of performative evocations of nonhuman natural life through ideophones. *Runa* perspectivism bolters our claims for the value of uncertainty because of the infinite multiplicity of perspectives, which make a single, totalizing, detached truth impossible.

The evidential system of Quechua also encodes perspective, and includes two morphemes – *-mi* and –*shi*, both of which encode perspective of a self or other, and are therefore covert markers of uncertainty. The morpheme –*chuj*, which marks an uncertain perspective, is an overt marker of uncertainty.

Several discourse devices make perspectivism and uncertainty flourish, such as the abundance of reported speech. Some discourse devices for uncertainty are not unique to *Runa* culture, such as self-directed questions and hedging devices. However, the ways in which echo questions are used by Quechua speakers may be unique.

Finally, *Runa* value a type of certainty that is not recognized as legitimate by rational frameworks of knowledge. Emotional truth, based on feelings of empathy for others, including nonhumans, is a type of truth that may lead people to confidently reason about ethical matters, as was evident in the chagra narrative.

**Acknowledgments**

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Sources for our examples are either Nuckolls’ tape and transcript files or Swanson’s video interviews. Swanson’s interviews are found in the YouTube links given for specific examples within the body of the paper. Nuckolls’ tape and transcript files are archived in AILLA, the Archives of Indigenous Languages of Latin America, and may be accessed at http://ailla.utexas.org/site/welcome.html by browsing the languages, looking for Pastaza Quechua, and scrolling through the list of narrative titles, each of which has a pdf file of transcriptions:

Example 1, from Looking for a new chagra, Transcript File, p. 499.
Example 2, from Nuckolls’ Verb Portraits, Tape B, *kuchuna* “to chop” (the transcript for this example is not available in the AILLA archives).
Example 8, from The chikwan speaks, Transcript File, p. 486.
Example 9, from The ways of the manioc boa, Transcript File, p. 187.
Example 12, from How Cezar Kuhi tamed a purawá anaconda, Transcript File, p. 193.

Example 13, from The ways of the manioc boa, Transcript File, p. 187.

Example 14, from How Cezar Kuhi tamed a purawá anaconda, Transcript File, p. 193

Example 15, see Nuckolls (2010, p. 188).

Example 16, from Caught in the grip of a mud boa, Transcript File, p. 182.

Example 17, from http://youtube.com/1bj1-KFyn4o, at 41 seconds.

Example 18 from How Cezar Kuhi tamed a purawá anaconda, Transcript File, p. 191.

Example 19, from The ways of the manioc boa, Transcript File, p. 188.

Example 20, from Becoming a shaman, Transcript File, p. 26.

Example 21, from Caught in the grip of a mud boa, Transcript File, p. 180

Example 22, from from How Cezar Kuhi tamed a purawá anaconda, Transcript File, pp. 192-3.

Example 23, from Nuckolls’ Field Notes, available upon request,


Example 25, from Lost in the Forest, Transcript File, p. 230.

References


