INTRODUCTION

A goal of this pedagogical grammar is to open a door into a world of intimate meaning that knowledge of Quichua can make accessible[[1]](#footnote-1). Increasingly, foreigners do not need to learn an indigenous language for reasons of basic communication. And many native speakers of indigenous languages already know an international trade language such as Spanish or English that they can use for basic communication. Language is more than a tool for basic communication, however. It also expresses the nuances of a person’s socially and individually distinctive identity.

Every group has its inside jokes, its distinctive genres, styles, and shades of meaning that only insiders know. A language embodies the culture which makes possible the emergence of such genres, styles, and shades of meaning. It also carries within it an implicit philosophy or religious view of the world. Just as Sanskrit carries a history of Hindu thinking, Quichua carries within it a history of Andean and Amazonian thinking about the world. Because translations are only approximate when a word from one language is translated to another, there is always a remainder.

Although one can mechanically translate the Quichua past tense marker into the English tense system, one cannot so easily translate the distinctively Quichua understanding of history and past time into English notions of pastness. A good reason for studying Quichua, then, is to be able to understand this remainder, to communicate like an insider, to understand the distinctive ways that a Quichua dialect gives intimate and local shades of meaning to life. It is to understand the particular sensory flavor, the poetics, the cosmological overtones that are missed when talking to the same people in a trade language. [[2]](#footnote-2)

Quichua is not only an abstract system but a cumulative history of people who speak it and of their complex knowledge of their environment, a knowledge which is based on the belief that birds, animals, plants and water also have their *shimi* (speech) and their songs.

*Historical overview of Amazonian Quichua dialects*

Speakers of Amazonian Quichua number in the tens of thousands. Although their language is related to Highland Ecuadorian Quichua they are not migrants from the Andes nor do they share much with Andean culture. Rather, they represent diverse cultural and ethnic groups who underwent language shift to Quichua. Their memories, myths, and ancestor tales inevitably take them downriver and to the east, the direction in which their major rivers flow. Some people refer to their eastward origins with the term *sapi* which can be translated as ‘root’, ‘beginning’, and metaphorically implies ‘origin’.

By way of historical background, speakers of Peruvian Quechua began moving northward into the Ecuadorian highlands only some 50 years before the Spanish conquest. Before that time the communities in what is now Andean Ecuador spoke other languages, most likely Jivaroan in the South and Barbacoan in the north. Varieties of Quechua that spread northward with the Inca expansion included at least the *Chinchay* *Suyu* dialect of northern Peru as well as a separate administrative dialect from Cuzco (Muysken 1997:181-82.) Because it was spread northward by elites, Quichua, which is what Ecuadorian varieties of Quechua are called, was initially a high prestige language. Gradually, throughout the colonial period it became the native language of the conquered populations of Andean Ecuador. By the time of Ecuador’s independence in 1830, Highland Andean Quichua became a low-prestige language associated with servants and hacienda workers who were bought and sold with the land.

By contrast with the low status of Highland Andean Quichua, speakers of Amazonian Quichua have never been a conquered population. Although the rubber boom did have a devastating effect on the region, Amazonian Quichua speakers were never subdued by colonialism in the way that Andean Quichua were, and so they never absorbed the stigma that became attached to Highland dialects. Ethnohistorical accounts recorded by Muratorio (1991) include narratives recalling the inventive ways that Amazonian Quichua people were able to subvert attempts by rubber merchants and various government officials to corral their labor and time. Furthermore, in addition to manioc farming, they retained a lifestyle of hunting, gathering, and seasonal migration to remote areas for a much longer period of time than did their Andean counterparts, which created enormous difficulties for national-level governmental management and control.

*Pastaza-Upper Napo Quichua*

This pedagogical grammar will teach two closely related varieties of Amazonian Quichua associated with the Pastaza and Napo headwaters. These two dialects, which we will designate PQ (Pastaza Quichua) and NQ (Upper Napo Quichua) are classified as Eastern variants of Central Sierra Quichua, a Quechua IIB dialect. Quichua likely entered the Amazonian region through the Pastaza Valley, and continued further into Amazonian Ecuador through networks of river systems, including the Ansuc, Arajuno, Villano, and Curaray, which fan out toward the northeast into the Napo River as well as the Puyo, and Bobonaza Rivers that flow southeast into the Pastaza River. (see map) During the colonial period the Quichua language was likely spread down these rivers causing language shift in communities which had previously spoken Jivaroan and Zaparoan languages.



We don’t yet completely understand the different modes of transmission of Quichua into Amazonian Ecuador. Adelaar and Muysken believe it highly unlikely that there was any Quichua spoken in Amazonian Ecuador at the time of the Inca conquest. Whitten has stated that Catholic missions have had an undeniable impact on the dominance that Quichua achieved in the lowlands of Ecuador by the mid 1800’s. He also states that Quichua probably spread into the lowlands, in part, through a formative process consisting of intermarriages and alliances between Achuar and Zaparoan peoples who would adopt Quichua as a new mediating language which allowed them to be in contact with distant, highland sources of valued goods.

The speakers of Pastaza Quichua whose language provided the basis for this grammar are mostly from the Montalvo area near Ecuador’s eastern border with Peru. They were raised in small settlements such as *Puka yaku*, *Hatun yaku*, and *Volvera*, near the military base in Montalvo, which is, as of this writing, not yet accessible by roads. Our older consultants who are now in their eighties, seventies and sixties, remember growing up during a time when clothes had to be made from tree bark, and steel axes had to be purchased from traders who plied their wares as they travelled along the networks of rivers, including the Bobonaza, and especially the Pastaza, which flows into the Marañon, which in turn reaches the Amazon River itself.

Our Napo Quichua sources reside in the communities of *Venecia* and *Santu Urku* on the South Bank of the Napo. Their family histories locate them in the Ahuano area near the mouth of the Arajuno River. They also recall a time before roads were built, when they hunted with blowguns and made seasonal migrations by canoe to hunting grounds at the mouth of the *Suno* and *Wataraco* Rivers. Their grandparents made long journeys by canoe to Iquitos as well as overland treks to trade with speakers living on the Bobonaza River.

To better understand the cultural connections between PQ and NQ speakers, it is helpful to consider the work of Rafael Karsten, the first professional anthropologist to work in the region, who portrayed the culture of P/NQ speakers as ‘greater Jivaroan’ and noted as early as 1916, that the culture of indigenous people living on the Upper Napo was essentially the same as the Pastaza Quichua The term ‘greater Jivaroan’ requires some explanation. We use it here to refer to a group of loosely shared cultural traits transmitted by intermarriage and trade between Jivaroan or, as they are referred to today, Chicham-speaking groups such as the Shuar, Achuar, Shiwiar, Awajun, Wambiza as well other non-Chicham speakers living around them, such as the Shapra, Kandoshi, Andowa, Zapara, and communities that underwent Quichua-zation from these languages. These communities shared a similar material culture including the design of blowguns, houses, feather ornaments and ceramic vessels for serving chicha made of sweet manioc or peach palm. They also shared similar rituals, songs, and overlapping mythologies which were often translated across languages. Of course not all communities share these cultural traits in the same degree. Many have now been lost in Napo but they are remembered by older people and would have been obvious when Karsten carried out his research in 1916

*Historical Differences between our two dialect areas*

Despite their probable common origins in the Pastaza headwaters and high degree of mutual intelligibility, the Upper Napo and Pastaza dialects have some differences which will be explained when relevant in the actual lessons. These differences were first distinguished in the 1950s when the Wycliffe Bible translators carried out surveys on what was then generically called “Jungle Quichua” or “Quichua del Oriente” to determine the boundaries of comfortable mutual intelligibility for a written text, namely translations of the Bible. The dialect we refer to as PQ was called Bobonaza Quichua by Orr and Wrisley because the majority of its speakers resided on the Bobonaza River. The Upper Napo dialect was called Tena Quichua because the majority of its speakers were oriented toward trade with Tena, the capital of Napo Province. Despite the fact that Wycliffe planned separate editions of the Bible for the two dialects, Upper Napo and Pastaza Quichua speakers communicate with each other easily without perceiving major difficulties. These two dialects should be distinguished from a third Amazonian dialect, designated Limoncocha by Orr and Wrisley, which is spoken on the Coca River and its tributaries as well as on the Napo below the Coca. This dialect, (which is not covered in our lessons), likely entered the Amazon through the Papallacta/Quijos valley at the headwaters of the Coca and so has ties to more northern Sierra dialects.

There are a number of complex historical reasons for the differences that do exist between PQ and NQ, but attempting to address those factors is outside of our main concerns for this pedagogical grammar. We will instead, explain how our two groups of consultants differ in their backgrounds and experiences. Our Napo Quichua consultants have not had much contact with other indigenous languages although their parents and grandparents have. Our Pastaza Quichua consultants, by contrast have vivid memories involving interactions with speakers of Zapara, Shiwiar, Shuar, and Spanish. Although older PQ speakers will sometimes profess ignorance of these languages, they are often aware, not only of what other language speakers are saying, but of how to produce grammatical utterances, and even more frequently, they can sing songs in these languages.

A second major difference between the Napo and Pastaza consultants lies in the degree of cultural loss due to depopulation during the rubber boom. Many of our older NQ sources (born in 20s, 30s, and 40s) do not know the names of their grandparents because they died or were taken away when their parents were still children. This break in generational continuity contributed to significant cultural loss of traditional songs, origin stories, ceramic arts and face painting. Nevertheless the few older people who do remember these things recognize the songs sung by our PQ sources as similar to those their own grandparents once sang. To a certain degree then, the traditions still preserved by our PQ sources represent a cultural reservoir that was once more broadly shared by NQ and PQ speakers alike. We turn now to a brief discussion of first impressions made by Amazonian speakers upon early clergy and missionaries attempting to learn some of these languages.

*Some early reflections on Quichua*

*Runa Shimi*, which is the term people use to refer to their language, means the speech or voice of *runa*. Although the meaning of *runa* is complex it can be roughly glossed as ‘human beings’. Hence *runa shimi* means ‘human speech’. *Runa shimi*, or Quechua, was the language of the Inca Tawantinsuyu (the four quarters) and is currently spoken in the Andean heartland of Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia, parts of Argentina and Colombia as well as the western Amazon. With some 11,000,000 speakers, *Runa shimi* is the largest indigenous language of the Americas. In Ecuador alone, where Quechua is commonly referred to as Quichua, there are approximately 2 million speakers. Quichua is spoken in all of the Andean provinces of Ecuador (except Carchi) as well as the Amazonian provinces of Napo, Pastaza, Sucumbios, and Orellana.

Although Quichua has no genetic relation to Spanish or other IndoEuropean languages, it has shared the Andean environment with Spanish for over 500 years. A majority of Andean Spanish speaking people have ancestors who once spoke Quichua. Hence, Quichua has deeply influenced Andean Spanish. The influence of Quichua is pervasive in the pronunciation of Andean Spanish as well as in the distinctive grammar and semantics of Andean Spanish.

Writing in 1773 the Jesuit priest Bernardo Recio offered a remarkable description of the influence of Quichua on the interior of the Spanish Quiteñan home. According to Recio, Quichua was so widely used in the capital city of Quito “that not only Indians speak it, but also mestizos...and even the Spaniards but above all the women, even the *damas*. For since they suck it in with their milk and they learn it from those who nurse them, they retain it and use it so that when they go visiting or carry out their commerce they make use of it with the frankness with which here in Cataluna the ladies use their Catalan to speak amongst themselves.” Recio wrote that Kichwa “is truly and of itself a language, the root and fount of many tongues; and one might hold the opinion that it was among the sixty two of the tower of Babel”.

*First impressions of other Amazonian languages*

The indigenous languages of the Andean/Amazonian region have a preference for concrete perspective that conflicts with the often abstract vocabulary of European and Middle Eastern languages (Nuckolls and Swanson 2014). Dissonance between the concrete tendency of the native languages and the abstractions of western speech is something that has both fascinated and frustrated missionaries and visitors who have encountered native languages since earliest times. Consider the following testimony from Frank Drown.

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

What is it exactly that frustrated the Drowns? We suggest that it was the near impossibility of communicating certain types of abstraction in the Shuar language. Biblical thinking is dependent on Greek concepts like “peace” or “grace” or perfect righteousness believed to exist timelessly in the mind of God quite apart from any particular historical instance. Like Platonic forms they are abstract and free of perspective. Evidently the Drowns’ Shuar interlocutors simply refused to think or to speak in these abstract terms. The closest they would come to contemplating what the Drowns meant by the righteousness of God was to compare it to the comportment of a respected grandmother who kept her manioc garden free of weeds.

In Amazonian thinking there is a moral value attached to this concreteness of speech. Because time and space are real, and there is nothing that is not limited by spatio-temporal perspective, to speak truthfully is to speak with awareness of this perspective, articulating its limits and advantages. One may use the perspective of others (animals plants or humans) analogically but in doing so one must allow the interlocutors to imagine those perspectives. To do this is not easy. It takes discipline, strength, and skill to find the concrete analogies from nature. In Amazonia Quichua thinking a person who can speak this way is *sindzhi* (strong), and is the same kind of person who would keep a well-weeded garden patch.

Amazonian ideas of speaking well (*ali rimana*) also have an aesthetic quality. To speak beautifully is to speak with skillful analogies to nature using the sounds and movements of forest species to evoke concrete memories in the audience which in turn give rise to thought. To illustrate an early European response to this quality of speech in the Ecuadorian Amazon we turn to another early missionary Francois Pierre. Like the Drowns, Father Pierre had difficulty communicating the abstract ideas of the Gospel so he let the Zaparo curaga of the Curaray speak for him. What impressed Pierre was the eloquent way in which the Zaparo chieftain held the attention of the people by using concrete analogies from nature:

“This elder, who did not know how to read or write, this Zaparo converted from infidelity, this savage confined in the deepest part of the woods, who does not have anyone with whom he could converse about holy things, who barely sees the missionary once every two years, explains without erring, difficult truths which are often inaccessible to reason alone. He does it simply; the terms, the formula are not things that interest him: nor would he even know what the words “define” or “distinguish” mean: he sees everything materially. But it is surprising how the idea shines resplendent through the painterly colors with which he dresses it. He makes the great trees and the rivers speak, he takes examples and comparisons from the flowers, the birds, and the savage beasts which turns the idea concrete until it is visible and palpable.” (Francois Pierre. Viaje de Exploracion al Oriente Ecuatoriano (1887:83).

What is remarkable in these passages is the similarity in the experiences of the Drowns and Father Pierre. Both agree that abstractions like ‘peace’ or ‘righteousness’ have to be translated into the earthy concreteness of rivers and plants and garden patches. If speaking concretely by using the perspectives of nature corresponds to *ali rimana* there are also Quichua terms for expressing moral and aesthetic criticism of inappropriate speech. In Quichua the word *lala* is an adjective for someone who is ‘soft’. A *lala runa* is someone who cannot stick to a task--the opposite of someone who is *sindzhi* or strong. *Lalana*, the verb formed from this adjective, means to exaggerate in the sense of speaking lazily or loosely. *Lalana* is to speak without the discipline of a properly limited perspective, and acting as though one had more perspective than one has. It is the way that ‘softie’s speak.

Even more reprehensible than “lalana” is *llullana*, a word that overlaps with the English meaning of ‘to lie’. In Quichua however, an important meaning of *llullana* is the idea of deliberately speaking from a perspective that one does not have. Since there is no God’s eye view from outside time and space, any speech from an abstract perspective would fall somewhere in this moral continuum between *lalana* and *llullana*. At best it is the speech of *quillas* (lazy people) at worst it is the speech of liars.

Related to the idea that one must speak from a perspective is the idea that language is not distinctive to humans but also characterizes all aspects of nature. In Quichua the word *shimi* has a broader range than the English word ‘language’. It also means voice. A shared voice marks a collective identity, including voices of animal species. *Runa* *shimi* is often articulated by speakers wishing to enhance empathy (*llaquichina*) which creates emotional connections between those who share a common voice.

*Teaching and Learning Goals*

This grammar comes out of an ongoing collaboration between Nuckolls and Swanson at the Andes and Amazon Field School which began almost 10 years ago. Each summer we have worked with speakers from the immediate Napo Quichua area as well as Pastaza Quichua speakers originating from Montalvo, but now residing nearby, for a period of 7 weeks of intense linguistic research and language instruction. Observing interactions between speakers during targeted elicitation sessions as well as many kinds of less formal contexts has given us ample opportunities to evaluate the similarities and differences between the two dialects and to observe how their speakers interact. We have also been able to observe how similar and how distinctively Amazonian the culture of these two regions is.

What follows is a list of goals that a student may wish to achieve by studying this grammar:

1. To enable students to converse in Quichua with community members as quickly as possible and thereafter to increase language competence in contexts of practical use.

2. To introduce the vocabulary and semantic fields of Quichua meaning for the areas of professional competence most likely to be used by students preparing to work with NGOs in Quichua communities. These areas include medical Quichua, Quichua for diplomacy, environmental Quichua, Quichua cultural terminology, etc.

3. To get the student to speak like an insider who can use subtle and polite forms of communication in certain contexts, and to be able to make and respond to humorous small talk.

4. To appreciate how Quichua as a language indigenous to the Americas works as a vehicle for cultural and religious identity including exploring semantic differences between Quichua and Indo European languages such as Spanish or English.

5.To understand the social meaning of speaking Quichua in a country where

Spanish is dominant.

6.To achieve proficiency appropriate to course level in the linguistic skills required to facilitate a successful social visit to a Quichua home. These include appropriate greetings and conversation designed to build relationships upon arriving and leaving as well as skills in presenting the purpose of the visit.

7.To achieve proficiency appropriate to course level in the linguistic skills required to transcribe and translate a recorded oral text such as an origin story, a song, or a traditional narrative.

8. To achieve a level of conversational ability that will allow a linguist to conduct original research on this language by eliciting and discussing utterances with monolingual consultants, for the purpose of analyzing grammatical subsystems.

To begin studying Quichua, students may want to familiarize themselves with the following chart, which is a typical representation of sounds using linguistic principles of place and manner of articulation. This chart is followed by two tables featuring Quichua consonants and vowels and the written symbols used to represent them, as well as the equivalent sounds in English.

*The sounds of Quichua*

*International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) consonants and vowels of Pastaza and Napo Quichua*

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|  |  |  | Bilabial | | Dental | | Alveolar | | Alveolo-palatal | | Palatal | | Velar | | Glottal |
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| Stops | |  | p | b | t | d |  |  |  |  |  |  | k | g |  |
| Labialized Stops | | | |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | kʷ |  |  |
| Palatalized Stops | | | | \*pʲ |  | \*tʲ |  |  |  |  |  |  | \*kʲ |  |  |
| Fricatives | | |  |  |  |  | s | \*z~dz | ɕ |  |  |  |  |  | h~Ɂ |
| Affricates | | |  |  |  |  | \*ʦ |  | ʨ | [ʥ] | |  |  |  |  |
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| Nasals | |  |  | m [m̩] | |  |  | n [ŋ] [n̩] | |  |  | ɲ |  |  |  |
| Laterals | |  |  |  |  |  |  | ɫ |  |  |  | ʎ |  |  |  |
| Taps | |  |  |  |  |  |  | ɾ |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Glides | |  |  | w [β] | |  |  |  |  |  |  | j |  |  |  |
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| High | i [ɪ] |  | u [ʊ] | |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
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| Low |  | a [ə] | |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
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| [ ] | Allophone | | |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| ~ | Free variant | | | |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| \* | Marginal sound | | | | |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

*Guide to pronunciation and spelling*

The following chart displays the IPA linguistic symbol in brackets [ ] as well as the equivalent written symbol in italics, to be used for representing all Quichua words:

(Table 1) Consonants

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| IPA and written symbols | Pronunciation | Quichua example words |
| [p] *p* | English *p* in *pat* | *pakana* ‘to hide’ |
| [b] *b* | English *b* in *but* | *bugyu* ‘freshwater dolphin’ |
| [t] *t* | More interdental than English alveolar *t* | *tunshi* ‘type of bird’ |
| [d] *d* | More interdental than English alveolar *d* | *dawa* ‘type of bird’ |
| [k] *k* | English *c* in *cat* | *kuti* ‘again’ |
| [g] *g* | English *g* in *goat* | -*guna* ‘plural suffix’ |
| [kw] *kw* | English *qu* in *quick* | *Kwankiri* ‘name of a lake’ |
| [pj] *py* | English *p* pronounced with an immediately following *y* as in *puny* | *pyulla* ‘mold’ |
| [tj] *ty* | English *t* pronounced with an immediately following *y* as in *tiara* | *tyukana* ‘to spit’ |
| [kj] *ky* | English *k* pronounced with an immediately following *y* as is the -cu- in *accuse* | *mikya* ‘aunt’ |
| [s] *s* | English *s* as in *sun* | *samana* ‘to breathe’ |
| [z]~[dz] *dz, z* | The *dz* sound as in English *heads* is unstable and easily loses the *d*, becoming simply *z* | *(d)zambulina* ‘to immerse under water’ |
| [ɕ] *sh* | English *sh* as in *she* | *shamuna* ‘to come’ |
| [h]~[Ɂ] *h* | Word-initial h is often dropped, and may be replaced with a glottal stop, especially before vowels. | *hapina* ‘to take, grab hold’ > *apina* |
| [ts] *ts* | English ts as in *lets* | *tsaka* ‘bumpy’ |
| [ʨ] *ch* | English *ch* as in *church* | *chay* ‘that’ |
| [ʥ] *dzh* | English *j*, *dg* as in *judge* | *mandzhana* ‘to be afraid of something’ |
| [m] *m* | English *m* as in *mother* | *mutyu* ‘cut off’ |
| [m̩] *m̩* | English *um*, as in negative ‘*um um’* | *mbwi* ‘type of frog’ |
| [n] *n* | More interdental than English alveolar n | *nanana* ‘to hurt, feel pain’ |
| [ŋ] *ng* | Word final *n* is usually pronounced as *ng* in English *sing* | *polang* ‘to emerge from underwater to the surface’ |
| [ɲ] *ñ* | English *ny* words derived from Spanish ñ as *canyon* | *ñaña* ‘sister of female’ |
| [ɫ] *l* | English ‘dark’ l’s or velar l’s, as in *call*, *dull*, *role* | *lalana* ‘to exaggerate’ |
| [ʎ] *ll* | Said as if an l and y are simultaneously pronounced: *ly* | *llullana* ‘to lie’ |
| [ɾ] *r* | Spanish *r* in *perro* | *rikuna* ‘to see’ |
| [w] *w* | English *w* in *want* | wawa ‘baby’ |
| [β] *w* | A more fricativized version of a *w*, occurring before the *i* vowel | *wiwilang* ‘plant based soap’ |
| [j] *y* | English *yet* | *yaya* ‘father’ |

(Table 2) Vowels

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| [i ] *i* | English *ee* in *beet* and *i* in *bit* | *rimana* ‘to speak’ |
| [u] *u* | English *oo* in *boot* | *ruku* ‘old’ |
| [a] *a* | English *a* in *ah ha* | *maki* ‘hand’ |
| [o] *o* | Spanish *ocho* | *polo* ‘a puncture or piercing’ |
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1. Ecuadorian Quichua is now officially written as Kichwa in materials produced by the Ecuadorian Ministry of Education. In that context the term Kichwa generally refers to the standardized Kichwa Unificado. We retain the older spelling Quichua both because of its long history of use and because materials written in the Pastaza and Napo dialects have traditionally used the spelling “Quichua.” [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The reason foreigners learn Quichua should also be distinguished from the reasons Quichua children study Quichua in school. These children already know the language of local identity and are learning a unified Quichua for reasons of Pan-Andean identity. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)