

ETYMOLOGY OF QUECHUA *kay*

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All varieties of Quechua contain a set¹ of words which have a deictic meaning. This semantic property appears to warrant grouping them into a unique lexical class (or at least into a subclass of the overarching substantive class).² One such word is *kay*, which is often glossed as ‘this’ and is described as a proximal demonstrative; *kay* denotes something which is near the speaker or something with which he or she is familiar. Yet *kay* is a complex word and, despite this deictic meaning, it belongs to the same lexical class as a number of other words which lack such a contextual meaning. As I will show, *kay* is bimorphemic, consisting of the verb stem *ka-* ‘to be, exist’ and the substantivizing suffix *-y*; a more accurate gloss, therefore, is ‘existing’ or ‘existence.’ When it modifies another substantive, *kay* designates said substantive as a part of the speaker’s existence, hence its deictic properties.

Several of the linguistic features of Quechua—a family of closely-related languages spoken by roughly nine million people primarily in the Andes—make it of interest to linguists and peculiar to outsiders. For instance, Quechua has a small vowel inventory consisting of only three vowel phonemes (/i/, /u/, and /a/). Conversely, some varieties, including Cusco Quechua, have a large consonant inventory that contains plain, aspirated, and ejective obstruent phonemes (e.g. /q/, /qʰ/, and /q' /). Evidential affixes, which are unheard of to most westerners, mark sentences to show the source of the speaker’s information or his certainty about the statement he has made. In the following examples from Huallaga Quechua, the direct evidential suffix *-mi* indicates that the speaker is convinced of what he says (1), while the indirect evidential suffix *-shi* indicates that the speaker has obtained this information through hearsay (2) (Weber, 1989, p.420-421):

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|---|---------------|------------|
| 1) Noqa- mi | chaya-:-man | aywa-r-qa |
| 1-DIR | arrive-1-COND | go-ADV-TOP |
| ‘(I assert that) I would make it if I were to go.’ | | |
| 2) Noqa- shi | chaya-:-man | aywa-r-qa |
| 1-IND | arrive-1-COND | go-ADV-TOP |
| ‘(It is said that) I should make it if I were to go.’ | | |

Furthermore, a number of linguists, including Schachter (1985, p.17-18), Lefebvre and Muysken (1988, p.27-28), and Weber (1989, p.35-36),³ have used morpho-syntactic evidence to argue that Quechua does not distinguish between nouns, adjectives, numbers, or demonstratives. Instead, what we might consider members of separate lexical classes all belong to one class called

¹ Some varieties, such as Huallaga Quechua, contain two sets of deictic expressions. One set (including *kay* ‘this,’ *chay* ‘that,’ and *taqay* ‘that over there’) refers to something based on its proximity to the speaker or hearer or on their knowledge of it, while the other set (including *ura* ‘below/lower,’ *hana* ‘above/upper,’ and *washa* ‘roughly at the same altitude’) refers to something based on its altitude in relation to the point of speech (Weber, 1989).

² As I explain below, Quechua does not distinguish between what we might differentiate as “nouns,” “adjectives,” “numbers,” and “demonstratives.” Rather, all such words belong to one lexical class, called “substantives,” and have identical morpho-syntactic properties.

³ Based on the semantic properties of words (e.g. whether they refer to a concrete entity or to a characteristic), earlier grammarians, such as de Santo Tomás (1560), assumed that Quechua, like European languages, must distinguish between nouns and adjectives. More recently, Floyd (2011) has used other morpho-syntactic evidence (although much of his evidence appears to be influenced by semantic features) to argue that Quechua does in fact distinguish between nouns and adjectives.

“substantives” and have identical morpho-syntactic properties.⁴ For instance, what we might consider nouns, adjectives, numbers, and demonstratives all can:

- serve as the subject of a sentence
- serve as the object of a verb
- take the same formal marking (e.g. case suffixes), and
- modify another substantive by entering into the same syntactic structure.

To modify one substantive (X), a speaker of Quechua can place another substantive (Y) immediately before it. This produces the meaning “X with the properties of Y.” The following examples illustrate how, again what we might differentiate as nouns, adjectives, numbers, and demonstratives, enter into the same syntactic structure to modify another substantive. Placed before *wasi* ‘house,’ *yachay* ‘learning’ produces *yachay wasi* ‘school’ (3); *wasi* produces *wasi wasi* ‘village’ (4); *hatun* ‘big’ produces *hatun wasi* ‘big house’ (5); *huk* ‘one’ produces *huk wasi* ‘a house’ (6); and *kay* ‘this’ produces *kay wasi* ‘this house’ (7):

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|----|----------------|---|
| 3) | <i>yacha-y</i> | <i>wasi</i> |
| | learn-INF | house |
| | ‘school’ | lit. ‘house of learning’ |
| 4) | <i>wasi</i> | <i>wasi</i> |
| | house | house |
| | ‘village’ | lit. ‘house of houses’ |
| 5) | <i>hatun</i> | <i>wasi</i> |
| | big | house |
| | ‘big house’ | lit. ‘house with the property of bigness’ |
| 6) | <i>huk</i> | <i>wasi</i> |
| | one | house |
| | ‘a house’ | lit. ‘house with the property of oneness’ |
| 7) | <i>kay</i> | <i>wasi</i> |
| | this | house |
| | ‘this house’ | |

Example (7), *kay wasi*, seems rather peculiar. Unlike examples (3-6), we cannot translate the modification performed by the modifying term in (7) *kay* ‘this’ as ‘of Y’ or ‘with the property of Y-ness.’ Semantically, *kay* (and other “demonstratives” like *chay* ‘that’ and *haqay* ‘yon’)⁵ appears as though it might belong to a separate class of deictic expressions whose members, by coincidence alone, modify substantives in a way identical to that in which substantives modify other substantives (i.e. by immediately preceding them). Other morpho-syntactic similarities suggest that *kay* is a substantive, but the etymology of *kay* which I propose confirms that it belongs to the same class as other substantives, especially *yachay* ‘learning’ in (3).

The word *kay* is frequently glossed as ‘this.’ Grammar books and dictionaries treat *kay* as an unanalyzable, monomorphemic unit. However, I propose that *kay* consists of two morphemes: *ka-* and *-y*. In Quechua, *ka-* is a verb stem meaning ‘to be, exist.’ Speakers use *ka-*

⁴ Quechua maintains a distinction between substantives and verbs; the language also employs a large number of derivational suffixes which can turn verbs into substantives and turn substantives into verbs. Lefebvre and Muysken (1988, p.27-28), for instance, list nominals (i.e. substantives), verbs, and postpositions (i.e. suffixes) as the only three main lexical classes for Quechua.

⁵ I take these “demonstratives” from Cusco Quechua; they are roughly identical to those which other varieties use. Often, *kay* is glossed as ‘this’ while both *chay* and *haqay* are glossed as ‘that.’ More accurately, *kay* means ‘this by the speaker,’ *chay* means ‘that by the hearer,’ and *haqay* means ‘that over there, away from both the speaker and hearer.’ To concisely differentiate *chay* from *haqay*, I gloss the former as ‘that’ and the latter as ‘yon.’

in several overlapping ways, including as a copular verb and to express existence (8) or possession (9)⁶:

8) ñuqa ka-ni
1 be-1
'I am'

9) chakra-cha-yku ka-ra-n
farm-DIM-1PL.EXCL.POSS be-PST-3

'We had a small farm (lit. our small farm existed/it was).' (JVO, 2013, January 31)

The other morpheme, *-y*, is an "infinitive marker." Rather than simply producing a non-finite verb, however, *-y* is a derivational affix; it attaches to a verb stem to produce a substantive referring to the performance of the action expressed by the original verb.⁷ As example (3) showed, *-y* attaches to the verb stem *yacha-* 'to learn' to produce the substantive *yachay* 'learning,' which then, like any other substantive, can modify another substantive by immediately preceding it. Likewise, *-y* attaches to the verb stem *ka-* 'to be, exist' to produce the substantive *kay* 'being, existing; existence.' We need not treat it as having an explicit deictic meaning. Rather, when *kay* modifies another substantive, it describes the modified term as having the property of existing within the speaker's frame of reference, as part of the speaker's world. *Kay* does not merely mean 'this;' semantically it is a much richer word. Nevertheless, the simplest translation for *kay* in English/Spanish is *this/este*, hence why English and Spanish speakers have incorrectly assigned a solely deictic meaning to *kay*.

That there is an etymological relationship between *ka-* 'to be' ("infinitive" form: *kay*) and *kay* 'this' is undeniable; coincidence alone cannot account for the large amount of formal and semantic similarity that exists between them. Either the verb *ka-* derived from *kay* via backformation,⁸ or the substantive *kay* derived from *ka-* via affixation. At first glance, the former etymology appears plausible, but consider its implications: if *ka-* came from *kay* via backformation, then either 1) Quechua once lacked a copular verb or 2) the new verb *ka-* replaced Quechua's original copular verb. Given the importance of copular verbs, it seems unlikely that either Quechua once lacked a copular verb entirely or that Quechua speakers would have replaced it.

Rather, *kay* 'this' must have derived from *ka-* 'to be, exist' via affixation; that is, it must consist of this verb stem and the substantivizing suffix *-y* and therefore be a substantive denoting the act of 'being' and 'existing,' or 'existence.' Used to modify another substantive, it produces the meaning 'X with the property of existence.'

10) ka-y wasi
exist-INF house
'this house' lit. 'house with the property of existence; existing house'

Moreover, it is from the speaker's perspective that something is said to exist. When used to describe another substantive, *kay* denotes that it exists as a part of the speaker's world,⁹ that it is something which is near the speaker or with which the speaker is familiar (JVO, 2013, February 12). As demonstrated, *kay* is clearly a substantive; however, its meaning when used

⁶ The following examples were elicited from Janett Vengoa de Orós (JVO), a native speaker of Quechua originally from Sicuani, Cuzco, Peru.

⁷ The resulting substantive is equivalent to an English gerund.

⁸ That is, some innovative speakers, noticing 1) that *-y* affixes to verb stems to produce substantives and 2) that *kay* 'this' ends in *-y*, reanalyzed the once-monomorphemic *kay* as *ka-y* and removed the final *-y* to create a new verb *ka-* 'to be, exist.'

⁹ Or, in a narrative, as part of the world of the character who is speaking or from whose point of view the story is being told.

descriptively is most easily translated into English/Spanish as *this/este*, causing outsiders to confuse it for a demonstrative pronoun.¹⁰

Rather than simply meaning ‘this,’ *kay* means ‘existence’ and describes something as a part of the world in which the speaker exists. It undoubtedly belongs to the substantive class, consisting of the verb stem *ka-* ‘to be, exist’ and the substantivizing suffix *-y*. Having thus established the etymology of *kay*, future research can focus on the etymology of other “demonstratives.” Both *chay* ‘this’ and *haqay* ‘yon’ also end in *-y*, leading us to wonder whether they too consist of a (now-obsolete) verb stem (i.e. **cha-* ‘to exist as part of the hearer’s world; **haqa-* ‘to exist, but neither as part of the speaker’s world nor as part of the hearer’s world’) plus the substantivizing suffix *-y*.

¹⁰ And to assume that Quechua has a distinct class of demonstratives.

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ABBREVIATIONS

:	preceding vowel is elongated
1	first person
3	third person
ADV	adverbializer
COND	conditional
DIM	diminutive
DIR	direct (information)
EXCL	exclusive
IND	indirect (information)
INF	“infinitive” (substantivizer)
PL	plural
POSS	possessive
PST	past
TOP	topic