

FERNÁNDEZ GARAY, Ana; CENSABELLA, Marisa (eds.) (2009). *Estudios fonológicos de continua dialectales: mapuche y wichí*. Santa Rosa: Universidad Nacional de La Pampa, 224. Pp. 2 maps. ISBN 978-950-863-121-3.

This book is a collection of articles dealing with the phonology and dialectology of Wichí (referred to in the past as Mataco) and Mapuzungun (also called Mapudungun or Mapuche), two unrelated Amerindian languages of South America. Published by the Universidad Nacional de La Pampa, it is the end result of a three-year project funded by the Argentine government, the purpose of which was to study dialect variation in these languages. All of the authors are specialists in the indigenous languages of Argentina, and all but one are teachers or researchers at Argentine universities or research institutions. Adopting the “dynamic synchrony” approach of the French functionalist school as a methodological-theoretical perspective, the book pretends to give an overall view of the dialectical continua of the Argentine varieties of the languages under study and at the same time to provide some understanding of sociolinguistic variation and ongoing phonological change in both languages. The four articles on Wichí and the single article on Mapuzungun found in this volume, while falling short of constituting a systematic survey, make significant steps toward achieving these difficult and important goals.

Wichí belongs to the Matacoan (also called Mataco-mataguayan or Mataguayan) language family, and the language is spoken by approximately 40,000 people in Argentina and 2000 people in Bolivia. Wichí speakers live in rural communities in the northern regions of the Argentine provinces of Salta, Chaco, and Formosa, and in the Bolivian department of Tarija. Most Wichí are bilingual in Spanish and their mother tongue. However, as Fernández Garay and Censabella observe, “Wichí is the indigenous language with the highest level of vitality of those spoken in Argentina; It not only has an important number of speakers, but also a high level of intergenerational transmission” (p.10)¹. Mapuzungun, the language of the Mapuche ethnicity, is spoken in central Chile and western Argentina. Its relationship with other languages has not been clearly established. The number of Mapuzungun speakers is also a subject of debate. In Chile there are over 600,000 Mapuches, among whom perhaps approximately 144,000 have “active competence” in the language (Zúñiga 2007:19). Fernández-Garay and Censabella state that the Argentine census of 2001 counted 300,000 individuals as Mapuches, but the number of Mapuzungun speakers is very small and generally confined to older people. Revitalization programs for the language exist in various Argentine provinces.

An introduction by the editors describes the research project which led to the book’s publication, summarizes the articles contained within, and provides historical and linguistic background on the Wichí and Mapuche peoples. The first article in the book, “**Variación y sincronía dinámica**” by Marisa Censabella, summarizes the content and historical background of the theoretical perspective utilized in the book’s three dialect

¹ All quotations from the book under review have been translated from Spanish by the reviewer. Readers may also wish to consult the review by Caraballo (2009).

studies – the “dynamic synchrony” of the French linguist Anne-Marie Houdabine (1985, among other works) – and justifies its use in the study of indigenous languages such as Wichí and Mapuzungun.

Essentially, this approach prescribes first classifying the language structures of idiolects as either “firm” or “weak” (in the case of the book under review, the structures analyzed are phonological oppositions and units)². Firm structures are those which “show no type of variant beyond those produced by alterations between normal and rapid speech timing” (p.119), as, for example, a vowel or consonant phoneme with no allophones. Weak structures are said to be “in disequilibrium” and not well integrated into the language system. Allophonic variations and neutralized oppositions, for example, are considered weak structures. Once identified in the speech of individuals, these structures are then compared and classified on the speech community level as being either “stable” or “unstable”. Weak stable structures are those which “show the same variation for all speakers and are therefore due to the internal organization of the system” (p.121). Weak unstable structures are those that vary among speakers in a group and that may be correlated with social variables such as age and geographic location. Examples of this classification of structures as applied in the analysis of phonological data from Wichí are seen in the discussion further below.

According to Censabella, in the dynamic synchrony approach a language system is analyzed in conjunction with variation, and only afterwards correlated with historical or sociological factors. In contrast, Labovian sociolinguistics is said to study variation in a stage of investigation posterior to that of the study of the language system (see p.22-23). She observes that the geographical distribution of Wichí dialects constitutes a dialectal continuum – a situation in which varieties spoken in adjacent enclaves differ slightly from one another, but where the varieties spoken at the geographical extremes of continuum may differ to the point of mutual unintelligibility. Furthermore, Wichí is a case of a dialect continuum in which linguistic heterogeneity over a geographic area is combined with relative social homogeneity of speakers. There is also no prestigious written variety of Wichí³. Censabella argues that linguistic situations of this type require a theoretical and

² The French functionalist school has its origin in the ideas of André Martinet (1908–1999). Martinet’s great contribution, in Censabella’s view, is his understanding of the part variation plays in both description and explanation: “Variation, even within the same idiolect, must first be hierarchized [i.e., classified hierarchically] in such a way as to understand which elements have meaningful and distinctive character, in order to then to explain this variation as the product of the history of the language (diachronic variation) or of social differentiation (synchronic variation)” (p.32). According to Censabella, Houdabine’s approach prescribes the identification of linguistic structures in three stages: (1) the identification of *systemic norms* which constitute the “internal economy of the system” as manifested in idiolects; (2) the analysis of *statistical norms*, which are norms of language use in a group of speakers, by means of the “hierarchization” of idiolect data in terms of external factors such as age, sex, place of birth, etc.; and (3) the study of *prescriptive norms*, which are conscious or unconscious norms of metalinguistic evaluation that form a speaker’s “linguistic imagination”. This methodological order, however, does not reflect their relative importance, all three aspects of language being considered as interrelated from the theoretical point of view. The studies in this book deal only with the first two “objective” norms, leaving aside the “subjective” norms of the linguistic imagination.

³ “The less standardized [a language] is, the more fluctuations occur, as there are no normative restrictions” (p. 200); So state the authors of the article on Mapuzungun later in the book.

methodological approach such as Houdebine's, where synchronic variation is taken account of and described at the outset of the investigation and then "hierarchized" in terms of the classification system mentioned above.

The dynamic synchrony studies of Wichí and Mapuzungun are preceded by two articles on Wichí which treat the phonology of that language from more conventional perspectives. **"El repertorio fonológico del wichí de Rivadavia"**, by Jimena Terraza, describes the Wichí variety spoken in a small Wichí community in the town of Rivadavia Banda Sur, located on the Bermejito River in the state of Salta. The author describes the segmental phonemes of the Rivadavia dialect, and provides a revised interpretation of the Wichí phonemic inventory in light of the studies of other scholars. Most interestingly, Terraza makes use of concepts from government phonology to argue that vowel loss in certain contexts leaves an underlying vacant syllable nucleus, and that resyllabification then occurs in accord with principles of government which are sensitive to the presence of the vacant nucleus. In this way, Terraza accounts for the numerous instances of consonant clusters and word-final consonants found in her data (as well as for the occurrence of the aspirated stops [p^h, t^h, q^h]), while at the same time assuming that Wichí does not allow such sequences underlyingly.

"Aproximación a los tipos de asimilación más frecuentes en wichí", by Lorena Cayré Baito and María Belén Carpio, describes nasal assimilation processes in Wichí in terms of feature geometry. The authors also describe a special case of assimilation that occurs when applicative and negative suffixes are conjoined. At the end of the article, spectrograms are provided in order to illustrate the formant frequencies of the five vowels in the Wichí variety spoken by their primary informant, an individual who lived in several different Wichí communities while growing up.

"Sistema fonológico y sincronía dinámica de seis variedades orientales del continuum wichí", by Marisa Censabella, presents a dynamic synchrony analysis of phonological data from six Wichí communities in the eastern part of the Wichí dialect area (five locations in Formosa province and one in Chaco). In each community, the author collected data from two speakers, one above fifty years of age and the other below forty. An analysis of the segmental phonemes of the language is presented, based on the distribution of sounds within words and short phrases. The main part of the article is a classification of the phonemes in terms of the categories of dynamic synchrony. In order to illustrate the method used, some examples of this analysis are given below.

Firm structures: The oppositions between the all six Wichí vowels, except for that between the two low vowels, are constant for all speakers and thus considered firm structures (the back low vowel is both weak and unstable, and does not occur at all some Wichí dialects). Likewise considered firm are the oppositions between points of articulation among the consonant phonemes, with the exception of the opposition between velar and glottal sounds. Another firm structure found among all the Wichí speakers studied by Censabella is the opposition between the series of simple and glottalized stops (/p, p'/, /t, t'/, /ts, ts'/, /ch, ch'/, /k, k'/). However, the glottalized stop phonemes show variation within individual speech, as well as differences in pronunciation according to geographical location, and so are classified as weak unstable structures.

Weak stable structures: These structures are stable because they are constant for all speakers, but are classified as weak because they considered to be badly integrated

into the language system. For example, the opposition between /x/ and /h/, while stable, is weak because the two sounds are in complimentary distribution in a number of contexts. Cases of allophonic variation that result from assimilation processes are also considered weak structures, for example, the aspiration of stops in morpheme-final position before /h/, the nasalization of vowels before /m, n, h/, and the unrounding of /u/ before certain consonants. These processes were observed in all speakers in the area under study, and thus the phonemes in question are classified as weak stable.

Weak unstable structures: These are weak structures which show variation within a group of speakers. The author correlated variants of this type with the age and geographic location of the informants. For example, the glottalized stops are implosive in most Wichí dialects, and this implosive character becomes progressively more pronounced as one moves to the west. The glottalized stops are weak because they vary within the speech of individual speakers (e.g., they vary between voiced and unvoiced forms) and unstable because they vary according to region. Weak unstable structures that correlate with age differences were also found. For example, the phoneme /k^w/ tends to be less labialized among younger speakers.

The author is able to draw a number of conclusions from her analysis, one of which is that a number of phonological variants may be seen to gradually differ in a continuum from east to west within the region studied. Censabella also puts forth the interesting argument that despite the fact that certain variations that correlate with age seem to indicate the increasing influence of Spanish in the pronunciation of younger speakers, these changes do not represent “debilitated oppositions”. She states that the Wichí phonological system is in fact quite stable in terms of “the correlation between weak unstable structures and the age variable” (p.141). This stability is attributed to the high degree of vitality of the language.

The fourth and final article on Wichí in this volume is “**Sincronía dinámica del sistema fonológico del wichí hablado en la Banda Norte del departamento Rivadavia, Salta**” by Ana Fernández-Garay and Silvia Spinelli. The authors adopt the dynamic synchrony perspective in order to describe phonological variation in five Wichí communities in the department of Rivadavia in the state of Salto. The area studied roughly covers the western extension of the Wichí language within Argentina. Part of the article presents a traditional phonemic analysis of the segmental phonemes based on their distribution within short utterances. The firm and weak structures distinguished by the authors are similar to those described by Censabella, though differing somewhat in phonetic detail and phonological interpretation. With regard to weak unstable structures, Fernández Garay and Spinelli make a number of observations regarding variants that correlate with geographic location and age. They also present numerous examples of “phoneme fluctuations” (cases where an individual speaker freely alternates two or more phonemes with a given lexical unit) and “phoneme alternations” (cases where alternate phonemes appear in the same lexical unit when used by different speakers). For example, in the region studied by the authors, the simple stops alternate with their glottalized counterparts, both as fluctuations and alternations. The authors suggest that the two types of variants may be due to contact with Spanish, or perhaps to some other reason such as the fact that Wichí lacks a standard variety. In some cases they suggest that it may also be possible that some unstable phonemes are on their way to disappearing from the language due to internal factors, such as “tensions with the system, possibly generated by the low functional load of certain phonemes” (p.170).

The Mapuzungun language is the subject of the last article in the book: **“Sincronía dinámica en la fonología del mapuzungun hablado al este de los Andes”** by Marisa Malvestitti, Ana Fernández Garay, and Antonio Díaz Fernández. The authors write that Mapuzungun is in an advanced state of disappearance in Argentina, and “is practically not transmitted as a first language in the communities existing within our country” (p.176). Revitalization programs exist which teach Mapuzungun as a second language, but in some regions only a few speakers remain. In light of this situation, the authors have adopted the dynamic synchrony approach so as to be able to describe the unstable structures in the language. Using this approach, and comparing historical sources with their own data and with works by other investigators, they describe variation in the segmental phonology of the Argentine varieties of Mapuzungun, both in the 19th century and in the present day.

The segmental phonemes of Mapuzungun are summarized at the beginning of the article, and regional differences are identified which, although involving large areas in the provinces of Chubut, Rio Negro, and La Pampa, differ principally in the occurrence and phonetic manifestation of the nasal and lateral dentals /n/ and /l/, and the palatal fricative /ʃ/. This section is followed by a detailed evaluation and discussion of sources from the 19th and early 20th centuries. The authors extract considerable information about phonological variation from these sources, and conclude that during the 19th century, despite some evident dialect variation, “the divergences within the Mapuzungun spoken east of the Andes were slight and affected mainly certain phonemes” (p.193). Modern studies of the phonology of the Mapuzungun spoken in the Argentine province of Nequén are also reviewed, this large dialect region not being covered in the data collected by the authors.

Within the area they themselves have studied, the authors divide the language into three varieties: (1) Ranquel, spoken in the north of La Pampa, (2) another variety spoken in northern Chubut, Rio Negro, and south and central Nequén, and (3) varieties showing a Tehuelche substratum, spoken in two separate areas in Chubut. An analysis of phonological variation in Mapuzungun is then presented, based on the authors’ own data. They examine phoneme fluctuations, phoneme alternations, and neutralizations, most of which are explained as due to the influence of Spanish. Phonostyles (a phonological resource used “when the speaker opts for the use of a determined phoneme to give his or her message and affective value” (p.207), e.g., as in infant-directed speech) are also discussed. The occurrence of the velar fricative in loan words, and of uvular sounds found in the speech of certain regions, are argued to be due to substratum influence from the extinct Tehuelche languages. Age-related variation is also addressed, and examples are provided of an increasing tendency to adopt variants that are phonetically more similar to Spanish, a tendency holding not only over generations of speakers, but in the speech of individual speakers over a period of several years. Given that Spanish is the main language of day-to-day use for Mapuzungun speakers, and that Mapuzungun is often learned as a second language after Spanish, the authors argue that in some cases the use of variants influenced by Spanish may be considered as “forming part of a process of the reappropriation of the language after a fracture in generational transmission.” (p. 214).

In their conclusions, the authors state that “The variants that speakers favored are better explained when considered in a social framework within which they constitute indices of membership in a particular community or show traces of past or present interaction with

the speech of other groups” (p.215). They note that there is a continuity between past and present varieties of the language throughout the area where the language is spoken, and that historical intergroup rivalries correlate with the important dialect differences. With regard to phonological variation, they note that the dentals /n/ and /l/ are extremely weak structures in the language, that the fricatives have been unstable structures throughout all Mapuzungun regions ever since the language was first recorded in the 18th century, and that the high central and back vowels are also weak. These weak structures are subject to the influence of Spanish, but there is also a general tendency for Mapuzungun sounds not shared with Spanish to be replaced by sounds that are shared by the two language or that are widely used in Spanish.

This book contributes a great deal to the scientific knowledge of the phonology, dialectology, and sociolinguistics of both Wichí and Mapuzungun. The dialectal continua of both languages, as they are spoken within the boundaries of Argentina, are described here in detail (although for both languages the geographical coverage is not quite complete). All of the articles are written by experienced researchers, are data-oriented, and are based on the authors’ own fieldwork. In the case of the article on Mapuzungun, extensive and careful research in earlier sources reveals much about phonological variation in a past state of the language. The articles in this book will thus certainly be of interest to specialists in these two languages or to researchers in (genetically or geographically) related languages of Argentina and Chile. For readers with a more general interest in field linguistics and indigenous languages, or for those who wish to broaden their perspective on phonology and sociolinguistics, the book’s main interest will most probably be found in its exposition and exemplification of the dynamic synchrony approach. The notion that variation should be considered part and parcel of a language description for the very beginning, the theoretical concepts of weak, firm, stable, and unstable structures, and the descriptive method derived from this theoretical approach, are all food for thought for those used to more conventional approaches.

Although the book does not pretend to present comprehensive phonological descriptions of the languages in question, and contains a considerable number of references to previous work by the authors themselves and by others, one wishes that the phonological content of the articles had gone beyond being limited to the treatment of segmental phonemes (the articles by Terraza and by Cayré Baito and Belén Carpio make up for this limitation only in part). Even some summary information on phonological rules and their domains, syllable structure, and suprasegmentals, would have provided a useful context to the discussion of phonemes, allophones, and fluctuations that make up the bulk of the accounts of the two languages’ phonological systems presented in these articles. In addition, even though the book is mainly intended for specialists, a more synthetic overview of the dialect continua of the two languages would have been appreciated. In the case of Wichí, the eastern and western parts of the area in which the language is spoken are treated in two separate articles, but there is no general summary of what these results mean in terms of each other, in terms of the other two articles on Wichí in the book, or in terms of the language as a socio-geographic whole. One must recur to the end of the Introduction for a few general observations of this type (p.14-15). With regard to the article on Mapuzungun, some sort of chart or table of the different variants, past and present, might have helped the reader sort out the large amount of information presented in the text. Maps are provided for

both languages, but unfortunately they are blurry and very difficult to read. The Wichí map does no more than indicate the towns mentioned in the articles.

This book is certainly to be recommended to specialists in Wichí or Mapuzungun. In addition, it may also be recommended to anyone interested in the dynamic synchrony approach as applied to languages without a written standard. The authors have shown that this unified approach to phonological description and sociolinguistic variation is quite appropriate for the study of languages in sociolinguistic situations that are typical for the indigenous languages of the Americas, and is it hoped that they and others will refine and deepen its use in further publications.

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