

# Was ist das für 1 *huk*? A Conchucos Quechua numeral doing curious things

Timo Buchholz – Universität zu Köln  
timo.buchholz@uni-koeln.de

## 1 Introduction

The Quechua languages are generally taken to not have articles, or other means of obligatorily marking (in)definiteness on nouns, except for a definite suffix in some Huanca varieties (cf. Parker 1976: 31–32, Adelaar & Muysken 2004: 217). In this paper I present data from South Conchucos Quechua (SCQ) recorded in Huari, Ancash, Peru, on *huk* 'one' that shows an interesting interaction with the categories of (in)definiteness, animacy, and discourse prominence. Nouns in SCQ can be left bare if not modified, and whether they are to be interpreted as definite or indefinite is then mostly retrievable only from the context (1).

(1) *TP03 MT Q 1761*

Tillapa	hawa-n-chaw-cha	ultu	ka-ykaa-n
lightning.bolt	below-3-LOC-ASS	tadpole	COP-PROG-3
'below a/the lightning bolt is a/the tadpole'			

From the discourse context of (1), it is clear that *tillapa* denotes an already introduced referent, while *ultu* is mentioned for the first time. Neither is marked by *huk*. However, *huk* can optionally be used when introducing new referents (2).

(2) *HA30 MT Q 0275*

tsay-chaw-mi	tari-nki huk	allqu-ta	hana-pa-m	rikachaaku-ykaa-n
dem.DIST-LOC-ASS	find-2 one	dog-OBJ	above-GEN-ASS	observe-PROG-3
'there you find a dog staring upwards'				

It is not clear what the conditions for this usage are. In Parker (1976), examples similar to both (1) and (2) are attested, but the variable occurrence of *huk* is not commented upon. Weber (1989: 9), on a related variety, only states that *huk* is “only infrequently [...] used as an indefinite article”. This leaves many questions unanswered. If *huk* really marks indefiniteness, what about cases like (1)? In the following, I explore some factors that condition the use of *huk* as a pronominal modifier in SCQ.

## 2 Human referents

One relevant factor seems to be whether the referent introduced is human or not. This result emerges from an inspection of SCQ data by 39 speakers (22f, 17m, age range 15-50, mean age 21.8 years) produced in a picture-naming task<sup>1</sup>. If *huk* really marks indefinites, this should be a good initial place to look for it because the picture-naming task was the first elicitation task participants performed, and thus the first time they saw these pictures (the same pictures later returned in further tasks). As Table 1 shows, the vast majority of nominal expressions (95%)

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<sup>1</sup> For more details on the elicitation methods, cf. Bendezú Araujo (2021), Buchholz (2021), or the website of the project.

elicited in this way are not produced with *huk*, so *huk* is clearly not obligatory. However, those expressions that are produced with *huk* nearly all denote human animate referents.

**Table 1:** Occurrence of *huk* with nominal expressions in a picture-naming task. Data from 39 speakers

	human animate	human inanimate (dead)	non-human animate	inanimate	all
with <i>huk</i>	20	1	0	2	23
without <i>huk</i>	51	11	123	278	463
all	71	12	123	280	486

The preference for human referents emerges even more clearly when only the data by speakers that produced *huk* at all (15 speakers; 10f, 5m, age 15-50, mean age 21.1 years) is considered (Table 2). There, more than two thirds of all expressions denoting human animate referents occurred with *huk*, while it almost did not occur with any others. Separating the data in this way makes sense because of how the task worked. Many participants presumably understood it to be only about the name of the depicted object and thus produced everything as bare nominals. For comparison, in the Spanish version of the task (all participants here are bilingual and performed all the tasks once in each language), many participants also only produced bare nouns. But those that did not use (indefinite) articles with nearly each nominal expression, as would be expected for Spanish. In conclusion, the (nearly exclusive) occurrence of *huk* with human animate referents likely reflects a true preference.

**Table 2:** Occurrence of *huk* with nominal expressions in a picture-naming task. Data from only those 15 speakers that produced *huk* at all

	human animate	human inanimate (dead)	non-human animate	inanimate	all
with <i>huk</i>	20	1	0	2	23
without <i>huk</i>	11	6	44	92	153
all	31	7	44	94	176

### 3 A marker of discourse prominence?

This broad difference in speaker behaviour is also seen in more complex tasks. In the *map task*, many participants do not use *huk* at all, except as a numeral. Others, like HA30, use it almost without exception when introducing a new referent (regardless of its animacy), and then mark this referent with the distal demonstrative *tsay* in the next utterance. The sequence in (3) from the beginning of their map task is an example in point. Note how the *huk*-marked expression in both cases is part of a presentative construction with the copular verb *ka-*.

(3) *HA30 MT Q 0013-0080*

hawa-chaw-mi            ka-n    este    huk    hirka  
 below-LOC-ASS        COP-3   HESIT   one    hill  
 ‘at the bottom is a hill’

tsay                    hirka-pita-m    subi-nki  
 DEM.DIST            hill-ABL-ASS    go.up-2  
 ‘from that hill you go up’

tsay-chaw-mi	ka-ykaa-n	huk	añas
DEM.DIST-LOC-ASS	COP-PROG-3	one	skunk

‘there is a skunk’

The way HA30 uses modifying *huk* (and *tsay*) in this map task is very similar to how Givón (1983) describes the use of indefinites and definites for introducing and continuing topics in discourse. In terms of Grosz, Weinstein & Joshi (1995)’s centering model of discourse structure, *tsay* would mark the backward-looking center, while *huk* marks a high-ranked, or prominent, forward-looking center. It would be interesting to explore whether it is this prominence that connects this observation with the results from the picture-naming task on the preference for human referents. Arguably, it is more plausible that the marking of discourse prominence is the primary function, causing human referents to be preferably *huk*-marked because they are likely to be perceived as more prominent, than the other way round, which would analyze the behavior like that of HA30 by assigning human status to nonhuman referents for some reason (so that then in turn they could be prominent). As a last point, consider this short sequence (4) from an interview with a monolingual SCQ speaker, DC49. The interviewer (GB00) asks a number of questions about DC49’s life and the customs in his community. He never uses *huk* to introduce a referent, except here, where the referent is human.

(4) *GB00&DC49 Condir 11098-11193*

marka-yki-chaw	tsay	Kachichinan-chaw
village-2-LOC	DEM.DIST	place.name-LOC

‘in your village, this Kachininan’ (GB00)

huk	ruku	wanu-ski-pti-n-qa	tushu-yaa-nki-ku
one	old.person	die-ITER-SUBDIFF-3-TOP	dance-PL-2-Q

‘if an old person dies, do you dance?’ (GB00)

mana-m	tushu-yaa-n-tsu	ruku	wanu-pti-n
no-ASS	dance-PL-3-NEG	old.person	die-SUBDIFF-3

‘they don’t dance when an old person dies’ (DC49)

Both question and answer are clearly about customs, so the referent denoted by *ruku* ‘old person’ is in both cases presumably not specific in the sense that either speaker “has a referent in mind” (cf. Heusinger 2011: 1044–1045). In a comparable English, Spanish, or German exchange, the expression denoting the old person would therefore be marked with an indefinite article. Yet here, in the answer, *ruku* is left bare, and only in the question, when the referent is introduced, is *huk* used. It seems thus that *huk* can be used with both specific and non-specific referents, but only when introducing them.

#### 4 Conclusion

Several important aspects of the use of *huk* could not be touched upon here, including its use to mean ‘another’ in certain contexts. I suggest that even though *huk* in SCQ is similar to an indefinite article in its discourse function of introducing new referents, it seems (still) quite different in other respects. Naturally, more comprehensive research should explore this further.

### Author note

At the moment of writing, I haven't been working with Klaus von Heusinger for much more than three months. Yet this time has sufficed for me to become interested in revisiting material from the previous project I worked on and to look at it from a new perspective inspired by the discussions we have had in Cologne so far. On the occasion of his 60th birthday I wish him all the best and hope that there will be many more joint explorations of these issues in the time to come.

The data described in this paper was elicited by Raul Bendezú Araujo, Uli Reich and the author during field work in Huari in 2015 and 2017 as part of the project “Zweisprachige Prosodie: Metrik, Rhythmus und Intonation zwischen Spanisch und Quechua” (DFG project number 274614727). See the website at

<https://www.geisteswissenschaften.fu-berlin.de/we05/forschung/drittmittelprojekte/Einzelprojekte/DFG-projekt-zweisprachige-Prosodie/index.html>.

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