

Object Agreement in Nahuatl and Quechua

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My paper for ICML 6 was a case study of a phenomenon (relative pronouns) which 17th century missionary linguists expected to find in languages they encountered, but did not. This paper is a case study of a phenomenon (verb-object agreement) which they would not have expected to find, but did. Verbal morphology encoding nominal features such as person and number of its subject occurs in Latin as well as modern Romance languages, but no such morphology encodes features of objects. Such agreement is found in many languages encountered by missionary linguists, among them Nahuatl and Quechua.

We will examine the discussion of verb-object agreement in two grammars:

- Diego Gonçalez Holguin, *Gramatica y Arte Nueva de la Lengua General de todo el Peru llamada lengua Qquichua, o lengua del Inca*, Ciudad de los Reyes, 1607.
- Horacio Carochi, *Arte de la Lengua Mexicana, con la declaración de los adverbios della*, Mexico, 1645.

These grammars are commonly regarded as the best produced in their respective languages and periods; their authors, belonging to the same Jesuit order, must have undergone comparable training as missionaries.

Though both exhibit verb-object agreement, Nahuatl and Quechua are otherwise not notably similar; the agreement system in Nahuatl is richer than that in Quechua, and Carochi's description is more systematic than Gonçalez'. Their attempts to deal with verb-object agreement illuminate not just the structures of the two languages, but also the notions of 'intransitive' and 'transitive' as they developed in modern linguistics.