ABSTRACT

Although Aymara is widely spoken by over a million people, linguistic descriptions rely on data generally gathered in population centers in La Paz, Bolivia and Puno, Peru. Accordingly, little is known about the extent of linguistic diversity existent in more isolated areas. In not taking into account the true variety of linguistic diversity, research into Aymara risks overlooking aspects of the language which may enlighten researchers with information attesting to evidence of contact, isolation, and language change which, when taken as a whole, forms part of the fabric of Andean history.

This work offers a comprehensive organization of linguistic data from a heretofore undocumented variety of this language, Muyla’ Aymara, demonstrating that the amount of variation within this language runs deeper than previously believed. This Aymara variant is spoken in the village of Muylaque, located on the Peruvian altiplano in the district of San Cristobal de Calacoa in Mariscal Nieto province, Moquegua. The decreasing number of speakers not only of this singular variant, but of the similar ones spoken in the nearby villages, gives the work a degree of urgency. The abrupt end to the ideal conditions which preserved the language hastens its demise.

Over a period of three years, data was gathered in the field with a Zoom H2 digital recorder. The method for accumulating the speech varied, but overall focused on recording narratives, myths, and legends. This was performed so as to maximize high-quality, natural data from the oldest speakers in the community. Recorded material was transcribed, glossed, and translated in a laborious process carried out jointly with the speakers themselves whenever possible to ensure the greatest accuracy possible. Once divided into interlinear glosses, the data was categorized by morpheme type and structure and then stored in a cross-referenced searchable database. Upon reaching an appropriate size, the linguistic data was then organized into the present description.

Although the overwhelming majority of the linguistic data was recorded in situ, overall extended periods of these recordings were unsuitable for phonetic analysis owing to the high level of background and ambient noise. In May 2010, the chief linguistic consultant was flown up from Peru to France where, together with a team of experts, recordings were made to document a variety of phonetic and phonological observations.

This description is divided into four chapters: (1) Introduction; (2) Phonology; (3) Morphology; (4) Syntax. The third chapter, Morphology, is subdivided into Nominal Morphology, Verbal Morphology, Transpositional Morphology, Independent Suffixes, and Sentence Suffixes. There are also appendices which give interlinear glosses for several narratives. The introduction has a brief overview of the culture and history of the Aymara and provides an overview of research, all of which suggests that Aymara should be seen as a group of variants and dialects. Also, the reader will be given an idea of the fieldwork conditions which resulted in this grammar.
Muylaq’ Aymara, like other varieties of the language, has 29 phonemes: 26 consonants and three vowels. The vast majority of roots are bisyllabic and, with few exceptions, suffixes are monosyllabic. Roots conform to one of two templates: CV(C)CV or V(C)CV. The former is the most common, with CVCV being predominant. As for the suffixes, the majority are CV, though there are exceptions. The agglutinative nature of this suffixal language, coupled with morphophonological alternations caused by vowel deletion and phonologically-conditioned constraints give rise to interesting surface structures that operate in the domain of the morpheme, syllable, and phonological word/phrase. The phonological/morphophonological processes observed include syllabic reduction, epenthesis, deletion, and reduplication. The most interesting and well-known aspect of Aymara phonology is vowel-deletion; a process by which certain vowels are lost for morphophonological, morpho-syntactic, or lexical motivations, occasionally resulting in long strings of consonants on the surface of an utterance which is underlyingly comprised of only CV(C) syllables.

Aymara is an agglutinative suffix-only language with a rich morphology. Roots can be divided into nouns, verbs, adjectives, and particles. Suffixes, which may have a morphological or syntactic effect, can be classified as nominal, verbal, transpositional, category buffer, bound, or orational. Given the ease with which category-changing transpositional morphemes attach to words of any category, often multiple times, it is common to find words with a range of morphemes from all the categories above.

The chapter on Syntax offers an outline of the syntactic typology in this variant before providing descriptions of the phrase structure (focusing on quantifiers and modifiers, and the NP), clause types (complement, relative, adverbial, prepositional, and locative clauses and, thereafter, nominalizations that go directly with the verb), and the sentence (sentence types ranging from the declarative to the interrogative, imperative, copulative, and existential, and complex sentences).

In providing this grammatical description it is hoped that a greater understanding of the Aymara variants will shed light on the structure of this complex language and Aymara as a whole.