

Information structure in Wichí: focus marker hop¹

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Abstract: The present paper provides an overview of the functions of the morphological focus marker *hop* in the grammar of Wichí, a Mataco-Mataguayan language spoken in the North of Argentina and the South of Bolivia. Basing the analysis on the corpus which I have compiled from the existing research which has been published on the language so far, we can conclude that the focus marker *hop* can but does not have to be used for the focusing of the subject, object, predicate, adverbial as well as on entire dependent clauses in the language. The focus marker *hop* can express both the informational focus as well as the contrastive focus. In the case of predicate focusing the verum-focus can also be marked and the focus marker can scope over the complex predicate.

Key words: Wichí; languages of America; information structure; focus marker.

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1. Introduction

The present article provides an overview of status and functions of the morphological focus marker *hop* in the grammar of Wichí, a Mataco-Mataguayan language spoken in the North of Argentina and the South of Bolivia. Wichí is one of indigenous languages, which has not been widely researched and whose information structure has no yet been investigated at all. There exists only one mention of *hop*'s importance for the information structure in Wichí utterances, to be found by Terraza, who makes a reference to the focus marking function of *hop* and indicates that it should be closely investigated.³

Morphological focus marking in Wichí is optional. Presumably, there are other ways to convey information structure in this language like, for example, the prosody. Nevertheless, in the current article I will leave the question open, whether the focus is marked through *hop* in a Wichí utterance and whether by other devices.

For the purposes of the present study I understand under information structure, following Chafe (1976), the way the information is packaged in an utterance. Furthermore, I follow the functional definition of focus given by Dik, according to whom “the focal information in a linguistic expression is that information which is relatively the most important or salient in the given communicative setting, and considered by S[peaker, A.S.] to be most essential for A[ddressee, A.S.] to integrate into his pragmatic information”.⁴

The article is structured as follows: Section 1 gives a brief survey of the geography, speakers, genetic affiliation and typological properties of Wichí. Section 2 includes information about the actual position of linguistic documentation of Wichí and the corpus which the present study is based on. Section 3 shows how different parts of the Wichí utterances are focus-marked by means of *hop* and presents a hypothesis of *hop*'s origin. Section 4 makes some conclusions and marks potential directions for further research.

³ Terraza, 2009, p.256.

⁴ Dik, 1997, p.236.

2. About the language

Wichí belongs to Mataco-Mataguayan language family and according to different sources is spoken by approximately 40,000 speakers in the North Argentina and about 2,000 speakers in the South of Bolivia.⁵ The other languages of the family are Maká, Chorote and Nivaklé.

The Wichí language exhibits several regional varieties. Tovar (1964) mentions two Argentine (Vejoz and Gusnhay) and one Bolivian (Noctén or Weenhayek) dialects. Gerzenstein (2003) proposes another dialect division between Salteño (Vejoz and Gusnhay) and Tueco in Argentina, but also acknowledges the Bolivian one. In this article I will analyse Salteño, the Argentine variety of Wichí. According to Lewis *et al.* (2013). The dialects of Wichí have different statuses. Vejoz is classified as a developing language, Noctén as a vigorous one and Guisnhay as a threatened one.⁶ According different authors⁷, the differences between the mentioned varieties are, for the most part, phonological. Hence, the conclusions I will make about the functions of the focus marker *hop* in Salteño are likely to be able to be applied to other dialects of Wichí.

According to Terraza (2009), Wichí contains following typological properties:

- agglutinative
- polysynthetic
- SVO – word order
- head-marking
- tripartite⁸
- three word classes: nouns, verbs, adverbs
- characteristics of nominal syntagma⁹:
 - no nominal classification

⁵ Durante, 2011, p.125.

⁶ Lewis *et al.* (2013) propose the following definitions of mentioned language status: Developing language: “The language is in vigorous use, with literature in a standardized form being used by some though this is not yet widespread or sustainable.” Vigorous language: “The language is used for face-to-face communication by all generations and the situation is sustainable.” Threatened language: “The language is used for face-to-face communication within all generations, but it is losing users.”

⁷ Terazza, 2009, p.9-10; Tovar, 1981, p.27-30; Viñaz Urquiza, 1974, p.157 i.a.

⁸ In contrast to Terraza (2009), Vidal and Nercesian (2005) assign Wichí to nominative-accusative languages.

⁹ Characteristics of nominal and verbal syntagmas are presented in the order of marking on the noun or verb.

- alienable/inalienable (prefix marking)
- number (suffix marking)
- distributive/ collective (suffix marking)
- tense (suffix marking)
- demonstrative (suffix marking)
- characteristics of verbal syntagma
 - voice (active, passive, middle – prefix marking)
 - subject (prefix marking)
 - negation (suffix marking)
 - object (suffix marking)
 - location/ direction (suffix marking)
 - changing of valency (suffix marking)
 - distributive/ collective (suffix marking)
 - number (suffix marking)
 - tense (suffix marking)
 - aspect (suffix marking)
- rich system of spatial and directional demonstratives

The following examples show how marking of nominal and verbal categories in Wichí works.

- (1) Axwenkye-mati ø-i-kye-mati toxa.
 bird-TEMP2¹⁰ 3-be-DISTR-TEMP2 PRO.DEM.DIST4

That bird (from a while ago) walked (a while ago) here.¹¹

- (2) Ha-yotsan-a-yax i-qox-yen-li-nu.
 2POSS-ask-APL-NMLZ 3-be.content-CAUS-ITER.SG-1SG.OBJ

Your question makes me happy.¹²

¹⁰ The numeral index by temporal, locative and directional marker means closeness to the moment/ location in which the sentence is uttered in the way, that higher number correspond to more closeness.

¹¹ Terraza, 2009, p.80.

¹² *Ibidem*, p.106.

3. The available data

As already mentioned, Wichí is one of the still scantily investigated indigenous languages. Although the first linguistic approach to Wichí dates back to the end of the 19th century, the first alphabet of the language was created in the middle of the 20th c. To the same period belong the first extensive descriptions of the language. The most important linguistic sources on Wichí remain the grammars by missionary Hunt (1940), Viñas Urquiza (1974), Tovar (1981) and the last one by Terraza (2009). Apart from that, since the beginning of 1990s several articles have been published by Argentine linguists which treat single aspects of Wichí's grammar. All available sources to Wichí are based on the Argentine varieties of the language. Nevertheless, as it has already been mentioned, the information on Wichí morphology and syntax that is found in these sources can, for the most part, be applied to other Wichí varieties.

There have been made several attempts of alphabetization of Wichí during the last 60 years, that is why the grammars of the language mentioned above use different textualization. For the purposes of the current study I have used the corpus from different periods of Wichí's alphabetization. Neither my knowledge of the language nor the sources about it allow me to use a uniform textualization of the examples for this article, so I quote them in the original form.

The corpus I used for the present study consists of, on the one hand, the already interlinearized examples from the grammar of Terraza (2009), on the other hand, of the un glossed Wichí narratives collected by Tovar (1981), which I interlinearized according to his own and Terraza's perception of the Wichí's grammar. The consequential glossing differences did not in the least affect the study.

4. Focus marker *hop*

As already mentioned, the first and the only reference to the importance of the particle *hop* for information structure was made by Terraza (2009). There is no agreement about functions of the particle in the preceding grammars of Wichí.

In Hunt's grammar of Wichí he first defines *hop* as a “person or thing referred to”¹³, but then to the end of his work he changes his mind saying that *hop* “as a pronoun defies definition, because it is so varied in its uses, ubiquitous and redundant, personal and demonstrative. *Hape*¹⁴ = the thing, animal or person referred to, required, indicated. It is prefixed to other pronouns [...]; to nouns [...]; to verbs [...], to adjectives[...], etc”.¹⁵ Even from these oldest definitions of *hop* could be seen the discourse importance of the particle.

Thirty four years later Viñas Urquiza (1974) in her definition of *hop* returns to the first one proposed by Hunt, understanding the particle as a demonstrative with attributive or nominal mode of use. Furthermore, Viñas Urquiza mentions the high frequency of *hop* in her corpus.¹⁶

In contrast to Viñas Urquiza, Tovar (1981) proposed other meanings of *hop*. He agrees with Hunt in the point that the particle fulfills many more functions than only the demonstrative one. He mentions also its function as a “sentence connective particle” and as discourse particle, translating it into Spanish as “pues”.

In the following parts of this section basing my approach on Terraza's (2009) claim that *hop* is a focus marker, I will show, how the focus marking of different parts of the utterance is realized by means of *hop*.

4.1. Subject focus

(3)	Wit	xwala-s-te	(...)	qamax-te
	CONJ.and	day-PL-TEMP4		still-TEMP4
	∅-i-hi-kye-t'e		hop	lus.
	3-be-NEG-DISTR-NEG		FOC	light

And in those days there still (past) was no light.¹⁷

¹³ Hunt, 1940, p.19.

¹⁴ There exists some variation in the textualization of the particle depending on the alphabet the author uses: *hop/ hap/ hape*.

¹⁵ Hunt, 1940, p.72.

¹⁶ Viñas Urquiza, 1974, p.69-70.

¹⁷ Terraza, 2009, p.182.

- (4) **Hap** wichi ta ø-újte Pále ø-tahu-y-ej
FOC people SUB 3-call priest 3-talk-LNK-APL.with
 ta ø-yuqw:
 SUB 3-say

And some people, who call the priest, talk and say.¹⁸

There is only a small number of sentences in the whole corpus where *hop* marks a subject. All of these deviate from the common simple Wichí clause with SVO-structure. Example 3 represents the case of the information focus¹⁹ on the subject. In this case we can see that the word order of the utterance is VS, which is not typical for Wichí. Possibly this structure (where the subject is placed in the end of the utterance) prompts the use of the focus marker, which is not always indispensable.

It would seem at the first sight that the next example shows the SV-structure typical for Wichí. At the closer analysis of the larger number of utterances with the subject focused through *hop* it becomes clear that the great majority of these are marked by parenthetical relative clauses placed directly after the subject.

I have not found examples of SVO-sentences with subject marked by *hop* and without parenthetical relative clause referring to the subject.

¹⁸ Tovar, 1981, p.44.

¹⁹ Following Rooth (1985, 1992), the general notion of focus include two major subtypes: information focus and contrastive focus. With the information focus it is signalized that the uttered sentence is the only one that is true out of the set of focused alternatives. In the contrastive focus it is signalized that the focused element contrasts with other member of the focus set of alternatives.

4.2. Object focus

- (5) Wit lam-te to y-en-li **hop** alambrado.
 CONJ.and PRO.3SG-TEMP4 SUB 3-make-ITER.SG **FOC** fence

And he who is making the fence.²⁰

- (6) Sultawu-s ø-tiyoxe-hen **hop** bala-s de goma
 soldier-PL 3-throw-PL **FOC** bullet-PL of rubber
 mat lamil ø-nuwa-hi-y-a-t'e.
 but PRO.3PL 3-fear-NEG-LNK-APL-NEG

The soldiers shoot with rubber bullets but they are not afraid of them.²¹

- (7) Wet ø-yiq e pej ø-tʔát pe
 CONJ.and 3-go LOC.far FREQ 3-put APL.over
 le-fwápo ø-néq ta i-hân e **hap** le-wét.
 3.POSS-shoulders 3-go SUB 3-follow LOC.far **FOC** 3SG.POSS-house

And he goes and puts it over his shoulders and follows him to his house.

(lit.: And he goes, puts it over his shoulders and follows his house.)²²

The most common part of the Wichí utterance, which is focus-marked by *hop* is the object. Just as in the case of the subject focusing, here we can see that *hop* marking can fulfill the role of both, a contrastive (example 5) or an information focus (examples 6 and 7) functions. In the example 5 the focusing of *fence* shows that the person is making a the fence, but not,

²⁰ Terraza, 2009, p.100.

²¹ *Ibidem*, p.253.

²² Tovar, 1981, p.48.

(10)	Wet		o-yéneq	ta	h-o-wéʔn	ya	hó	grácias
	CONJ.and		1-believe	SUB	?-1-have	LNK-APL	?	gratitude
	hap	Diós	taj	wúj	ta	ø-tʔamaj	no	yaq
	FOC	God	SUB	a.lot	SUB	3-protect	1SG.OBJ	until
	hap	fwála-na		(...)				
	FOC	day-DEM.POS5						

I believe that I thank God, who has protected me during the long time until now (...) ²⁵

The focus-marked adverbials are relatively poorly represented in the corpus. The majority of them are temporal adverbials and only a few are modal adverbials. The latter normally include a noun and are integrated in the argument structure of the verb, that is why the *hop*-marking of these is identical with the object focus marking (see section 4.2).

Due to the lack of context it is not possible to define in the example 8 whether it is the case of contrastive or informational focus. On the one hand, there obviously exists a close number of alternatives for the focused adverbial, which could be contrasted to *summer* in this sentence, i.e., winter, autumn and spring. On the other hand, it is possible that the speaker only informs his interlocutor about the period, when he was born, without intention to contrast it with other seasons.

From the narrative context of the sentence, which I skipped here, becomes apparent that in the example 9 we are dealing with a contrastive focus. In his speech the narrator is contrasting his words of today with his words in the future.

The focus-marked adverbial of the last example shows a clear case of the informational focus.

²⁵ Tovar, 1981, p.43.

In general, the relatively small number of adverbials focused by *hop* in the corpus can be explained by the fact that in Wichí adjuncts are often expressed through temporal and locative markers on the noun, pronoun, verb or even on coordinator and subordinator. Modal adjuncts which include a noun are normally integrated, as already mentioned, in the argument structure of the verb.

4.4. Predicate focus

- (11) **Hap** i-hó ye Oʔó.
FOC 3-go PST rooster.

They went to the rooster.²⁶

- (12) **Hap** ø-yiq hén yaq pe tsi honáj.
FOC 3-go PL until APL.over DEM.POS3 evening

They were walking until the evening.²⁷

- (13) Mítsi tso **hap** ø-tíyaj a pej le
 cat DEM.DIR.DIST **FOC** 3-jump PST? FREQ 3SG.POSS?

ap i-chas majche le-chálos.
 one.more.time 3-scratch 3SG.POSS-cheeks

The cat was jumping and scratching his face.²⁸

In the examples above we can see that predicates can also be focused by means of the focus marker *hop*. In the example 11 *hop* marks verum-focus in terms of Höhle (1992).²⁹ The

²⁶ Tovar, 1981, p.152.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, p.154.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, p.156.

²⁹ (1992) suggests that verum-focus is a way to realize a semantic operator VERUM, which relates to the truth of the utterance.

context of this utterance is the following: a group of animals discuss, what they should do next and then decide to go to the rooster. And so they go to rooster.

In the next example we can see that the informational focus on the predicate is marked by *hop*. In the utterances this episode of the narration the animals are described as walking for a long time towards a certain place. In the example above it is focused that they keep going until the evening.

The last example of a focused predicate shows a contrastive focus. The given example is preceded by sentences, which describe, what different animals were doing in a certain situation. The cat, in contrast to other animals, was jumping and scratching. The interesting point in this sentence is the scope of the focus marker: *hop* appears to scope over a complex predicate consisting of two verbs connected by a conjunction. I have not found in the corpus other examples of this type where *hop* scopes over the complex elements of an utterance.

4.5. Dependent clause focus

(14) N-kyem-hi-li-t'e **hop** to n-kyutsan.
 1-work-NEG-DEM.POS2-NEG **FOC** SUB 1-be.pregnant
 I don't work because I'm pregnant.³⁰

(15) Ma na-hân hin tso na-lán
 Let.us 1-follow man DEM.DIR.DIST 1-kill

hap ta i-lán | é-la.
FOC SUB 3-kill 1PL.POSS-animal

Let us follow this man and kill him, because he killed our animal.³¹

³⁰ Terraza, 2009, p.141.

³¹ Tovar, 1981, p.143.

(16)	∅-Fwit-aj	pej	hãn	tiyáj		
	3-want-APL	FREQ	carry.on	shoot?		
	ta	wet	háp	ta	i-leyéj	le-lútsej pʔa.
	SUB	CONJ.and	FOC	SUB	3-to.fire	3PL.POSS.arm PFV?

They wanted to carry on with shooting and then they fired their arms.³²

As it can be observed in the examples above, the focus particle *hop* can also mark the dependent clauses. All of these clauses are causal and have a similar structure as the examples 14 and 15. In her dissertation Terraza notes that causal clauses could be introduced by the combination of *hop* with the subordinator which also introduces other types of dependent clauses.³³ Nevertheless, there exist some examples of causal clauses in the corpus, where the causation is exclusively introduced by means of a subordinator (see example 17). This fact supports the assumption that *hop* keeps his function as a focus marker also in the combination with a subordinator.

(17)	∅-Lukwey	∅-t'itselt-ex	to	atsinha-tsu
	3SG.POSS-parents	3-surprise-APL.with	SUB	woman-DEM.DIR.DIST
	hi-kyutsan.			
	3-get.pregnant			

The parents were surprised because the woman had become pregnant.³⁴

In the narratives collected by Tovar (1981) I have found several examples, where *hop* is surrounded by two identical subordinators with or without conjunction *wet / wit* (see example 16). For this type of utterances I suspect that the double subordinator placed

³² *Ibidem*, p.40.

³³ Terraza, 2009, p.244.

³⁴ *Ibidem*, p.218.

between two clauses can be interpreted as if that the first one were the causal and the second one the main clause. However, this assumption should be further investigated.

4.6. A hypothesis about the origin of *hop*

In her dissertation Terraza mentions that the focus marker *hop* could stem from the copula *hope*³⁵ and refers in this point to Creissels (2006). According to him, in some languages focus markers originate from copulas, which over the course of time have developed through the cleft constructions into the focus markers while gradually losing their verbal function.³⁶

The number of occurrences of *hope* in the corpus is relatively low. This could be explained by the fact that the use of this copula with predicative nominals is in many cases (already) optional (with or without differences in meaning). In the cases without a copula the nouns are juxtaposed. The example 18 shows the predication with a copula and the next one without.

- (18) N-xwukya \emptyset -hope takyemaloy.
 1SG.POSS-father 3-be carpenter

My father is a carpenter.³⁷

- (19) Walter n-kyexwa.
 PN 1SG.POSS-husband

Walter is my husband.³⁸

³⁵ *Ibidem*, p.256.

³⁶ Creissels, 2006b, p.125-6; 2006a, p.357-9.

³⁷ Terraza, 2009, p.231.

³⁸ *Ibidem*, p.232.

The position of the nouns can be switched without change of meaning. It is clear that the semantics of these two examples are different, but, in my opinion, this fact is not relevant for the the present discussion.

As far as cleft construction with *hope* are concerned, I have not found any examples for this case. The only sentence where *hope* is not surrounded by nouns, but preceded by a relative pronoun is shown in the following example. Unfortunately, I cannot explain neither the structure of this utterance, nor the function of *hope* in it.

(20)	N-p'etat	kye	n-yomey	maq
	1SG.POSS-forget	SUB.that	1-say	thing
	kye	∅-hope	n-p'etat	
	SUB.that	3SG-be	1-forget	

I forget what I have said, I forget everything.³⁹

Drawing some conclusions, from the available corpus from the synchronic point of view we have to admit that despite the evident morphological similarity between the focus marker *hop* and the copula *hope*, it cannot be with certainty inferred whether these two words are related. Nevertheless, it is possible that on the later evolution stage of Wichí the copula *hope*, which may also have been used for building clefts passed through the desemantization and converted to the focus marker *hop*. Furthermore, the functions of the marker could have changed in the way which makes it impossible to relate the elements marked by *hop* to the clefts.

³⁹ *Ibidem*, p.249.

5. Conclusions

The analysis presented has revealed one of the strategies of focus realization in Wichí, the morphological marking by the marker *hop*. There are at least five different parts of utterance which can be focused by *hop*: subject, object, adverbial, predicate and dependent clause. The object focusing has the highest occurrence in the corpus. For the purpose of focusing the focused element of the sentence has to be preceded by *hop* while the word order has to be preserved, except in the case of focusing of the subject, where the SV word order seems to change to VS.

The focus marker *hop* can express informational focus as well as contrastive focus. In the case of predicate focusing the verum-focus can also be marked and the focus marker can scope over the complex predicate. It is quite likely that the latter property also applies to the subject, object and other types of focused elements, but, unfortunately, this could not be verified with the existing examples. In the case of the focus marking of the dependent clause the vast majority of the focused dependent clauses are causal. For explanation of this fact further investigation is needed.

Last of all, the study shows a possible explanation of the origin of the focus marker *hop*, i.e., its extraction from the copula *hope*. For a more detailed research of this hypothesis it would be necessary to conduct a comparative study of Wichí and other languages of the Mataco-Mataguayo family with the objective to reconstruct Wichí's evolutionary process.

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Appendix

Abbreviations

APL	applicative
CAUS	causative
CONJ	conjunction
DEM	demonstrative
DIR	directional
DIST	distal
DISTR	distributive
FOC	focus
FREQ	frequentative
ITER	iterative
LNK	linker
LOC	locative
NEG	negation
NMLZ	nominalizer
O	object
OBJ	object
PL	plural
PN	proper noun
POS	positional

POSS	possessive
PRO	pronoun
PST	past
PFV	perfective
S	subject
SG	singular
SUB	subordinator
TEMP	temporal marker
V	verb

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Resumo: O presente artigo fornece uma visão geral das funções do marcador morfológico hop na gramática de Wichí, uma linguagem Mataco-Mataguyan falada no norte da Argentina e no sul da Bolívia. Com base na análise do corpus que compilamos a partir das pesquisas existentes e publicadas sobre a língua até agora, podemos concluir que o marcador de foco hop pode, mas não tem que, necessariamente, ser usado para o foco no sujeito, objeto, predicado, advérbio, bem como nas cláusulas inteiramente dependentes na língua. O marcador de foco hop pode expressar tanto o foco informacional quanto o foco contrastante. No caso do predicado com foco no verum-foco, também pode ser marcado e o marcador de foco sobre o predicado complexo pode se estender.

Palavras-chave: Wichí; idiomas da América; estrutura de informação; marcador de foco.

Resumen: El artículo presentado ofrece una descripción general de las funciones del marcador morfológico de foco hop en la gramática de la lengua Wichí, hablada en el Norte de Argentina y el Sur de Bolivia. El presente análisis hecho a base del corpus formado de investigaciones publicadas sobre la lengua revela que el marcador de foco hop puede ser utilizado para focalización tanto de sujeto, objeto, predicado, complemento circunstancial, como de oración subordinada en la lengua. El marcador de foco hop puede expresar el foco informacional y el foco contrastivo. En el caso de focalización verbal puede ser marcado el verum foco y el scopus del marcador puede extenderse sobre el predicado complejo.

Palabras claves: Wichí; lenguas de America; estructura informacional; marcador de foco.