A corpus-based analysis of two "mystery" discourse particles in Mapudungun

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This study presents the description and analysis of two discourse markers used during interactions in Mapudungun (isolate, South America). Both particles, *ta* and *nga*, were defined as "decorative" by Augusta (1903). Few attempts to identify their functions have been made since then: Smeets (1989) interpret them as anaphoric pronouns, and Zúñiga (2006) as assertive and emphatic particles.

For the purpose of this study, the author understands discourse marker in the broad sense given by Schiffrin (1987) and Maschler & Shiffin (2015). In Schiffrin's words, these markers are sequentially dependent elements which bracket units of talk. In addition, they have a metalingual interpretation in the context where they occur (Maschler & Shiffrin 2015), that is, they provide commentary or specify procedurally a relationship between two segments of discourse (Fraser 1998). From cross-linguistic analyses, I consider the variety of formal elements that can be recruited as discourse markers and the different functions they can have (Zavala 2001; Fairbanks 2016). As it has been pointed out by Brody (2010), I acknowledge the multifunctionality of discourse markers, and the cross-linguistic differences inherent to each discourse system.

The data used in this research form a conversational corpus collected through interviews to 7 native speakers integrally done in Mapudungun. The interviews were recorded and transcribed, and they constitute altogether a corpus of approximately 5:30 hours. As a result, the particle *ta* is the most frequent word in the corpus (1,517 hits). In turn, *nga* has comparatively a low frequency (77 hits) and is unevenly distributed. However, both particles are similar in that they lack propositional meaning, are mostly optional, are difficult to describe semantically (cf. Ojibwe's "mystery particles", Fairbanks 2016) and appear at different unit boundaries. Regarding their usages, neither of these particles function as an anaphoric pronoun, although they can follow a demonstrative, which itself does. Secondly, some of their appearances could be described as assertive and emphatic, especially when they connect a subject with its predicate, but this seems not to be their unique nor their basic function. Thirdly, in terms of their position, *ta* occurs especially between subject and both verbal and nominal predicates (28% of the corpus analyzed so far), between the verb and complements or adjuncts (30%), and after connectives (24%), with no tokens at final position. In turn, *nga* is used in intermediate position (68% of the analyzed data), after connectives (11%) and at final position (21%).

In conclusion, I propose that their distribution is central to understand their function: they tend to delimit units and, thus, they can signal their relationship and, in some cases, their equivalence. In addition, they seem to signal the speaker's attitude towards the utterance: while *nga* conveys a speaker's intent of alignment between his/her own presuppositions and those of his/her interlocutor (Du Bois 2007), *ta* does not index such interactional move.

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