



**HAL**  
open science

## Review of Fernández Garay, Ana: Diccionario Tehuelche-Español/Indice Español-Tehuelche.

Katharina Haude

► **To cite this version:**

Katharina Haude. Review of Fernández Garay, Ana: Diccionario Tehuelche-Español/Indice Español-Tehuelche.. 2007. halshs-00692108

**HAL Id: halshs-00692108**

**<https://shs.hal.science/halshs-00692108>**

Submitted on 27 Apr 2012

**HAL** is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

Ana Fernández Garay, 2004. *Diccionario Tehuelche–Español/Índice Español–Tehuelche* (Tehuelche–Spanish Dictionary/ Spanish– Tehuelche Index) Leiden: CNWS. [Indigenous Languages of Latin America 4]. ISBN 90-5789-092-5. 208pp.

**Reviewed by Katharina Haude (Radboud University Nijmegen)**

The book discussed here is a slim, but highly informative and reliable document of a language nearly extinct today, the Patagonian language Tehuelche.

In the past 150 years, the native peoples of Patagonia have suffered a decline that led them close to extinction (cf. Adelaar & Muysken 2004: 555). The Indians that survived the violent “Conquest of the Desert” of the late 19th century, which aimed at making the plains of Patagonia suitable for white settlers, were moved to reservations. Due to rapid acculturation, their numbers have decreased still further since then. In 1980, only 100 Patagonian Indians were counted (p. 9). Like the other native peoples of Patagonia, the few remaining Tehuelche Indians have lost their language and cultural identity almost completely.

This situation gives an idea of the circumstances under which the *Diccionario Tehuelche–Español/Índice Español–Tehuelche* (henceforth DTE) was produced. Of the seven regular contributors to the DTE, only about three were able to carry out a conversation in Tehuelche. This was in the early 1980s, when most of the data for the DTE were collected. The more fluent speakers have passed away since then. According to the *Ethnologue* (Gordon 2005), Tehuelche had only four speakers in 2000.

The DTE is divided into three parts: an Introduction (pp. 1–48), the Tehuelche– Spanish Dictionary (pp. 49–130) and the Spanish–Tehuelche Index (131–180). In addition, there is an Appendix (pp. 181–195) containing a hitherto unpublished word list compiled by Jorge Suárez in 1966–68, and a bibliography (pp. 203–208).

*Linguistic background information*

The Introduction provides highly detailed information on the historical and socio-cultural background of the Patagonian peoples (pp. 4–9) as well as on 684 Reviews the history and circumstances of the research on the language (pp. 3f., 9f., 13– 16). In addition, it contains a grammatical sketch (pp. 16–29). In the following paragraphs, I will concentrate on the linguistic parts of this section.

*Genetic affiliation, phonology, and grammar*

Tehuelche belongs to the Chonan family, whose other members are the now extinct languages Teushen, Selknam, Haush, and Gününa Küne (p. 12). There is no evidence that Tehuelche can be split up into different dialects. It is pointed out that there is a particular problem with regard to the distinction between areally and genetically based similarities: words that resembled the name of a recently deceased person had to be avoided for one year, and the resulting need for synonyms caused extensive borrowing from neighbouring languages. Accordingly, a large part of the shared vocabulary may originate not from genetic affiliation, but to this particular type of areal diffusion.

Tehuelche has 31 phonemes. The vowel phonemes are /a/, /e/, and /o/, with a contrast in quantity (long vs. short). The consonant system contains voiced (/ b/, /d/, /g/, /g/ (represented as

/G/) and voiceless (/p/, /t/, /č/, /k/, /q/) plosives, each of the latter contrasting with a glottalized counterpart (/pʰ/, /tʰ/ etc.). The four fricatives are /s/, /š/, /x/, and /χ/ (represented as /X/). Furthermore, there are two glides (/j/ and /w/), a liquid /l/, a vibrant /r/, and a glottal stop /ʔ/. Note the existence of four uvular consonant phonemes: /g/, /q/, /qʰ/, and /χ/.

Some phonemes can be realized in very different manners: for instance, /e/ can be realized as [ɛ] or as [i]; /o/ can be realized both as /f/ and as /u/; /p/ can be aspirated, but /t/ and /k/ apparently not. The realization(s) of each phoneme are given in a list (pp. 17f.). However, nothing is said about the circumstances under which the different realizations occur.

The remainder of the section on phonology briefly describes with accent placement, consonant clusters, and syllable types.

The grammar section (with the somewhat misleading title “syntax” (*syntaxis*)), gives an overview of the different parts of speech, the different classes of grammatical morphemes, and morphosyntactic alignment. The basic grammatical features of Tehuelche are as follows.

The open word classes of Tehuelche are nouns, verbs, and adverbs. Adjectival concepts (cf. Dixon 1977) are expressed through intransitive verbs. The large and heterogeneous class of “adverbs” includes so-called postpositions, subordinating and coordinating particles, and interjections. There are several closed classes of function words, such as pronouns, numerals, and quantifiers.

Nouns have inherent lexical gender (masculine, feminine, neuter), which is not indicated on the noun itself, but apparently occurs as an agreement feature on verbs and adverbs (this is not stated explicitly, however). Interestingly, neuter gender can mark dual or mass nouns. For example, the noun meaning “foot” is masculine when referring to a single foot, but neuter when referring to a pair of feet.

In contrast to nouns, which can function both as arguments and as predicates, verbs can only function as predicates. The three major verb classes are existential verbs (e.g. weather verbs), intransitive verbs, and transitive verbs. Transitive and intransitive verbs are each split up into two morphological classes, depending on whether they obligatorily take an agreement marker or not. Adjective-like intransitive verbs take an agreement marker, while other intransitive verbs do not. One group of transitive verbs obligatorily contains a patient agreement marker, while the other group does not.

The morphosyntax of Tehuelche is of the “marked nominative” type (Dixon 1994): the A argument of the transitive and the S argument of the intransitive clause are overtly marked in the same way, whereas the O argument of the transitive clause is unmarked.

### *Dictionary, Index, and Appendix*

The main part of the DTE is the Dictionary Tehuelche–Spanish. It contains approximately 1,300 main entries, most of which have several subentries. Tehuelche proper names and toponyms are included. The data on which the Dictionary is based were collected by the author during ten months of field work in 1983–1984 and were checked during later field trips. Most data originate from recorded discourse, some were obtained through elicitation.

The information given in each entry is very detailed. Everywhere, the speaker that used the word is indicated through initials. In many cases, this means that when a word was used or accepted in the same form by all consultants, all their initials are given. However, due to the advanced state of language loss, the speaker variation is often quite high. In these cases, the

Dictionary does not choose one “correct” variant of a word. Instead, all variants are given, ordered according to their frequency and with explicit indication of each consultant.

Each entry furthermore states grammatical properties of the word, such as the morphological class to which the word belongs and its grammatical form. Subentries illustrate the different morphological and syntactic environments in which the lexeme was found. Most of the main entries as well as the subentries 686 Reviews contain actual examples of use, all of which stem from the data corpus. By cross-references, the Dictionary furthermore indicates possible semantic relationships between different entries. The sources of loan words, which usually stem from Spanish or Araucanian (Mapudungun), are also provided.

The Dictionary gives extensive semantic information. In cases where there is no Spanish translation equivalent, the meaning of the word is paraphrased or described in detail. Many entries are complemented by encyclopaedic information, including drawings, bibliographical references and quotations. Sometimes a literary translation is given in addition to the Spanish translational equivalent.

The second main part of the DTE, the Spanish–Tehuelche Index, can be seen most of all as a cross-referencing device. Each Spanish entry is followed by (the different varieties of) the corresponding Tehuelche lexeme that forms a main entry in the Tehuelche–Spanish Dictionary, where it can then be looked up for full information.

The Appendix contains words from a hitherto unpublished list compiled by Suárez between 1966 and 1968. Only those words and variants are listed here that did not occur in Fernández Garay’s corpus. The Appendix also contains semantic information found by Suárez that differs from the information obtained by Fernández Garay. As in the main part, there is also a Spanish glossary of the Suárez word list.

### *Evaluation*

The DTE is an extremely valuable contribution to the research on South American Indian languages. Aside from the particular value it obtains from the precarious situation of its object language, the DTE also shows in an exemplary manner how even a relatively thin book can provide extremely detailed and insightful information on a language. This is due, first of all, to the high reliability of its data. Fernández Garay’s strict separation of data gained from her own field work from that collected by Jorge Suárez some 15 years earlier is a clear sign that no attempt is made at completing or brushing up the data artificially. The accuracy and consistency in which the data are presented is also remarkable. A large part of the Introduction (pp. 29–48) is dedicated to a detailed explanation of how the Dictionary is organized and how it should be used. At the same time, the data are presented in a transparent way, so that the Dictionary is informative also when used without further instruction. The Spanish–Tehuelche Index is to be especially commended because it highly Reviews 687 facilitates the search for particular entries for someone not familiar with the language. My spot checks have shown the Index to be absolutely reliable in its cross-referencing function.

In this way, the DTE fulfills its aim of being of use to different types of readers (p. 4): to future generations of Tehuelche Indians who may want to learn something about the language of their ancestors (according to the author, there is no such interest at the present moment); to people interested in the native cultures of Argentina in general; and to linguists who work on languages of the area. The choice of Spanish as the metalanguage is more than justified given

these target groups. Also the fact that there is no overall map of Argentina, which would be helpful to a reader unfamiliar with the region, is no serious drawback under this circumstance.

However, I also have some points of criticism to make. Most of these concern the presentation of the grammatical sketch in the Introduction (pp. 16– 29), some deal with the Dictionary part itself, and some relate to the layout of the book.

The grammatical sketch is thorough and convincing with respect to the data and the way they are analyzed. The author's profound knowledge of the language is obvious. However, reading the sketch does not result in a feeling that one has an idea of how the language works. No overview of the general behaviour of the language is given, such as a characterization of its basic word order, the structure of words, the degree of agglutination or synthesis. Different types of morphemes, such as roots and affixes, are not clearly distinguished. Hyphens do not mark affixes, but are used to indicate the obligatory presence of another morpheme, so that also lexical stems appear with a hyphen. Only the unusual alignment type of the language is characterized explicitly (pp. 28f.). This section, however, also contains a somewhat lengthy discussion of the typological significance of this pattern, which does not fit the style of the remainder of the book.

The use of the terminology is consistent and probably well considered, but not always entirely transparent. For instance, it is not clear why certain morphemes are labelled "postpositions", such as the nominative marker that precedes the pronominal element it marks (p. 27; p. 29). On the whole, the amount of technical terms exceeds the insights gained from the sketch. It would be sufficient, for example, to simply speak of a "patient" instead of a "semantic patient" (*paciente semántico*; p. 24), since no contrasting, different type of patient is specified.

Another drawback of the grammatical sketch is that there are only very few illustrations of the grammatical phenomena. For example, when it is stated that 688 Reviews nouns differ in gender (p. 20), an illustration of the phenomenon would have been desirable. Some other sections are simply not informative due to the lack of exemplification. The section on syllable structure (p. 19), for example, only consists of a list of possible syllables. It is puzzling to see here that syllables can apparently have the shape "CC" or even just "C". One has to consult other sources to find out that indeed, Tehuelche syllables can have a consonantal nucleus (Adelaar and Muysken 2004: 563). However, it would have been the task of the grammatical sketch to point this out. Likewise, the table of personal pronouns (p. 21) is almost impossible to interpret without at least one example of use. Pronouns can have forms such as *-o...* or *m...e-*, and it would be interesting to know what the dots stand for, and how the prefix- and suffix-positions are assigned.

The examples that *are* given, in turn, do not always illustrate clearly the point that is made. For instance, the examples of the two morphological classes of transitive verbs (p. 24) are not informative: judging from the examples, both classes of verbs seem to take agreement markers indexing the patient (*k-* as a third-person marker on verbs of group 1, *t-* on verbs of group 2). However, the text claims that only one class (group 1) does so.

Note that it is made explicit by the author (p. 29) that the DTE is to be seen as a complementation to an already existing grammar of the language as well as to a Tehuelche text collection (Fernández Garay 1998 and 1997, respectively). Probably the use of the terminology, as well as many other things that are not understood here, become clear when the grammar is taken into account. However, given the fact that this work is not easily accessible, the grammatical sketch should have been presented in a more reader-friendly manner.

Finally, the organization of the grammatical sketch as a whole could be more transparent. In part, this could have been achieved easily by locating the sketch in a first-level position within the Introduction. As it is, the entire sketch (“3.5. Aspectos fonológicos y sintácticos del tehuelche”) is a subsection to Section 3, “Aspectos lingüísticos”, which also includes sociolinguistic and historical information. The phonology part of the sketch, accordingly, appears on the third level, as does the part on the grammar (“3.5.2. Sintaxis”). As a consequence, the 22 sub-headings of the grammar section appear on the fourth level (from “3.5.2.1. Sustantivos” through “3.5.2.22. La construcción sintáctica del tehuelche”), and two headings are even on the fifth level. This makes it hard for the reader to keep up with the hierarchies of different grammatical categories. In my view, the grammatical sketch would have deserved a first-level position in its own right, thereby avoiding the long rows of section numbers.

As for the Dictionary part, it was already said that it is highly informative and detailed. However, in my view the frequency of occurrence of particular Reviews 689 words is dealt with in too much detail, whereas the phonetic realization of particular words receives too little attention. I will specify both these points.

As was mentioned above, when there are different phonological variants of one word, these are ordered according to their relative frequency (p. 32). However, it is not clear what “frequent” means here, especially given the small number of consultants. If a word occurred five times with three different pronunciations, is this already a case of different “frequencies”? How are speakers counted that provided more text material than others? Given the general thoroughness of the way in which the data are dealt with in the DTE, I believe that there are straightforward answers to these questions. Still, it is questionable how helpful it is to present the data according to a vague gradual frequency scale. Alternatively, the alphabetical order could have been employed everywhere, and only when one form is used by only one or two speakers, this might have been pointed out. Additionally, the cases in which all speakers agreed could have been established as default, thereby avoiding the rows of six or seven initials.

The space saved here could instead have been used for phonetic information. Unfortunately, this information is omitted entirely from the Dictionary entries. The author refers the reader to the list of phonetic realizations of the phonemes in the Introduction (p. 32). However, that list does not provide information on the environments in which the different realizations occur. Since, as mentioned above, the degree of phonetic variation is quite high in some cases, the reader has often no clue as to how exactly a word is pronounced. And even if the Introduction were more explicit on this point, omitting phonetic information in the Dictionary is still a serious shortcoming given the fact that the DTE is also aimed at non-linguists, who might not want to consult a grammatical sketch in order to know how a word is pronounced.

Finally, I would like to comment on the layout of the book. In general, the DTE is a beautiful book with apparently no typographical errors, and extremely consistent in its layout. However, the Dictionary part displays odd hyphenation in some cases, initial vowels being sometimes separated from the rest of the word (e.g. “e-rrar”, p. 64; “a-rrugada”, p. 73). Another point concerns the use of italics. Strangely, the names of native American languages and ethnic groups are given in italics (e.g. “tehuelche”), while those of established written languages are not (e.g. “inglés”). This unnecessary use of italics disturbs the visual impression, especially when the language names occur in headings. Since the headings in the DTE are in italics, the language names appear then in standard print, which gives odd results such as “2.3. Los tehuelches” (p. 7), “2.2.1. Los mapuches” (p. 5).

Let me emphasize that most of my points of criticism are neglectable in view of the overall purpose and setup of the book, particularly given the fact that complementary works are already in existence (Fernández Garay 1997, 1998). The DTE is a thorough, reliable, and impressive document of an almost extinct language.

### References

- Adelaar, Willem with Pieter Muysken. 2004. *Languages of the Andes*. Cambridge: CUP.
- Dixon, R.M.W. 1977. Where have all the adjectives gone? *Studies in Language* 1(1): 19–80.
- Dixon, R.M.W. 1994. *Ergativity*. Cambridge: CUP.
- Fernández Garay, Ana 1997. *Testimonios de los últimos tehuelches. Textos originales con traducción y notas lingüístico-etnográficos*. Archivo de Lenguas Indoamericanas, Colección Nuestra América, Buenos Aires: Instituto de Lingüística, Facultad de Filosofía y Letras, Universidad de Buenos Aires.
- Fernández Garay, Ana 1998. *El tehuelche. Descripción de una lengua en vías de extinción*. Valdivia: Universidad Austral de Chile, Anejo no. 15.
- Gordon, Raymond G. Jr. (ed.). 2005. *Ethnologue: Languages of the world*. (15th edition). Dallas TX: SIL International.