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978-0-521-02886-8 - A Grammar of Tariana, from Northwest Amazonia

Alexandra Y. Aikhenvald

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## A Grammar of Tariana

This is a comprehensive reference grammar of Tariana, an endangered Arawak language from a remote region in the northwest Amazonian jungle. Its speakers traditionally marry someone speaking a different language, and as a result most people are fluent in five or six languages. Because of this rampant multilingualism, Tariana combines a number of features inherited from the protolanguage with properties diffused from neighbouring but unrelated Tucanoan languages. Typologically unusual features of the language include: an array of classifiers independent of genders, complex serial verbs, case marking depending on the topicality of a noun, and double marking of case and number. Tariana has obligatory evidentiality – every sentence contains a special element indicating whether the information was seen, heard, or inferred by the speaker, or whether the speaker acquired it from somebody else. This grammar will be a valuable source-book for linguists and others interested in natural languages.

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**A GRAMMAR OF TARIANA,  
FROM NORTHWEST AMAZONIA**

Alexandra Y. Aikhenvald

Research Centre for Linguistic Typology  
La Trobe University, Melbourne



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*For my Tariana family*

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## Preface

This is a grammar of Tariana, a member of the Arawak family – the largest language family of Central and South America. Tariana was once a dialect continuum spoken by over 1500 people in various settlements along the Vaupés river and its tributaries. The subgroups of Tariana used to constitute a strict hierarchy, and each would speak a different dialect. The difference between individual dialects is comparable to that between Romance languages. As the Catholic missions and white influence expanded, the groups highest up in the hierarchy abandoned Tariana. As the result, the language is actively spoken by only about 100 people, mostly adults, representatives of the lowest-ranking group Wamiarikune, and is severely endangered. I started assembling data on the language in 1991 and have since worked with most speakers of this dialect of Tariana. As by-products of this work, we produced a bilingual Tariana–Portuguese dictionary, several collections of texts and a practical grammar, and launched a program for teaching Tariana in secondary school. The dedication of the consultants, their insights and their patience made it possible to carry out this daunting task.

This grammar contains an analysis of the Tariana language, starting from a brief characterisation of language and its speakers, then going on to phonology, morphology, syntax, discourse organisation and semantics. The analysis is cast in terms of a cumulative typological framework of linguistic analysis – which employs 'the fundamental theoretical concepts that underlie all work in language description and change' (Dixon 1997: 128) and in terms of which significant typological generalisations are postulated; this has come to be called basic linguistic theory. I have avoided employing any of the more specific formalisms (which come and go with such frequency).

Every chapter of this grammar includes a presentation of the facts of the language interwoven with arguments for their analysis within a typological framework. No attempt has been made to separate pure 'description' from theoretical interpretation. In particular, numerous features of Tariana go against what was thought to be 'universal' – for instance, having serial verbs and complex predicates of several distinct types as independent grammatical phenomena, or having gender and classifiers as overlapping means for noun categorisation. A typological perspective for each phenomenon is crucial for the analysis given here.

Tariana is spoken in the multilingual area of the Vaupés basin, characterised by strong cultural inhibition against language mixing – viewed predominantly in terms of loan morphemes. The long-term interaction between East Tucano languages and the Tariana dialect continuum has resulted in a rampant diffusion of patterns and calquing of categories – which include classifiers, tense-evidentiality, number marking and even pronominal cross-referencing. There is a strong areal convergence of patterns – rather than of forms – without, however, implying anything like the emergence of an 'identical' grammar. When appropriate, information on the areally diffused or genetically inherited character of a pattern is included in this grammar. A full analysis of contact-induced developments in Tariana is dealt with in a separate study (Aikhenvald forthcoming-a).

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Detailed exemplification is provided for every grammatical point. Most examples come from texts, and a few from spontaneous – or carefully directed – conversation. An additional objective is to convey as much of the Tariana culture as possible through using naturally occurring examples. I avoid using elicited sentences; elicitation was limited to lexicon and to paradigms.

English glosses are kept as close as possible to the glosses and explanations offered by my consultants. When no English equivalent is readily available, a Portuguese word is used, e.g. *abiu-fruit* or *mucura-rat*; some semantically complicated terms are explained in the texts, or in Chapter 1. Readers should be warned against trying to draw conclusions concerning Tariana grammar and semantics from the study of translations.

Examples, tables and diagrams are numbered separately within each chapter. Footnotes are numbered separately for each chapter. The orthography used in the examples from languages other than Tariana, and language names, follows that of the sources (unless indicated otherwise).

This grammar can be used as a sourcebook for further typological studies, and as a model for further grammars of languages of Arawak and of other families of the Americas. It is far from being the last word on Tariana – this grammar is intended to provide a sound systematic foundation for further studies, reanalyses and reinterpretations.

It is my hope that this book will encourage linguists to go out into the field and document languages threatened by extinction (before it is too late to do so), notwithstanding the difficulties and temporary frustrations which necessarily accompany a fieldworker.

## Acknowledgements

My warmest thanks go to the Brito family who taught me their language and accepted me as a member of their family. When in July 1991 Graciliano Sanchez Brito ('Gara') appeared in a makeshift house in the township of São Gabriel da Cachoeira (state of Amazonas, Brazil) that I was sharing with a few students from the Federal University of Santa Catarina, little could I suspect that he would become my main teacher, and then my classificatory older brother. Later I met his brothers, Jovino and José Luiz, his sister Olívia, and his parents. His father, Cândido Brito – one of the few traditional speakers and a real treasure-chest of Tariana lore and culture – was an indefatigable and patient teacher. And his mother, Maria Sanchez – a Piratapuya herself – adopted me as her daughter and taught me quite a few secrets about the life of Vaupés women. Gara's cousin, Rafael, the youngest speaker of the Santa Rosa dialect, has always been extraordinarily helpful, besides being great fun to have around.

When I went to the villages of Iauaretê and Santa Rosa, I met Ismael (Mayë) Brito, Gara's older brother, and Leonardo Brito, Cândido's younger brother. I learnt an enormous amount from both of them.

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spoken by a very remote group, upstream from Iauaretê. And he has, ever since, been a real encyclopedia of the Upper Rio Negro region for me. I have also profited from discussions with Elias Coelho, Janet Barnes, Henri Ramirez and Stephen Hugh-Jones.

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## Organisation and cross-referencing

A brief overview of the linguistic profile of Tariana is found at the beginning of Chapter 1. Phonology is discussed in Chapter 2. Chapter 3 contains an outline of word classes. Chapters 4–20 deal with various aspects of morphology, while syntactic issues are considered in Chapters 21–24. Chapter 25 deals with discourse organisation, and Chapter 26 provides a brief sketch of semantic issues, especially those relevant to the understanding of the grammar.

Here and *passim* '-' stands for any morpheme boundary, that is, a boundary between a root and an affix, or between two roots. The symbol '= ' indicates a boundary between a root and a clitic, or an affix and a clitic, or two clitics (see Chapter 2). The symbol ' indicates a primary stress, and ` indicates a secondary stress (obligatory on enclitics). Stress is marked on each example in Chapter 2 ('Phonology') and in other chapters only if it is relevant to the discussion. Since nasal vowels and long vowels are always stressed, stress on these is not marked.

In Tariana there is a considerable amount of variation between certain allophones (discussed in Chapter 2). Examples of alternative pronunciations are *yápi*, *ñápi* 'bone', *yápu*, *ñápu* 'stream', *yama*, *ñama* 'two', *pamúya*, *pamúña* 'middle', *-pidena*, *-pidana* 'remote past reported', *-naku*, *-nuku* 'topical non-subject', *-nuka*, *-naka* 'present visual', *di-keña*, *di-keñwa* 'he begins'. There is also variation between long vowels and short vowels, e.g. *ke:ri*, *ke:ri* 'moon', *na:*, *na* 'they went, they said'. Most of these variants depend on the age and proficiency of the speaker; every example in this grammar records the actual pronunciation by the consultant.

Examples are numbered separately for each chapter. All the examples and texts are supplied with an interlinear morpheme gloss, and then translated into English. Homophonous morphemes (e.g. *-nha* 'pausal marker; interrogative present visual; imperative (containing doubt)') are differentiated by their glosses. The symbol '+' is used to indicate fused morphemes, e.g. *direta* 'he ordered' is glossed as 3sgnf+order+CAUS, its underlying form being *di-* (3sgnf) *-ira* (order) *-ita* (CAUS). Portmanteau morphemes are glossed with a ':', for instance, *-peni* (PL:ANIM) 'plural.animate'. All grammatical morphemes are glossed in small caps while lexical morphemes are glossed in lower case. Pronominal prefixes are shown as 1sg, 3pl, in lower case. For polysemous morphemes, different translation in glosses corresponds to different meanings; for instance *-kaka* 'reflexive-reciprocal' is glossed as REFL when it has reflexive meaning and as RC when it has reciprocal meaning.

Cross-references are of two kinds:

- those preceded by § refer to chapter and section number, e.g. §11.1 refers to section 1 of Chapter 11;
- those beginning with a number refer to examples in the grammar, e.g. 11.1 refers to example 1 in Chapter 11.

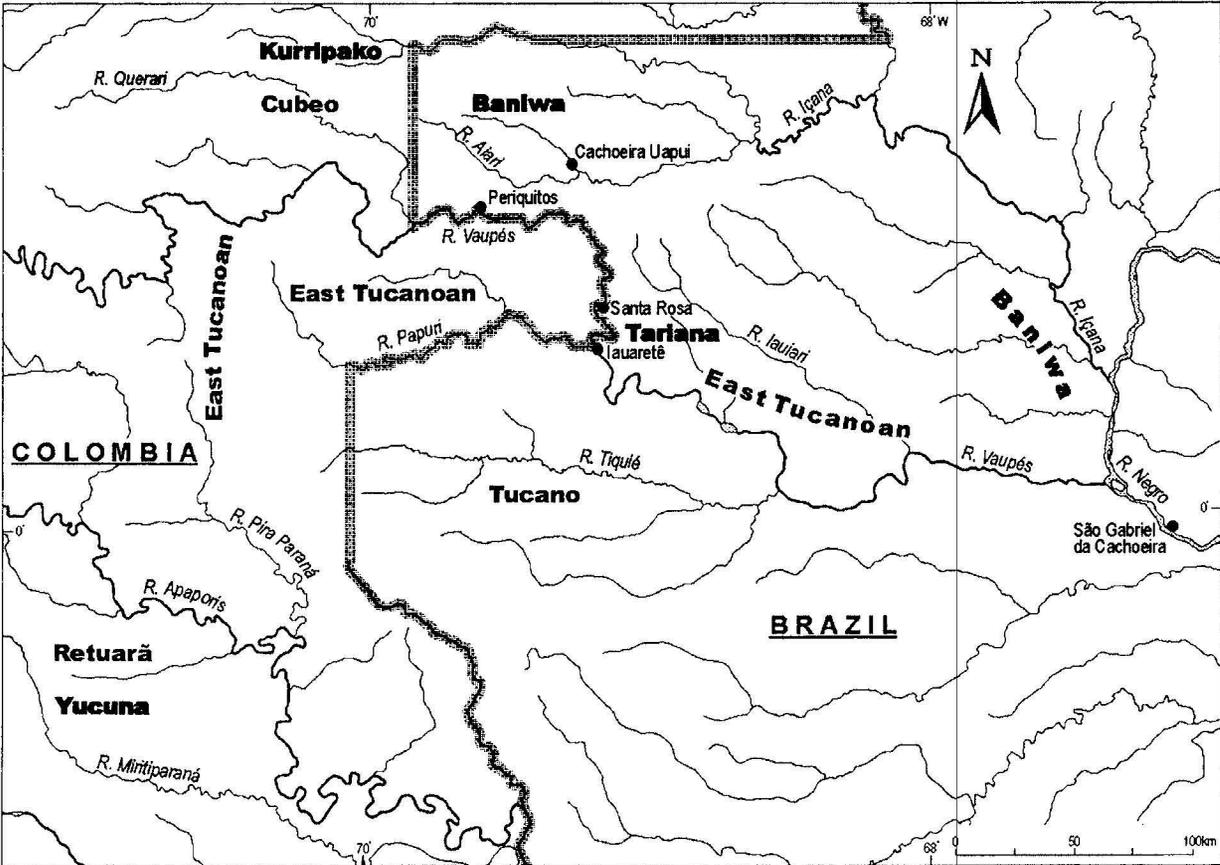
## Abbreviations

A	transitive subject	FUT.CERT	certain future
ABSTR	abstract	FUT.UNCERT	uncertain future
ACT.CONTR	action contrast	GEN	generic
ADM	admirative	GEN.INFR	generic inferred
ADV	adverbial	HAB	habitat
AFF	derivational affix	HABIT	habitual
ANIM	animate	HORT	hortative
ANT	anterior	HUM	human
APPR	apprehensive	IMP	impersonal
APPROX	approximative	IMPV	imperative
ART	article	IMPV.DETR	detrimental
ASS.PL	associative plural		imperative
AUG	augmentative	IMP.SEC	secondhand
AUX	auxiliary		imperative
CAUS	causative	INAN	inanimate
CL	classifier	INDF	indefinite
COHORT	cohortative	INFR	inferred
COLL	collective	INS	instrumental
COM	comitative	INT	intentional
COMPL	completive	INTER	interrogative
COND	conditional	IRRES	irresultative
CONV	converb	LOC	locative
CONTR	contrastive	LOCN	locational
CONTR.ACT	contrast of actions	MASC	masculine
COUNTEREX	counter-expectation	NAT.PHEN	natural phenomena
CURV	curved	NCL	noun class
CUST	customary	NEG	negative
DECL	declarative	NEG.EX	negative existential
DEM	demonstrative	NF, nf	non-feminine
DIM	diminutive	NOM	nominalising
DIST	distal	NOM.FUT	nominal future
DISTRIB	distributive plural	NOM.PAST	nominal past
DS	different subject	NONVIS	non-visual
EMPH	emphatic	NPOSS	non-possessed
EX(IST)	existential	NON.INDIV	non-individuated
EXC	excessive	O	object
EXTRAL	extralocal	OBJ	objective case
f, fem, FEM	feminine	NUM.CL	numeral classifier
FOC.A/S	focussed subject	p	person
FR	frustrative	P.REL	past relative
FUT	future	PART	participle

PART.CONTR	participant contrast	REP	reported
PASS	passive	REPET	repetitive
PAUS	pausal	S	subject of an intransitive verb
PEJ	pejorative	S <sub>a</sub>	subject of an active intransitive verb
PERF	perfective	S <sub>io</sub>	subject of an intransitive verb with a non-canonically marked argument
PL, pl	plural	S <sub>o</sub>	subject of a stative intransitive verb
POL.SUG	polite suggestion	SPEC.INFR	specific inferred
POSS	possessive	SUB	subordinating
POSTP.IMPV	postponed imperative	SG, sg	singular
POT	potential	SINGL	singulative
PREC	precative	SS	same subject
PRES	present	TH	thematic
PROH	prohibitive	TOP.ADV	topic-advancing voice
PROX	proximate	TOP.NON.A/S	topical non
PURP.NONVIS	purposive non-visual	UNCERT	uncertainty-subject
PURP.VIS	purposive visual	VERT	vertical
QUAL	qualificative	VIS	visual
REC	reciprocal	VOC	vocative
REC.P	recent past		
REF	referential kinship term		
REFL	reflexive		
REL	relative		
REM.P	remote past		

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MAP. ARAWAK AND TUCANOAN LANGUAGES IN NORTH-WESTERN AMAZONIA