The grammar of well-being: how to talk about disease in a tropical society

Alexandra (Sacha) Aikhenvald,
Distinguished Professor and Foundation Director,
Language and Culture Research Centre (LCRC), JCU
A.y.Aikhenvald@live.com
What this talk is about

- Ways of talking about diseases, ailments, convalescence, and well-being vary from language to language.
- In some languages, an ailment 'hits' or 'gets' the person.
- In others, the sufferer 'catches' an ailment, comes to be a 'container' for it, or is presented as a 'fighter' or a 'battleground'.
In languages with obligatory expression of information source, the onslaught of disease is treated as 'unseen', just like any kind of internal feeling or shamanic activity.
• Do the grammatical means of talking about diseases and ailments reflect traditional attitudes and thoughts about the origins of adverse conditions?

• And what are the patterns involved in describing traditional healing practices and 'getting better'?
The main question is

How does language reflect conceptualization and perception of disease, its cure, prevention, and consequences?
And

• How do the patterns of speaking about disease change under the new social circumstances of a pandemic?
What this talk is about - cont

• My special focus is on languages from hot-spots of linguistic diversity and diseases of all sorts — especially Amazonia, with special attention to:

• **Tariana**, an Arawak language spoken in the multilingual Vaupes River Basin area in Amazonia, Brazil.
1 Preamble

• Every language has a variety of means for talking about diseases and ailments.

• The ways in which disease, ailment, recovery, and well-being are conceptualised, across languages and cultures, correlate with how people talk about them.
Different phases of disease or sickness

• tend to be expressed using different grammatical schemas, that is grammatical constructions

• and they may change as languages change.
Our focus is on

• grammatical means of talking about various phases of disease and sickness, across the world’s languages
• and how these means may correlate with perception and conceptualization of disease
As Nick Enfield (2004:3) put it, ‘Encoded in the semantics of grammar we find cultural values and ideas’ and clues about social structures and peoples’ attitudes.
The lexicon – or vocabulary – of any language

• is another obvious place to look for patterns of conceptualization of disease and well-being

• and we will get back to this towards the end of this presentation.
Vocabulary for various stages of disease

• Reflect traditional knowledge and attitudes
• So do the metaphors.
• Military metaphors: human body as a battlefield:
  ➢ - fights the disease
  ➢ - succumbs to a disease
  ➢ - loses or wins the battle
The effect of military metaphors

• May be empowering
• Or it may have the opposite effect – Khullar (2014), Sonntag (1978, 1979) offer many examples.
Stigma associated with a disease

- May impinge upon its naming and being precise about it
- This takes us to the domain of taboo (Allan and Burridge 2006)
The conspiracy of silence:

- In Kwaio, an Oceanic language from the Solomons, the terms *xuu* 'leprosy' and *fonumela* 'a disease category partly overlapping with tuberculosis' are 'restricted in use, because of the danger of "contagion".

- In many languages, including English and Hungarian (Benczes and Burridge 2018), one avoids mentioning the name of a dreaded disease (such as syphilis or cancer)...
The result: Vagueness in referring to actual disease

• There is often a wide range of terms reflecting symptoms.
• But there tends to be just one general way of talking about being sick: in Manambu, from East Sepik (Papuan New Guinea), *ba:r* (or *bare*-) may refer to any illness…
• In view of changing social perceptions, can this change?
We now turn to

• Grammatical schemas employed in talking about disease at its different stages.

• We will then examine the effect of the pandemic on language use.
The expressions of diseases may belong to a variety of word classes:

• They can be adjectives, e.g. English *sick*;
• They can be verbs, e.g. Portuguese *adoecer*, Tariana (Arawak, Brazil) *
  kamia*, Warekena (Arawak) *anua-*
• They can consist of a copula+ copula complement, e.g. *be sick*. 
• They can be nouns, e.g.
• English *fever, tuberculosis,*
• Tariana *adaki* ‘fever, dangerous disease’, Manambu (Papua New Guinea) *ba:r* 'fever, malaria‘, Yalaku (Papua New Guinea) *pori* ‘malaria, any disease’
• Or different diseases and ailments can be expressed by members of different word classes.

    For instance, In Tariana, the generic term 'be sick' is a verb, and the few names of specific diseases are nouns.
2 A Taxonomy of grammatical schemas in describing disease

• This taxonomy is based on the analysis of grammars and materials on c. 300 languages from different parts of the world, including those I did fieldwork on myself, similar to all typological work we do at the LCRC

• Cast in the framework of basic linguistic theory - see principles in:
A. The Predication schema

The disease is in the predicate slot of an intransitive clause.
A-1 State:

• **English** *I am sick, I am feverish*

• **Estonian** (Balto-Finnic, Eesti) *külmetu-sin* (cold+REFLEXIVE.CAUSATIVE-PAST.1sg)
  
  'I caught a cold' (lit. I colded myself)

• **Tariana** (Arawak, Brazil) *du-kamia-ka*
  
  (3fem.sg-be.ill-
   RECENT.PAST.VISUAL)

  'she is sick'.
Estonians in Tallinn
• The Tariana people of Santa Rosa, Amazonas
A-ii. Process:

- **English** *I got sick, I became sick*

- **Murui** (Witotoan, Colombia)  
  *kome raikotai* - 'person become(s) sick'
Kasia Wojtylak working with a speaker of Murui, a Witotoan language of Colombian Amazonia
B. The Motion schema:

Tariana

(1) adaki  di-nu-mha
fever  3sgnf-come-
       PRESENT.NONVISUAL

nu-na
1sg-OBJECT

'Fever comes to me, meaning: I am becoming sick with fever'.
A motion event in Tariana

• Has to be expressed using a serial verb construction (Aikhenvald 2018, *Serial verbs*, OUP, provides criteria and a summary):

(1a) paita nawiki di-ruku
    one person 3sgnf-go.down
di-nu-pidana
3sgnf-come-rem.past.reported
‘A man came going downstream’
A motion verb in the Motion schema

• Cannot be used in a serial verb construction –

• (1b) adaki di-rukú di-nu-???

• This points towards special grammatical features of the expressions of well-being –

• Hence the title of the talk!
C. The Possession schema

C-i. Predicative possession and existential schema

The 'sufferer' is the subject of the possessive verb 'have' and the disease is the possessee, as in English *I have a cold.*
C-ii. The Locative possession schema

the 'sufferer' is the location of the disease, e.g.

(2) ta-l on vähk \textit{Estonian}  
he-ADESSIVE is cancer  
'He has cancer' (lit. at him is cancer)
Or 'fever is to me', in Tariana:

(3) adaki alia-mha
fever exist-NONVISUAL.PRESENT
nu-na
1sg-to
'I have fever' (lit. to me is fever)
‘To me is fever’...
Possessive constructions in Schema C

• can be used if you wish to say 'I have a house', or 'I have two older sisters', you will do it in the same way.

• but expressions like (2)-(3) and have in 'I have a cold' in English behave differently.
• In English, one can use 'belong' to refer to a house, but not to a disease ('I have a cold' versus *a cold belongs to me). Same for Estonian, *kuuluma ‘belong’
• In English, Estonian, or Tariana, a possessor-oriented question sounds weird – 'I have a cold' versus *whose cold is this?.

• This also points towards the existence of special grammatical features of the expressions of disease.
D. The Comitative schema

the 'sufferer' is the subject of a copula or verbless clause, and 'disease' accompanies the subject, e.g. 'I am with fever' in Trio/Tiriyo (Carib: Suriname, Brazil)

Or Portuguese estou com febre ‘I have fever’
Trio/Tiriyo

(4) këi-ke  n-ai  pahko
fever-COMITATIVE  he-is  Dad

'My father has a fever'

(my father is with fever) (Carlin 2004: 475)
A Tiriyo man (Brazil)
Murui (Witotoan, Colombia)

(5) nịgarui oo diga jaai-de?
how many days you with go-it

'How many days have you had (the sickness)' (lit. how many days does (it) go with you?)

(Wojtylak 2018)
E. The Acquisition schema with 'agentive' sufferer:

A transitive clause where the 'sufferer' is the subject and the disease is the object, e.g. English *I caught a cold, he got malaria*, Portuguese *ele pegou malaria 'he got malaria'* and (6), from Baniwa, very closely related to Tariana.
Baniwa of Içana (Arawak, Brazil)

(6) whéetshi hipaka-ni
flu he.got/caught-it

'He got flu'

• Is the 'disease' here a true object?
• No: *I caught a cold* can hardly be questioned as *What did you catch?*
• Saying *A cold was caught by me* is ungrammatical.
Afonso Fontes and Hilda da Silva (Hohôdene Baniwa) with their daughters
F. The Acquisition schema with 'agentive' disease:

a transitive clause where the 'sufferer' is the object and the disease is the subject:

Manambu, Sepik area, Papua New Guinea

(7) Malaria  de kem  kure-l
   malaria  him       get-she
   ‘He got malaria’ (lit. malaria got him)
Jacklyn Yuamali, Manambu
Trio/Tiriyo (Carib, Brazil/Surinam)

(8) j-apëi mararia
   it.to.me-take.PAST malaria
'I have caught malaria' (lit. malaria has caught me) (Carlin 2004: 476)
Tariana (Arawak, Brazil)

(9) adaki dhipa-mhana
    fever he+grab-REM.PAST.NONVISUAL
    nu-na kaiperi
    1sg-OBJECT painful

‘A painful fever grabbed me’ (meaning: I got very ill)

A split NP – for whoever is interested!
The late Américo Brito (Tariana)
Is the 'disease' here a true subject?

• No. It cannot be questioned: so, 'who or what caught him?' cannot be asked about a disease.

• Nor can the expression be passivized.
G. The Container schema:

a copula clause or a verbless clause with the 'sufferer' in the subject function and the disease marked as a location, or a container:
Trio/Tiriyo

(9) mararia-tao
malaria-CONTAINER.LOCATIVE
w-ae
it.to.me-be
'I have malaria' (lit. I'm in malaria, malaria is surrounding me)' (Carlin 2004: 476)
Murui (Witotoan, Colombia)

(10) ninomona nai-e oo-mo
    where anaphoric you-in
    komui-de raiko
    grow-it sickness

'Where has the sickness grown in you?'
(Wojtylak 2018)
H. The Topic schema:

the 'sufferer' is the topic in clause initial position and the disease is the subject of the subsequent clause.
Manambu (Papua NG)

(11) de yap war-el
he breath/asthma go.up-she
‘He has asthma (or heart attack)' (lit. he breath goes up (breath/asthma is feminine))
Mandarin Chinese and many languages of the Mainland Southeast Asia

(12) Zha:ngsa:n hěn tóu téng
Zhangsan very head ache
'Zhangsan has a severe headache'

(Zhangsan (,) very head ache) (Li and Thompson 1980: 70-1)

Note the part-whole relationship between the 'sufferer' and the affected part.
At least some of the schemas are special, e.g.

- Constructions in C Possession schema behave differently from superficially similar possessive constructions.
- But they do differ from other possessive constructions – slides 40-42, repeated here
Possessive constructions in Schema C – repeated from above

- can be used if you wish to say 'I have a house', or 'I have two older sisters', you will do it in the same way.
- but expressions like (2)-(3) in Estonian and Tariana, and *have* in 'I have a cold' in English behave differently.
Repeated from above

In English, one can use 'belong' to refer to a house, but not to a disease ('I have a cold' versus *a cold belongs to me). Same for Estonian, *kuuluma ‘belong’
Repeated from above

In English, Estonian, or Tariana, a possessor-oriented question sounds weird – 'I have a cold' versus *whose cold is this?.
At least some of the schemas are special, e.g.

• Constructions in E, The Acquisition schema with agentive sufferer and disease as ‘object’, differ from other transitive clauses: here ‘disease’ lacks many object properties – see slide 49, repeated here:
Repeated from above-Baniwa of Içana (Arawak, Brazil)

(6) whéetshi hipaka-ni
    flu          he.got/caught-it

'He got a flu'

• Is the 'disease' here a true object?
• No: *I caught a cold* can hardly be questioned as
  *What did you catch?*
• Saying *A cold was caught by me* is ungrammatical.
At least some of the schemas are special

Constructions in F, Acquisition schema with ‘agentive’ disease, differ from other superficially similar transitive clauses: ‘disease’ lacks many subject properties – see the following slides, repeated from above.
Repeated form above: Tariana (Arawak, Brazil)

(9) adaki dhipa-mhana
fever he+grab-REM.PAST.NONVISUAL
nu-na kaiperi
1sg-OBJECT painful
‘A painful fever grabbed me’ (meaning: I got very ill)
Is the 'disease' here a true subject?
• No. It cannot be questioned: so, 'who or what caught him?' cannot be asked about a disease.
• Nor can the expression be passivized.
• In B, The Motion schema, the verb of motion cannot be part of a serial verb construction - as we have seen, and:
B. The Motion schema

Tariana

(1) adaki di-nu-mha
fever he-come-PRESENT.NONVISUAL
nu-na
1sg-OBJECT

'Fever comes to me, meaning: I am becoming sick with fever'.

* di-nu-mha di-uka??? (came arrived?)
Such special features associated with grammatical schemas used for talking about disease/well-being suggest that it makes sense to talk about ‘the grammar of well-being’.
A summary: special features of grammatical schemas established so far

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Schema</th>
<th>Special Feature</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B. The Motion schema</td>
<td>Lack of use of serial verb constructions, typical for events involving physical motion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. The Possession schema</td>
<td>Different syntactic possibilities of the possessive verb and restrictions on possessive content questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. The Acquisition schema with 'agentive' sufferer</td>
<td>Disease as 'object' does not have all object properties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F. The Acquisition schema with 'agentive' disease</td>
<td>Disease as 'subject' does not have all subject properties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H. The Topic schema</td>
<td>Restrictions on content questions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3 Different stages of disease reflected in different schemas

- Onset of disease
  - A. Predication schema: process
  - B. Motion schema
  - E/F. Acquisition schemas

- The state of disease
  - A. Predication schema: process
  - C. Possession schema
  - D. Comitative schema
  - G. Container schema

- H. Topic schema
So,

- The Motion schema B may be used for onset/acquisition of disease
  Tariana, (1): adaki di-nu-mha nuna
  ‘fever comes to me’ (nonvisual)

- The Predication schema A-I used for the state of disease:
  A-i: du-kamia-ka duha
  ‘she is sick’ (visual)
How about the subsequent stages — Recovery and getting well?

I. Change of state-cum-motion schema:

Tariana

(12) Matsia di-a-ka
    well he-become/go-RECENT.PAST.VISUAL
    'He got better, got well'
J. Predication schema

Baniwa

(13) hálhaame nhoa
be.better I
'I got better, am well'
More?

What about inflicting and spreading disease, and curing it (that is, orchestrating recovery)?

And more?
The questions are -

• What are the cognitive and attitudinal underpinnings and motivations for the use of each particular schema?
• Can we provide an explanation for their choice?
Establishing trajectories of well-being will help provide answers!
The trajectory of well-being

• For each language and society, this will be a combination of the ways of verbally describing the various stages of
  - onset of disease
  - disease setting in
  - disease on the wane
  - disease cured, sufferer recuperating

And the schemas will come in handy!
4 The trajectory of well-being: an example from Tariana

• Tariana (Arawak) is spoken by no more that 100 people in three villages in the remote areas of north-west Amazonia, Brazil (border with Colombia), in the basin of the Vaupés River.

• The language is endangered. There is a dictionary, a large collection of stories, a lengthy grammar (see the references), and a school program.
• The State of Amazonas in Brazil
• The municipality of São Gabriel da Cachoeira and the area known as Cabeça de Cachorro (Dog’s head), and adjacent areas
Travelling on the Rio Negro before turning off to the Vaupés
Travelling on the Vaupes
Our arrival in the Tariana village of Santa Rosa, border between Brazil and Colombia
Only c. 100 of 3000 ethnic Tariana

• speak the language…
• A few speakers have now moved to Iauaretê, a mission centre, and to São Gabriel da Cachoeira (or SGC), the capital of the municipality (same name)
• SGC is among the most indigenous cities of Brazil, and the one with the largest number of COVID-19…
Rafael Brito, Serewhali Enu Irine, – one of the most eminent Tariana - lives and works in SGC
His father Leonardo Brito is one of the few remaining elders who speak the language and know the lore.
The Tariana are highly multilingual

Tariana belongs to the Arawak language family. It is surrounded by speakers of unrelated Tucanoan languages. The main principle of organization is 'linguistic exogamy':

- 'My brothers are those who share a language with me', and
- 'We do not marry our sisters'
- One absolutely has to marry a spouse who will speak a different language (those who do not do this are 'like dogs')
- As a consequence, the area is highly multilingual: every Tariana would know a few Tucanoan languages, plus Portuguese and Spanish.
• Tariana's closest relative is Baniwa of Içana, also Arawak. Baniwa is a bigger group (more than 5,000 people). It is spoken outside the multilingual Vaupés, so there is no influence from Tucanoan.
• Baniwa shares 70-80% lexicon with Tariana.
• Baniwa is different from Tariana in many structural aspects, including talking about disease.
How to talk about disease in Tariana

➢ The general term for a disease is *adaki* which also means 'fever' (as one of the symptoms).

➢ A serious disease (inflicted by shamans or ritual transgressions) is *herenakasi*.

➢ Minor diseases which can be treated with white people's medicines or herbs include *wesi* 'flu' (cf. Baniwa *whéetshi* (6)).
The verb ‘be sick’

• -kamia ‘be ill, sick’

• Its action nominalization *pa-kamia-nipe* (IMPERSONAL-be.ill-NOMINALIZATION) ‘illness’.
The conspiracy of silence (again)

• Generic terms for disease: one prefers to be generic!
• Many terms for symptoms
What causes adaki?

- The main reason for onset of adaki, 'serious disease, fever' is believed to be shamanic intervention, often superficially realised as 'anger'.
- This is why 'scolding' has negative and dangerous connotations: by scolding (di-kwisa) someone could inflict a serious disease.
The concept of *puaya*

- *Puaya* means ‘adverse, other, *diferente’*.  
- Bodily states — such as being pregnant or mestruating — are *puaya* 'adverse'.
- Any ritual misbehaviour is likely to produce adverse consequences. This includes having sex before going hunting, or (as we are all good Catholics), doing any 'work' on Good Friday. When I thought I could take a picture of a healing session, the shaman warned us of it being *puaya* – bringing 'adverse consequences' — so no pictures are available.
What may cause a *puaya* state, a disease (*adaki*) or worse?

- Breaching the restrictions might unleash the actions of the Evil spirit who will 'eat the person up', and then only a strong shaman might help.

- Shamanic activities ('breath' and 'opening the pot of fever') are the major causes of disease. Then the illness 'spreads' — unlike Dyirbal where illness is 'crossing' from one person to another, and can be given by one person to the next.
The trajectory of *adaki*

- (i) the Motion schema B, as in (2):
- *adaki* comes: the onset of disease:
(1) adaki     di-nu-mha
  fever     he-come-PRESENT.NONVISUAL
  nu-na
  1sg-OBJECT

'Fever comes to me, meaning: I am becoming sick with fever'.
(ii) the Possession schema (C-ii) for the disease set in: 'fever is to me', in Tariana:

(3) adaki alia-\textbf{mha}
fever exist-\textbf{NONVISUAL.PRESENT}
u-nu
\textit{1sg-to}

'I have fever' (lit. to me is fever)
(iii) The Agentive Disease schema F

(9) adaki dhipa-mhana
    fever he+grab-REM.PAST.NONVISUAL
    nu-na kaiperi
    1sg-OBJECT painful

‘A painful fever grabbed me’ (meaning: I got very ill)

A split NP – for whoever is interested!
The trajectory of well-being in Tariana

Onset of disease
- B: adoki di-a-mha nia-na
  - Fever comes to me
  - NONVIS
  - I am sick

Disease set in
- A: ru-lakatia-mha
  - I have fever
  - NONVIS
  - I am sick

Disease on the wane
- B: adoki di-a-mha
  - Fever goes (away)

Patient recuperating
- B: ru-yena-mha
  - I have overcome (sickness)

INFlicting Disease:
- malierei 'shaman'
  - nivo-pasa di-sueta-mha
  - he puts magic (out)
- adoki di-smuta-mha
  - he makes fever out
- adoki di-sueta-mha
  - he puts fever (out)

Where is 'fever'? adoki-di a-sowe-pidana
- fever-CL-POT
  - sits in the Fever pot
  - (in locations known only to shamans, old settlements where people have been buried inside the house for a few generations, and abandoned settlements)

Cure
- malierei di-pasea-mha
  - Fever he-spreads
  - NONVIS
  - 'Fever spreads'

Result
- adoki di-a-mha
  - Fever goes away

Cure
- malierei di-pasea-mha
  - Fever he-spreads
  - NONVIS
  - 'Fever spreads'

Result
- adoki di-a-mha
  - Fever goes away

Cure
- malierei di-pasea-mha
  - Fever he-spreads
  - NONVIS
  - 'Fever spreads'

Result
- adoki di-a-mha
  - Fever goes away
Cultural and cognitive underpinnings -

• The use of Schema F, ‘Agentive disease’, reflects the agentivity of someone who inflicts the disease, adaki,

• Or of a powerful shaman who takes on the form of adaki - cf. the principles of Amazonian perspectivism (Viveiros de Castro 2004) and Peter Riviere’s ‘What you see is not what you get (WYSINWYG) in Amazonia’ (1994)
The use of the Agentive schema

• Can be explained by the agentivity of *adaki* or whoever is behind this.

• There are many more examples of similar structures and attitudes in other tropical languages, including Manambu and Karawari, all from the Sepik area of Papua New Guinea.
How do you speak about being sick, Tariana?

Tariana and its Tucanoan neighbours have a significant feature: grammatical marking of information source, or evidentiality.
Frans Boas (1858-1942), a founding father of modern linguistics, put it this way: 'while for us definiteness, number, and time are obligatory aspects, we find in another language location near the speaker or somewhere else, source of information — whether seen, heard, or inferred — as obligatory aspects' (1938: 133)
More on this phenomenon –
Evidentiality is obligatory in Tariana

- you saw it: visual -ka
- you heard it or smelt it or felt it, could not see it: non-visual -mha
- you inferred it: inferred -nihka
- you assume this is so, based on common sense: assumed -sika
- you know it based on someone telling you: reported -pidana
The trajectory of well-being in Tariana

Onset of disease

B. adaki diwa-mha ru-na
fever he come NONVIS tag to 'fever comes to me'

F. adaki diqa-mha ru-na
fever he grab NONVIS me 'fever grabs me'

INFlicting DIsEASE:

mali wi 'shaman'
hivupes di-suwa-mha
'he puts magic breath' (out)

adaki di-musuta-mha
'he makes fever come out'

adaki di-suwa-mha
'he puts fever (out)'?

Where is 'fever'? adaki-di pi-ru-pana
fever-CL-POT the-it REPORTED
'(it) sits in the Fever pot'
(in locations known only to shamans,
old settlements (where people have been
buried inside the house for a few generations),
and abandoned settlements)

mali wi adaki-di ru-mha
shaman fever-CL-POT he-open-NONVIS
'shaman/or can be a Spirit opens the pot of fever'

Disease set in

A. ru-nkwa-mha
the sick NONVIS
'I am sick'

C. adaki di-mha ru-na
fever exist NONVIS me to
'I have fever (malana...)

Disease on the wane

B. adaki di-a-mha
fever he-go NONVIS
'fever goes (away)'?

B. ru-yena-mha
lag-pass, overcome NONVIS
'I have overcome (sickness)'

Patient recuperating

A. mali wi ru-sena-mha ku-wane
well I feel NONVIS almost
'I feel well (almost)'

Cure

mali wi di-puwa-mha
shaman he-sick NONVIS
'Shaman sick (the illness)

mali wi di-papa-mha
shaman he-bless NONVIS
'Shaman blesses (the person)

mali wi di-ka-mha
shaman 3-close 3-hit NONVIS
'shaman (or a Spirit) shuts the pot of fever (close)'

Result

adaki di-a-mha
fever he-go NONVIS
'fever goes away'

adaki di-yena-mha
shaman he-pass NONVIS
'fever passes'
Nonvisual evidential –*mha*…

- One talks about one's own disease or any internal state using a nonvisual evidential.
- This is why we have -*mha* in the Trajectory of well-being when talking about one's own sensations (and also in (1) and in (9)).
- Shamanic actions are not seen: talking about a shaman inflicting a disease involves -*mha*.
- 'Fever spreads' has -*ka*: we can see this…
- If he or she is sick, and we can see that they are sick, we use -*ka* as in Aii.
The use of evidentials appears to reflect cultural stereotypes and the ways of understanding the mechanisms of inflicting disease and its onset...
Recall Nick Enfield’s (2004:3) words -

'Encoded in the semantics of grammar we find cultural values and ideas’ and clues about social structures and peoples’ attitudes.
This is what we have seen

- For the use of evidentials and
- For the use of the Agentive schema F with regard to *adaki* ‘disease’ and its causation.
The language of a pandemic: how the Tariana language embraced COVID-19

- Social upheavals endanger language change.
- New health hazards bring about new ways of saying things.
COVID19 affects the ways we speak – Australian English

The expansion of blends:

- Quarantimes = quarantine times
- Quarantini = martini drunk during quarantimes
- Covidivorce = ?
A covidiot -
K. Burridge and H. Manns  
In contemporary Russian

- Emergent blends of various kinds
- *Karanti-kuly* – a blend of *karantin* ‘quarantine’ and kanikuly ‘*holidays*’: compulsory leave during the COVID-19 lockdown(s)
- *Karanti-nka* - a blend of *karantin* ‘quarantine’ and *kartinka* ‘*picture*’: what you send to your mates during the COVID-19 lockdown(s)
Based on:
Elena Shmeleva, Deputy Director of the Institute of Russian language, Moscow, ‘Infectious neologisms’. Kommersant, April 2020.
The Tariana language embracing COVID-19

• COVID-19 has hit Amazonian Indians very hard

• The state of Amazonas — home to about four million people and several hundred indigenous languages — has seen more than 100,000 active cases with at least 4,000 deaths. And, sadly, still counting!
Cecilia Brito, a Tuyuca wife of Leo Brito, in hospital with COVID-19 in the indigenous mission centre Iauarete
The Tariana language embracing COVID-19

• New ways of speaking about a disease: COVID-special:

1. The onset of disease: COVID-19 ‘appears’, *hiku*.
   We recall that *adaki* ‘comes’.
2. COVID-19 ‘grabs’ a person (like adaki) - Schema F:

(14) COVIDzi dhipa-ka di-na

COVID 3sgnf+grab-rec.p.vis 3sgnf-obj

‘COVID grabbed him (he got COVID – I have seen it)
At the same time

• A new schema for the onset of COVID has evolved: one encounters it by chance, running into it (as into a snake or an obstacle):

(15) diha COVIDz-nuku di-keta-ka
   he COVID-object 3sgnf-
   run.into-rec.p.vis
   ‘He got COVID: he ran into COVID – I have seen it)
COVID-19 is specified!

- Unlike other diseases, COVID-19 is specified by name.
- BUT: there is emergent name avoidance.
- Many tend to refer to it as *herenasi* ‘dangerous disease’
Contagious neologisms

• As a result of the increasing influence of Portuguese, some Tariana now use Schema E, with agentive sufferer:

(16) COVIDz nuna dhipa-mha
  COVID me 3sgnf+grab-pres.nonvis
  ‘Covid grabs me, I got COVID’
One can even say

• How’s COVID going?

• (32) Covidz kwe-tha di-a?

  COVID how-nonvis.inter 3sgnf-go?

Cf. Portuguese

  Como vai o Covidz?

Speakers are applying a Portuguese pattern to Tariana…. 
An interim conclusion

COVID-19 – a disease like no other before it – is affecting the Tariana language

One can see the spread of contact-induced patterns – like elsewhere!
How do I know all this?
One cannot travel, but thanks to Facebook and Whatsapp, I get daily updates from Jovino Brito, his son Jociwaldo, his wife Goro, and many others!
Rafael Serewhali Enu Irine and myself are working on a COVID-19 brochure in Tariana
6 Take-home points

• We have identified schemas A-J used in talking about well-being.

• The next move is to establish the trajectory of talking about different phases of well-being, the spread of disease, its cure: what are the schemas employed?

• What concepts are at work behind the schemas? The Agentive Schema F may disease may reveal the nature of the spirit or shaman behind it...

• Ways of speaking well-being and diseases correlate with special features of grammar — especially evidentials
Take home points (cont)

- Last but not least:
- A social upheaval created by COVID-19 has had a strong linguistic impact in a number of instances
- Ways of speaking about a disease change because of new emergences and increased contact between languages and people — perhaps the concepts also do?
Envoi: on military metaphors

• What about disease as a 'war zone': fighting the disease, with body as a battleground?
• The imagery of human body affected by disease as a war zone does not appear to be applicable outside European languages.
• The use of military metaphors to describe illness dates back to at least the seventeenth century.
The poet John Donne (1572-1631) described his illness as ‘a canon shot’ and ‘a siege’ (in 1627, Meditations I, XI).
• The physician Thomas Sydenham (1624-1689) described medical intervention as a military attack (1848-50 edition, 267-8): ‘I attack the enemy within’, where ‘A murderous array of disease has to be fought against, and the battle is not a battle for the sluggard’.

• This was not a conventional or frequent way of talking about disease: the disease was talked about as plagues 'laying' upon people (Montgomery 1996): there was no aggression implied.
Louis Pasteur’s (1822-95) description of germ theory employed military metaphors of 'invading armies laying siege to the body that becomes a battlefield'. According to John Lienhard (2019), he may have been influenced by the military metaphors overrunning the language during the Franco-Prussian war (the 1870s).
From then on, the tradition got gradually established.

In 1904, a 'war against cancer' was described in a lead article in *The British Medical Journal*.

Further on, cancer cells were identified with Bolsheviks, as 'anarchic', threatening the stability of the body (Bleakley et al. 2004: 25).
Susan Sonntag (1933-2004), whose criticism of ‘military metaphors’ in writing about disease is a timeless classic (1978, 1989)
Selected references

Further references and examples are in:


Moura, Heronides e Fábio Lopes da Silva. Forthcoming. ‘O vírus nos ronda: metáforas sobre vírus e sobre corrupção’.
Wojtylak, Katarzyna I. 2018. 'How did this grow in you? About the expression of disease in Murui (Witotoan)'. Talk at LCRC discussion forum.