TARIANA

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Abstract

Tariana is an endangered Arawak language spoken in the multilingual area of the Vaupés River Basin (northwest Amazonia, Brazil). In its grammatical and semantic structure Tariana combines a number of features inherited from proto-Arawak, with the areal influences from Tucanoan in the form of grammatical calques and diffused patterns.

Key words

Cross-references: classifiers and noun classes, semantics of; evidentiality in grammar; language death; language change, language contact

The Tariana language belongs to the Arawak language family (q.v). It is spoken by about 100 people in the multilingual linguistic area of the Vaupés River Basin (northwest Amazonia, Brazil). This area is known (Aikhenvald 2002b; Sorensen 1967) for its multilingual exogamy: one can only marry someone who speaks a different language and belongs to a different tribe. People usually say: 'My brothers are those who share a language with me' and 'We don't marry our sisters'. The other languages in this area belong to the Tucanoan family and they are still spoken by a fair number of people. The basic rule of language choice throughout the Vaupés area is that one should speak the interlocutor's own language. Descent is strictly patrilineal, and consequently, one identifies with one's father's language group. There is a strong cultural inhibition against 'language-mixing', viewed in terms of lexical loans. In its grammatical and semantic structure Tariana combines a number of features inherited from proto-Arawak, with the areal influences from Tucanoan in the form of grammatical calques and diffused patterns.

Tariana was once a dialect continuum spoken in various settlements along the Vaupés river and its tributaries. The Tariana clans used to form a strict hierarchy (according to their order of appearance as stated in the creation myth: see Aikhenvald 1999). Lower-ranking groups in this hierarchy (referred to as 'younger siblings' by their higher-ranking tribes people) would perform various ritual duties for their 'elder siblings'. Each group spoke a different variety of the language. The difference between these varieties is comparable to that between Romance languages.

As the Catholic missions — and with them white influence — expanded, the groups near the top of the hierarchy abandoned the Tariana language in favour of the numerically dominant Tucano language. This process started in the early 1900s. The Tariana language is spoken nowadays just by people from two subtribes of the lowest-ranking group Wamiarikune, in two villages, Santa Rosa and Periquitos. The varieties are mutually intelligible. Most children are not

learning Tariana any more. Innovative speakers of Tariana have more Tucanoan-like features in their language than traditional speakers. A literacy program in Tariana is at present under negotiation.

Tariana is a polysynthetic language, agglutinating with some fusion. It has mostly suffixes, with just a few prefixes. Constituent order depends on pragmatics. Younger speakers tend to put the verb last in the sentence, just like speakers of Tucano. There are mainly postpositions, with just one preposition (borrowed from Portuguese).

Tariana has twenty seven consonants (including a series of aspirated stops and preaspirated nasals and glide) and fifteen vowels (*a, i, e, u*, each with a long and a nasal counterpart), *o* (with a nasal counterpart), and high central *ɨ*. Accent is distinctive and of pitch type, as a result of Tucanoan influence.

Underived adjectives form a closed class of about thirty members, while classes of nouns and verbs are open. Verbs divide into transitive and intransitive active, which take prefixes cross-referencing their subject (A/S$_a$). As is typical for an Arawak language, the same set of prefixes marks possessor on inalienably possessed nouns and the argument of postpositions. Intransitive stative do not take any cross-referencing markers. Unlike any other Arawak language, grammatical relations in Tariana are also marked with cases: topical non-subject case *-nuku,* focussed subject case *-ne/-nhe*, instrumental case *-ine* and locative case *-se.* This case system for marking core syntactic functions was developed under the Tucanoan influence. The case markers result from the reanalysis of locative suffixes of Arawak origin. A member of any word class can occupy the intransitive predicate slot.

The locative and the instrumental cases can combine with the non-subject topical case if the constituent is topical (thus yielding a peculiar instance of 'double case').

Tariana has a complex system of over forty classifiers which are used as agreement markers on adjectives, as derivational affixes on nouns, and also as numeral and as verbal classifiers; a slightly different system of classifiers is used with demonstratives. A two-way gender opposition (feminine vs. the rest) is used in personal pronouns (third singular and all plural forms, thus contravening established universals) and in verbal cross-referencing. Classifiers are an open class, since any noun with an inanimate referent can be used as a 'repeater' (or 'self-classifier'). Repeaters can be used to mark the agreement with a topical noun while grammaticized classifiers are used for unmarked agreement.

There is an obligatory distinction between singular and plural for nouns with animate referent. Nouns with inanimate referent often refer to substances, and classifier suffixes are attached to them to specify singular reference. For instance, *episi* means 'iron as a substance', while *episi-da* (iron-CLASSIFIER:ROUND) means 'axe' and *episi-kha* (iron-CLASSIFIER:CURVED) means 'wire'. Number agreement is optional for inanimate nouns.

The Tariana verb has a plethora of moods and aspects. It has an elaborate system of marking 'information source', known as evidentiality. Tariana distinguishes visual evidentials (something seen), non-visual evidentials (something heard, or smelt, or felt by touch), inferred evidential (something inferred based on visible results: as one infers that it has rained on the basis of puddles); assumed evidentials (based on general knowledge), and reported evidential. Three tenses (present, recent past and remote past) are combined with evidentials. Traditional stories are typically cast in remote past reported evidential, and autobiographical narratives in visual evidential. Non-visual evidential is used to relate the actions of evil spirits which are not 'seen', and dreams of ordinary people,while prophetic dreams by omniscient shamans are cast in visual evidentials. A reduced set of evidentials is used in questions, while imperatives have just one,

reported, evidential (meaning 'do something on someone else's order'). This unusually complex evidentiality system has been largely calqued from Tucanoan languages.

A complicated system of serial verb constructions expresses aspectual, directional and sequential meanings, and also reciprocal and associative meanings. There are three types of causatives. Morphological causatives are formed on intransitive verbs. The same morpheme on a transitive verb indicates an advancement of a peripheral argument of the transitive verb to the core, and/or complete involvement and topicality of the O argument. Periphrastic causatives (indirect causation) and serial causative constructions (direct causation) are used to form causatives of transitive verbs.

When several clauses are combined to form one sentence, all but the main clause are marked differently depending on whether their subject is the same as, or different from, that of the main clause. This feature (known as switch-reference) is shared with the Tucanoan languages.

A detailed reference grammar is in Aikhenvald (2003). Aikhenvald (2002a) is a comprehensive dictionary, while Aikhenvald (1999) contains a text collection and an outline of the Tariana ethnography with an account of the kinship system (which is of Dravidian type).

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