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**Editor: Emily McEwan-Fujita**

SHIFTING LANGUAGE ATTITUDES IN NORTH-WEST AMAZONIA\*

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**Abstract:** Tariana is an endangered language spoken by about 100 people in a remote area of northwest Amazonia, Brazil. The language is spoken in a fascinating area where one can only marry someone who speaks a different language and who belongs to a different ethnic group. Tariana is being rapidly displaced by an unrelated language, Tucano. The article focuses on the drastic changes which have occurred among the Tariana over the past decade. At present, Tariana speaking communities as such no longer exist. The linguistic exogamy is occasionally violated. Language remains the badge of identity, but for most people only in theory. The puristic language attitudes have relented. Occasional code-switching with Tucano and Portuguese (the national language) is no longer considered a mark of incompetence. Many Tariana lament that their language is being lost, and are relying on the school to “learn it back”, and the language is no longer spoken in the families.

**Keywords:** language endangerment; exogamy; language obsolescence; language teaching; language and culture maintenance; Vaupés.

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# 1 Introduction

More than three thousand ethnic Tariana live on the margins of the Vaupés River, a major tributary of the Rio Negro, which flows off the mighty River Amazon. Only few people still speak the language, and hardly any children are learning it. The language situation and language attitudes have drastically changed since traditional times, and especially over the past twelve years, between 2000 and 2012. Tariana is one of more than 200 indigenous languages of Brazil. Its study is significant for linguistics thanks to its many unusual properties (as shown in Aikhenvald 2003a). The language is particularly fascinating from a sociolinguistic perspective since it is spoken in a linguistic area where one is obliged to marry someone from a different language group. In other words, every Tariana is multilingual, and the language shows the impact of contact with other languages spoken in the area. These belong to the Tucanoan family and are not genetically related to Tariana. This article is a sequel to an earlier study published in the SLSLC section, Aikhenvald (2003c), which described the language situation and language attitudes up to 2000. Things have drastically changed between then and now, and this article provides a longitudinal description of the changes that have taken place.

The loss of the Tariana language in major settlements along the Vaupés River started early in the twentieth century. The Tariana (and many other peoples of the Brazilian Vaupés) switched to Tucano, a major lingua franca of the region. By the 1990s, Tariana was spoken by about 70 people in Santa Rosa and Periquitos, two remote villages up the Vaupés River. These two villages are located within the jurisdiction of the mission centre Iauaretê, close to the border between Brazil and Colombia. Iauaretê is part of the municipality of São Gabriel da Cacheoiera (a regional capital). In the 1990s, about 2,000 people lived in Iauaretê. Among them were many of the Tariana who no longer spoke the language, and about fifteen speakers of Tariana. By 2012, the population of Iauaretê grew to be c. 3,000. Many of the Tariana speakers from Santa Rosa and from Periquitos moved to Iauaretê. Some moved to the rapidly expanding city of São Gabriel da Cachoeira, in search of better jobs, better schools and better living conditions.

## 2 The Tariana language

Tariana was once a dialect continuum spoken in various settlements along the Vaupés river and its tributaries. The Tariana people were divided into ten clan groups. These each spoke a distinct dialect, and formed a hierarchy. 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” – for instance, they would light their cigar during the Offering ritual. The difference between each clan dialect was comparable to that between Romance languages.

As the Catholic missions expanded, and with them the influence of Brazilian mainstream civilization, the groups near the top of the hierarchy abandoned the Tariana language in favor of the numerically dominant Tucano language. This also reflected the policy adopted by the Catholic (Salesian) missionaries who promoted Tucano at the expense of other indigenous languages. The idea that an Indian should be multilingual was anathema to the missionaries. They did their best to eradicate the “pagan” custom of multilingualism. This was done through the dormitory system, where children, taken away from their parents for most of the year, were encouraged to speak nothing but Tucano.

According to early documents, some Tariana dialects in the area of lower Vaupés were close to extinction in the early 1900s. In the 1950s and 1960s a number of higher-ranked Tariana dialects were reportedly still known to older people. By 2012 all these dialects were extinct.

Tariana is currently spoken in the Iauaretê district only by members of a lower-ranking subclan called Wamiarikune. There are two dialects, those of Santa Rosa and of Periquitos. Differences between them are slight, but notable; they can be compared to those between British and American English. Older and more knowledgeable speakers used to be aware of the differences, and preferred not to mix the extant dialects. In 2012, younger people care less.

The other languages in this area belong to the East Tucanoan family and they are still spoken by a fair number of people. Tariana belongs to the Arawak language family – related to the famous Taino, the first Indian language heard by Christopher Columbus when he arrived in 1492 at the central American island of Hispaniola (Taino became extinct less than 150 years later: Aikhenvald 1999b, 2012a). Tariana is the only Arawak language in the Vaupés region.

### 3 The social setting

The Tariana language is spoken in a fascinating area where, traditionally, one could only marry someone who speaks a different language and who belongs to a different tribe (this is called linguistic exogamy). People used to say: “My brothers are those who share a language with me” and “We don’t marry our sisters”. That is, in the Vaupés River Basin area one’s ethnic identity is inextricably linked to one’s linguistic allegiance. The loss of one’s language has traditionally been considered pitiful and, ultimately, a shameful thing. People who marry members of

their own group are “like dogs” – only dogs marry their own brothers and sisters.

Language is traditionally inherited through one’s father. Language proficiency, and the ability to speak the language “correctly” used to be of primary importance. Those who speak a “borrowed language” have nothing of their own.

Traditionally, the Vaupés River Basin used to be perhaps the most multilingual area in the world. In traditional times, each person knew several languages: their father’s (which is the language they identify with), their mother’s, their spouse’s, and languages of other relatives and other members of the community.

The basic rule of traditional language choice throughout the Vaupés area is that one should speak the interlocutor’s own language. According to the language “etiquette” of the area, one has to speak the language one identifies with – that is, one father’s language – to one’s siblings, father and all his relatives, and mother’s language to one’s mother and her relatives.

Traditionally, to “know” a language in the Vaupés context means to know it through and through. Only those who have a native-speaker-like proficiency in a language would acknowledge that they actually “know” it.<sup>1</sup> The Tariana used to refer to those who know just the names of flora and fauna but cannot produce a story in the language as “those who only call names”.

A further feature of the traditional Vaupés River Basin linguistic ideology consists in strongly negative attitudes against recognizable loans and code-switches. Someone who inserts words in Tucano, Piratapuya or Desano into his or her Tariana is referred to as “useless” This puristic attitude operated as a strong brake against an influx of lexical loans (but see Aikhenvald 2012b).

Across the world, speakers think of a language in terms of its vocabulary. Purism among the Tariana (and elsewhere) “focuses most zealously on lexicon as a particularly salient locus for contamination” (Dorian 1994: 486). However, East Tucanoan structural influence has permeated the Tariana grammar patterns. This is the reason why Tariana, spoken in the Vaupés River Basin linguistic area, is structurally different from closely related Arawak languages, and has been so attractive for students of language contact (see, e.g., Aikhenvald 2002b; Heine and Kuteva 2005).

Thanks to the efforts of the Salesian missionaries, and general Brazilian education policies, Tariana is being rapidly replaced by Tucano, the major indigenous language of the Vaupés, and by Portuguese, the national language of Brazil. This has created a major disruption in the traditional pattern of language and

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<sup>1</sup> More details on the Vaupés River Basin Linguistic area with a special focus on Tariana is in Aikhenvald (1999a, 1999b, 2002a, 2002b, 2003a, 2003b, 2003c and forthcoming); cf. Sorensen (1967) for a similar situation in the Colombian Vaupés where there are no Tariana.

culture transmission, and contributed to destabilizing one of the most multilingual areas in the world. What used to be a situation of stable multilingualism without dominance of one language group over another is no more.

This whole area has been under the constant control of the Catholic Salesian mission since mid-1920s. The missionaries made sure the people in the villages abandoned their “pagan” customs, threw the traditional paraphernalia away, and became good Christians. Children were sent to dormitories, and forbidden to use languages other than Tucano, the majority language. As a result, when I started working with the Tariana in the 1990s, only very few people still remembered the traditional Offering Feasts, male and female initiation, and songs. The Salesian missionaries used to be in charge of the school and of the hospital. Nowadays, in 2012, they have changed their negative attitudes to language and culture: they are advocating language and culture maintenance. This change of policy has happened gradually, since mid-1990s, under the leadership of the then Bishop Dom Ivam Azevedo, an open-minded supporter of Indians and their culture.

The overall control of health and education is currently in the hands of the local Indigenous organizations and National lay authorities. The role of Portuguese is growing: this is the major means of instruction, and most people in their forties and younger know it well. Colombia is just across the border – many indigenous people go there for extra work, and some Colombian Indians flee to Brazil, to avoid the drug lords. Thus, many people know Spanish, which is also the foreign language taught in secondary schools in Iauaretê.

Traditionally, someone’s standing in the community and value as its member was strongly linked to their language proficiency, and also the knowledge of traditional lore. Rampant language loss among the Tariana (and other peoples of the Brazilian Vaupés) did not result in the people downgrading the value of the language. On the contrary: people strongly lament the loss of the “good old days” and “good old ways” of speech, producing something similar to what Jane Hill (1998) described as a “discourse of nostalgia” in her discussion of the bilingual communities around the Malinche volcano in central Mexico.

The growing language loss is threatening in yet another way. “Full knowledge” of a language is gradually ceasing to be accessible to many people. However, the language remains a major badge of identity – hence the desire of almost all the Tariana not to lose their language, or to “learn it back”. The Brazilian state’s new emphasis on proving one’s indigenous group membership through language proficiency contributes to the strong desire of the Tariana to learn their language back.

## 4 The winds of change in north-west Amazonia, and the new values

The early 2000s have seen a surge in interest, and support for indigenous languages and cultures of the Upper Rio Negro area, and Amazonia in general. A large part of this stemmed from the support of the *Instituto Socioambiental* (ISA), a scholarly body with bases in Brasília and São Paulo, itself supported mostly from overseas (also see [www.instituto.socioambiental.org.br](http://www.instituto.socioambiental.org.br)). It finances community projects, but not indigenous schools; the latter have been supported by the Brazilian government since the mid 2000s. Indigenous leaders' activities have resulted in the creation of various organizations, under the umbrella of the Federation of the Indigenous organizations of the Upper Rio Negro (FOIRN). This powerful body works together with the *Instituto Socioambiental*, and helps local Indigenous organizations and groups organize language and culture revitalization programs.<sup>2</sup>

Thanks to the efforts of ISA, FOIRN, and numerous community leaders and activists, an important event took place at the end of 2002. Three indigenous languages of the Upper Rio Negro area were granted official status – Tucano, Baniwa and Nheêngatú (or Língua Geral) – by a decree of 22 November 2002. For comparison, in 2012 only two other Brazilian states have official indigenous languages. Following the lead of São Gabriel da Cachoeira, the municipality Tacuru in Mato Grosso do Sul officialized Guaraní (a Tupi-Guaraní language) on 24 May 2010. Officialization of Guaraní in Paranhos, within the same state, is currently in progress. Akwê Xerente, a Jê language, acquired official status in the municipality of Tocantinia in the state of Tocantins in May 2012.

The officialization of the three languages in the Upper Rio Negro has facilitated creation of schools and educational programs (some at the level of tertiary education), and production of school materials. This also gave a boost to creating further schools with an indigenous focus (called “differential schools”) for other groups, including the Tariana and the Tuyuca. And also, general support for

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<sup>2</sup> For instance, the ethnic Warekena in six communities on the Xié River requested that I should come back and help them in revitalization of their language. FOIRN and a Laboratory of Indigenous studies at the Federal University of Amazonas (under the leadership of Ivani Faria) provided support for a three day workshop on the Warekena of Xié in the community of Campinas (20–22 May 2012). This was run by myself with the help of Eneida Silva (a lecturer from the University of Amazonas), and Arthur Baltazar and Anderson Tomás Ferreira (from the Campinas community). Similarly to the present-day Tariana, there is no Warekena-speaking community in Brazil. The workshop had more than a hundred people taking part, and was intended as a start-up for a larger project of language and culture revitalization. But that is another story.

indigenous people on the federal and state levels has increased substantially during the last five years. There are now financial benefits, including one-off payments, for those who can prove that they are indigenous. Universities offer “indigenous-only” places and scholarships. Being “indigenous” has prestigious overtones, and has become a desirable asset.

The Portuguese term *Índio*, with its slightly pejorative overtones, is being replaced by *Indígena* ‘Indigenous person’ with no such connotations. Throughout the municipality of São Gabriel, it is now appropriate to talk about “indigenous languages”, rather than “dialects” (*dialetos*) or “jargons” (*gírias*), as was the case throughout the 1990s and before that.

To be eligible for special support and benefits, one requires a document confirming one’s indigenous identity, colloquially referred to as an “indigenous certificate” (*certificado indígena*). To receive this document, one needs to show that one’s parents are of indigenous origin. People are also often asked if they know their language and culture, and if they know their indigenous “sacred” blessing names. Those who do not are often ridiculed (and are known to have been denied the certificate: Jovino Brito, Ilda da Silva Cardoso, p.c.). Having to have some tangible knowledge to “prove” one’s indigenusness has prompted interest in getting acquainted with one’s language, acquiring some cultural knowledge, and learning one’s sacred name.

A sacred blessing name is usually given to a baby, or to a child when it is blessed by a healer. This usually happens when the child gets sick, or when the healer feels ready to bless the child. Each subclan has a set of such blessing names (a full set of the Wamiarikune’s names is in Aikhenvald [1999a]). The blessing names are employed in healing ceremonies, events that are very important in remote areas of north-west Amazonia where not much is available in terms of Western medicine.

Many young Tariana (who do not speak the language) are now keen to learn their sacred names. The lists in Aikhenvald (1999a) have suddenly become very useful: one of the sons of a now deceased Tariana speaker (Gara, who died at the end of 2008) was very happy to learn his “true” blessing name, different from the one on the basis of which he had obtained his “Indigenous certificate”. His reaction was: “the name I gave to the agency was wrong, it did not work; I now know the right one, and it will help me be healthy”.

The value which Tariana themselves put on cultural knowledge is one of the driving forces behind the attempts to maintain teaching some cultural practices at the Tariana school. In the traditional Tariana society, “dance-masters” were a specialized group. Among the Wamiarikune, the Brito of Santa Rosa used to be dance-masters. The elders (most of whom are now gone) complained to me in the 1990s and early 2000s that they’d lost their skills, and knowledge. Since 2010,

one of the focuses of the Tariana school has been teaching students how to dance to the traditional music – following the lead of the upper-ranking Tariana groups that did preserve this knowledge. The dance movements, the implements, and the paraphernalia associated with the dances (an apron, and a feather head-dress for men, and a grass-skirt for women) can be called “standard average-Vaupés” (a good description of these was provided by Brüzzi [1977]) – they are shared not just by the Tariana, but also by other groups. The patterns of face-painting now in use in the Tariana school are the ones preserved and transmitted by the upper-ranking Tariana. They have become the “norm” (according to Brüzzi [1977], different Tariana subclans used to have somewhat different weaving patterns and face painting; these differences have at present been leveled).

Language has always been the badge of identity for the indigenous people of the Vaupés. Language loss has created a discrepancy between traditional values placed upon being able to master one’s father’s language, and modern reality: many Tariana speak a “borrowed” language, and are thus not “up to standard”. This in itself is a good enough reason to try and learn the language back – something we saw at the first Tariana learning workshop run in Iauaretê in 2000 (see Aikhenvald 2003c). The affective value of language is another factor – as pointed out by McEwan-Fujita (2010), positive emotional connections with one’s “own” language are a strong motivation for keeping it in use. In the Vaupés context, one’s “own” language is one’s father’s language.

Language loss, and the loss of traditional knowledge, has resulted in the increased value of linguistic and cultural documents of Tariana: the dictionary, the existing cultural description, the recorded and transcribed texts, and also web-resources. Gradually, the focus has started shifting from the spoken to the written word.

## 5 “Lest we lose our language”: establishing Tariana in the school system

When I first started working with the speakers of Wamiarikune Tariana back in 1991, many expressed concern that the language was going, with children not learning it. The first primer was designed in 1994. Building on a large corpus of stories, and a comprehensive grammar and dictionary of Tariana (see Aikhenvald 1999a, 2002a, 2003a), we put together pedagogical materials: several mimeographed collections of Tariana stories, a teaching manual, and a better quality primer with pictures.

In June 2000, a Tariana-teaching workshop was run in Iauaretê – the details are in Aikhenvald (2003c). After the workshop, the general feeling was phrased

by Jovino Brito, a major activist of the Tariana language maintenance: “now that our language is taught at school, we won’t lose it”. The workshop indeed created a foundation for the future language program, to which I will turn shortly.

The fight for Tariana language and culture revival began. A few problems came up during the Tariana-teaching workshop. The dialect differences between the dialect of Santa Rosa and of Periquitos resulted in a stand-off between some older speakers. The Tariana of Santa Rosa plainly accused the Tariana of Periquitos of the crime of “language mixing” (see Section 3). Indeed, on a number of occasions the Periquitos Tariana did include Tucano words and morphemes in their Tariana (see Aikhenvald 2002b). The Periquitos Tariana responded with an accusation of a different sort: they pointed out to me that the Santa Rosa children speak nothing but Tucano, while their own children learn Tariana, alongside other languages of the region. Both had a point.

There also remained a certain amount of resistance among the “upper-ranking” Tariana against being taught a lower-ranking way of speaking. This resistance has never been overt; in Tariana society, and perhaps Vaupés society in general, animosity is often subtle. The upper-ranking Tariana would “forget” to come to meetings, and not support various activities. But as the Tariana school progressed, this opposition mellowed.<sup>3</sup>

The Tariana indigenous school was established in Iauaretê, as an off-site campus of the School São Miguel, in early 2005. The School is called *Enu Irine idakine*, literally ‘the grandchildren of those belonging to blood of Thunder’.<sup>4</sup> Its founding director was Rafael Brito, the youngest speaker of the Santa Rosa Tariana (born in 1973), an active organizer and an aspiring politician. Its current director does not speak the language.

The Tariana school teaches all the subjects required by the Brazilian school curriculum. In addition to this, there are language classes, and classes in “cultural performance”. Thanks to efforts by the directorate, and their families in Iauaretê, the school acquired a decent building, and even a couple of computers.

At present, the Tariana school in Iauaretê has over fifty students, and employs nineteen teachers of different disciplines. A major problem was to secure a teacher of Tariana who would know the language well. After a few years of struggle, the school managed to employ two teachers. Edivaldo Muniz – a fluent speaker of the Periquitos dialect – was appointed in 2012 to teach the language at

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<sup>3</sup> Deaths of older people from higher-ranking clans who were vehemently opposed to the Brito family contributed to this.

<sup>4</sup> The name *Enu Iri-ne i-daki-ne* (‘thunder blood-plural INDEFINITE-grandchild-PLURAL’) reflects one of the Tariana origin myths, where they are said to have emerged from drops of blood shed by their Grandfather the Thunder.

the primary school level. After a few weeks of negotiations, Emílio Brito, one of the most fluent speakers of the Santa Rosa dialect, became the language teacher for the secondary level.

In addition to the Iauaretê school, five other branches of the Tariana school were established within the Vaupés area. These include Santa Rosa where there are still about half-a-dozen adult speakers, and Periquitos. The Tariana school in Periquitos has thirty-five students, only five of whom still speak the language. The middle generation (in their forties, thirties and twenties) in Periquitos speak the language well; the teachers of Tariana – Lauro and Batista Muniz – are highly competent in the language. The name of the school differs from that of other Tariana branches of the School of São Miguel: *Enuniseridapana*, literally, ‘the house of the one belonging to those of Thunder’. The name reflects the specific autodenomination of the Periquitos Tariana.<sup>5</sup>

That the Periquitos Tariana managed to secure a special name for their Tariana school reflects their attitude: from the very beginning of the Tariana literacy program, and of the school, the Periquitos Tariana tried to emphasize that they should be kept apart from the Tariana of Santa Rosa. Back in 2000, there was even a suggestion that different pedagogical materials be created. However, the dialectal differences between the two Tariana dialects spoken by the representatives of the Wamiarikune subclan did not warrant such an effort. Periquitos dialect forms are incorporated in the Tariana-Portuguese dictionary (Aikhenvald 2002a), and are mentioned in the Teaching Manual.

At present, this dialect differentiation matters less and less. A speaker of the Periquitos dialect is teaching Tariana at the Tariana school in Iauaretê, something unthinkable back in the early 2000s. And the puristic attitudes appear to dwindle. We return to this in Section 9.

## 6 Tariana speech communities in flux: age, generation and speaker competence

By 2012, teaching Tariana within primary and secondary school had become firmly established. But the speech communities are in flux.

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<sup>5</sup> The Tariana of Santa Rosa, and of Periquitos refer to themselves as *Talia-seri* (singular), *Talia-seni* (plural), or *Enu Irine i-dakine* (see Note 4). The Tariana of Periquitos use the terms *Enu-maki-ne* (lit. ‘thunder -Makú’ [or servants]-plural), ‘the Makú of Thunder’ (collective reference), *Enu-maki-ne-seri* ‘one Makú of Thunder’ (individual reference: note the individualiser -*seri*); and *Enu-ni* ‘those of Thunder’ (collective reference), *Enu-ni-seri* ‘one of those of Thunder’ (individual reference).

Just as in many other language groups speaking “receding” languages, language proficiency among the Tariana correlates with generation, and not so much with age of the speakers (just as described by Dorian [2009]). The current older generation (born between the 1920s and 1940s) all spoke the language. Those born before 1925 remembered life in traditional longhouses, banned by Salesian missionaries as they firmly established themselves in the area. Most of them knew the traditional lore; one had healing powers. The level of proficiency varied (see Aikhenvald 2001, 2003a: 19–23).

Their children, the “middle” generation (born between the late 1940s and late 1960s), know the language well. Of those born in the 1970s, only a few speak it. Their children, born in later years, do not know the language. This is a typical dynamic of language obsolescence; similar statements would be true for indigenous groups in Australia, Siberia and North America.

In the 1970s, many Tariana started moving to the mission centre Iauaretê to make sure their children would acquire better schooling. Those Tariana who still speak the language live scattered in different suburbs of Iauaretê, and speak predominantly Tucano between themselves and to their children. In the absence of a sizeable Tariana-speaking community in Iauaretê, this move was a sure path towards language loss.

Since 1991, the drivers of the Tariana language revival and maintenance movement have been the Britos of Iauaretê. Two of the Brito family, the most accomplished middle generation speakers, died in 2008. The most knowledgeable speaker of the older generation passed away only recently in 2011. Two middle-generation speakers moved away for the sake of better jobs. One of the two older generation speakers still lives in Iauaretê, but speaks Tucano more often than Tariana. The other one is planning to move to Iauaretê from Santa Rosa; however, he is less knowledgeable than others of his generation and speaks mostly Tucano within his family “for the wives to understand”. A fluent Brito sister remains in Iauaretê, with her mother who is a Piratapuya. Although her mother is fluent in Tariana, traditional language rules dictate that they speak Piratapuya at home.

In Santa Rosa up until the early 2000s, most men spoke Tariana among themselves and to their fathers (following the “etiquette” of the Vaupés area). Now, only a half-dozen Tariana speakers live in Santa Rosa. No one speaks Tariana in their daily life.

The community of Periquitos has fared somewhat better. After the deaths of two proficient elders, two remain (one is partially incapacitated). The other elder of Periquitos is a highly knowledgeable and articulate speaker, with healing powers. Of his nine children, eight are fluent in Tariana. The “middle generation” in Periquitos continue using the language to speak to their wives, and their

children. However, their use of Tucano and Wanano in day-to-day communication increases; as a result, of thirty-five students within the school only five speak Tariana.

That is, there is no Tariana speech community in Iauaretê nor in Santa Rosa. Even in Periquitos, where a smallish speech community remains, there is more and more reliance on the school as a way of maintaining the language. And this is reflected in the new discourse of “blame”.

## 7 Who is to blame for language loss?

What Jane Hill (1998) called “the discourse of nostalgia” about the good old days now irrevocably gone has been heard from many Tariana since at least the early 1990s. In fact, according to Brüzzi (1977), the general nostalgic attitude focused on accentuating the “negative” may have been there since time immemorial, as a way of thwarting evil spirits’ potential envy and aggression. In the 1990s and early 2000s nostalgic talk about language loss was rife.

Women – wives and mothers – are uniformly blamed for not “transmitting” the language to the Tariana children. A teacher in the Tariana school, herself a Tucano, is married to a Tariana man (not a speaker of the language). When she got married, her father said to her: “You will now kill his language, this is what women do”. Traditionally, mothers did not aim at maintaining the father’s language. The Brito mother is a Piratapuya. She learnt Tariana from her Tariana mother, and speaks it well. However, she does not speak Tariana to her daughter, a fluent Tariana speaker. The etiquette of the area engenders an involuntary “blockage” from the use of Tariana in this context.

In the traditional Vaupés society, women come from different language groups than men. Thus the language of the wife of a Tariana man will not be Tariana. However, the wives of the older generation were, and are proficient in Tariana; many of them did in fact speak Tariana to their children. Many wives had Tariana mothers; others learnt the language from their husbands because that was the thing to do in those days. That younger women do not know Tariana (or never bothered to learn it) is mostly due to the fact that Tariana was considered a language on the way out, and there were very few people to learn it from.

The practice of “accusing women” of doing wrong things and spoiling everything has deep roots in traditional Tariana discourse (see Aikhenvald forthcoming). In many traditional stories, women are conceptualized as a “dangerous other”, and “those who do not think”. Women are to blame for the fact that

manioc has a hard skin difficult to peel. Human sweat has a bad smell because women “misbehaved” with a smelly *mucura* rat.<sup>6</sup>

But now that the Tariana schools have been established, the rhetoric of accusation in the Vaupés area is gradually changing. That children can hardly speak or write Tariana is considered the fault of the school, and of the teachers who are not implementing it properly.

## 8 Teaching teachers

The establishment of the teaching program has boosted the status of the Wamiarikune dialect of Tariana. It has gradually become the prestige language – the one for which the orthography has been created, and the one taught at school. Having a firm place in the school system in north-west Amazonia means the language has overtones of prestige and power, just as described by Freeland (1995) for the Miskitu in Central America.

The teaching materials were regularly supplied by me to the school (I estimate having sent on average twenty copies of the teaching manual and ten of the dictionary each year). But more materials, and more incentives for teachers to work with them, were needed. In late 2011, Rafael Brito, Jovino Brito and I agreed that it was time we organized a Tariana-language workshop for the teachers of the Tariana school, to boost their interest and knowledge, produce new up-to-date materials, and also try to involve children of the late Tariana elders.

As planned, we ran a two-week workshop in Iauaretê from 25 April until 8 May 2012. This workshop was organized during a teaching break, and involved two dozen teachers of the Tariana school. Before the workshop, we made a visit to the school. This simple building impressed me enormously.

The walls in the school are covered with hand-written posters, all in Tariana using the orthography we had developed earlier. The posters are welcoming students, saying how happy we are to be together, and offering God’s blessings (the word for the Christian God is the same as that for the Trickster Creator, *Ñapirikuri* lit. ‘the one on the bone’). Posters and instructions relating to day-to-day life – like “don’t litter”, and “don’t mess about” – were in Portuguese. I asked Rafael Brito, the founding director and an authority figure, whether children (and teachers, for that matter) understand what the Tariana posters say. He said no,

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<sup>6</sup> Incidentally, women are blamed for language loss in some other cultures. For example, Jaffe (1999: 103–108) focuses on the “discourse of culpability” among the Corsicans who identify women as “betrayers” of the indigenous language.

but they know what is said there. Some teachers, he added, ask students to learn them by heart.

The only air-conditioned room in the building has internet access. This is where the Tariana website I put together (<https://research.jcu.edu.au/research/lcrc/language-archives/south-america-languages>) was displayed – and looked upon with admiration by everyone, including the elders (who are literate, but hardly ever use computers). Websites, internet, mobile phones, mp3 players, laptops and electronic equipment of all sorts are the new status symbols across north-west Amazonia. But day-to-day life remains pretty much traditional – some people use gas for cooking, but one frequently sees women preparing food on a wood fire. Hardly anyone has flush toilets or showers (there is plenty of running water in the river and waterfalls).

Every morning, Jovino and I worked with the two elders – Leonardo Brito (of Santa Rosa) and Jorge Muniz (of Periquitos). Our sessions consisted of lively conversations and discussions, and recordings of traditional healing procedures, burial practices and ritual cannibalism.

In the afternoon, teachers from the Tariana school joined us; the numbers varied from ten to twenty. Rafael Brito took the lead. He was working on a variety of new primers, with nice colored pictures – which he himself took and loaded straight onto his laptop. The teachers were repeating words after Rafael. Some did very skilful drawings for various objects and animals. And then came singing sessions.

During the 2000 Tariana Teaching Workshop, Rafael and José Luis Brito translated a few Brazilian songs into Tariana. Isaias (the son of the late Américo Brito, one of the most competent speakers) and Rafael sung them, accompanying themselves on a guitar. This was a success; but since then, the song texts had been lost. I brought them with me. Rafael spent time rehearsing them with the teachers, and also translating new ones. I was able to offer Tariana translations which were then run past Leonardo, the elder, and also Emílio and Jovino Brito. The texts were corrected straight on Rafael's laptop, and then projected onto a home-made screen (made out of a sheet) with a power-point projector (called "data-show" in the local Portuguese, and now also in Tariana and Tucano). Teachers were writing them down, learning them, and then singing them together.

My other role in the afternoon sessions was that of a language consultant. If Rafael could not remember a word, he would ask me – and I would find it in the dictionary (now the ultimate authority, since it contains the information from the best Tariana speakers who are now dead). The response would be run past Leonardo, who would endorse it, and offer a comment, in Tariana, and then in Tucano (for the teachers).

After the workshop, the teachers organized an Offering Festival (also known as *Dabukuri*), to thank us for running it. Short speeches were given by important members of the community, including Rafael Brito, his younger sister Vanilde (now president of the Association of Parents and Teachers), Jovino, and of course Leonardo Brito and Jorge Muniz, the two elders. Leonardo gave the whole speech in Tariana of Santa Rosa. Jorge spoke in Tariana of Periquitos. Just a few people could understand them, but the importance of their speeches was symbolic; understanding them was not necessary. In a way, it reaffirmed the status of Tariana as the language of the school. Other people spoke in Tucano and in Portuguese. My speech was mixed – partly Tariana, partly Portuguese: I was asked not to speak exclusively in Tariana because “many of our relatives will not understand”.

And then came the dances: first a newly invented “Crab-dance” dance performed by six to seven-year olds, to the tune of a popular Brazilian song “Crab” (*Carangueijo*) translated into Tariana. The little kids actually sang the song in Tariana – this was one of Rafael’s earlier translations. Then, older children performed a traditional Vaupés “cultural dance”, and offered me a generous present of fruit and fish. Dances went on until late. All the instructions to the dancers were in Tucano.

The workshop for teachers was a success. Everyone is now determined to learn as much of the language as possible. Learning Tariana – and being able to use at least a few simple greetings – has become a status symbol, for all the Tariana of Iauaretê region. We now turn to some consequences for the language itself.

## 9 The new Tariana: purism versus compromise

The changes in the Tariana language situation have brought about further challenges and changes. The only small community of speakers is in the remote village of Periquitos. Speakers of Tariana in other areas are scattered. Only three elders are still alive. What’s more, a speaker of the Periquitos dialect and a speaker of the Santa Rosa dialect are now teaching Tariana at the Tariana school in Iauaretê. There is no question any more about which Tariana dialect is “correct” (in contrast to the situation in the late 1990s when the opposition between the speakers of the two dialects appeared to be insurmountable).

As noted by Hamp (1989), and then by Dorian (1994), linguistic compromise is a better avenue for survival than intractable purism: if a minority language is to survive next to a larger dominant language, it has to allow for a certain number of loanwords. Nancy Dorian points out that “it may prove the wiser course to accept considerable compromise rather than make a determined stand for intactness, where threatened languages are at issue” (1994: 492).

A major cultural-linguistic feature of the Vaupés River Basin area was resistance to any lexical loans (Section 3 above). Conceived as tokens of undesirable language mixing, loans and code-switches were viewed as marks of a speaker's incompetence. This requirement has now been relaxed.

Jorge Muniz, the Periquitos elder, kept inserting a few Tucano words into his story. In previous times, this would have been met with giggles behind his back by speakers from Santa Rosa. He would have been accused of being “incompetent”. There is no such reaction now; it is accepted that Jorge talks this way.

Most of the remaining Tariana speakers are now freely using Portuguese code-switches. When other elders were alive, and especially in the context of the then existing speech community in Santa Rosa, a Portuguese code-switch used to be accompanied by an introductory “in the white man's language” (Aikhenvald [2003b] focuses on the negative overtones of overusing the “White man's” language, and the issues of language mixing among the Tariana). This is no longer necessary.

This is not to say that there are no purists left. Jovino's elder sister Olívia commented on the fact that the Periquitos people “mix” their language, and that I should not be listening to them. Jovino Brito was also not impressed by the code-switches. He made a constant effort to only use Tariana words, even for new concepts. We had to talk quite a bit about computers. Jovino insisted that a computer be called *nawiki iwihida-pasole* (people indefinite+head-CLASSIFIER:BOX) ‘a box of human head’: Jovino's explanation was that a computer is supposed to think like a person's head does. Back in 2000, the late Ismael Brito suggested a new coinage, *pa-wha-nipa* (impersonal-sit-PASSIVE+CL:flat), literally ‘bench’, to refer to a bank where money is: Portuguese has *banco* for both. This extension was rejected by Ismael's peers and elders. Now Jovino is consistently using this very term for ‘(money) bank’. In his day-to-day life in São Gabriel the number of his Tariana conversation partners is limited. There is no one but his brother José Luis who occasionally addresses him in Tariana (and me, in our regular lengthy phone conversations across the globe). Jovino speaks nothing but Tucano to all his other family members, and Piratapuya to his mother.

Throughout the 2012 workshop, each of the two elders spoke in his own dialect. Ten years ago, speakers of Santa Rosa dialect would frown upon those from Periquitos. Now each accepts the other's forms as “his way”. The two extant dialects – Santa Rosa and Periquitos – now live together peacefully. But for how long? The Tariana speech community in Periquitos is dwindling: fewer and fewer children speak the language. However, given the competence of the teachers, it will probably survive for at least another generation or two.

The Tariana language is also changing. The archaic form of the case marker *-naku* ‘topical non-subject’ is still common in Periquitos. Among the Santa Rosa

Tariana, only Leonardo uses it consistently. As expected, the number of calques from Tucano is on the rise. An obsolescent language “retreating, contracting, as it gradually falls into disuse” (Dixon 1991: 199) is often flooded with an influx of patterns and forms from the dominant language. The dialect taught at school is the less archaic one. Nobody seems to mind.

Tariana orthography was another issue of compromise. Throughout the pedagogical workshop, I acted as an “orthography consultant”: showing where to write an *h* if a consonant is aspirated and to make sure we write long vowels correctly. Tariana has two phonemes that proved to be somewhat contentious: a lateral flap (the only rhotic in the language) and a palatal dental nasal. When we came up with the first orthography proposal in 1994, Graciliano Brito, and then Rafael insisted that we use an “*r* without a head” (Tariana *ere dihwida sedite*), that is, the IPA symbol *ɾ*. The letter *r* was rejected. The Tariana orthography was to be as different from Portuguese as possible (especially since the Portuguese *r* is indeed different from the Tariana rhotic). The IPA symbol for the palatal nasal, *ɲ*, or “*n* with a long tail” (Tariana *ene disipi wyakite*), was also chosen for the orthography. The Portuguese sequence *nh* for the same sound was not appropriate because we had already used *nh* for the aspirated nasal. The symbol *ñ* was considered too similar to Spanish to suit the Tariana quest to be distinct.

The general opinion of the teachers was now different. The two IPA symbols, *ɾ* and *ɲ*, were considered too difficult to write and to type on a laptop. It no longer mattered that the Tariana orthography should be of its own kind. Everyone opted for what was easier to type and more similar to Portuguese and Spanish. We all agreed on simple *r*, for the flap, and a Spanish-style *ñ*, for the palatal nasal. The compromise solution has been reached.

With the Wamiarikune Tariana established as the language of the Tariana school system, gone are the days when higher-ranking subclans would refuse to learn the language maintained by those who were traditionally beneath them. We left Iauaretê the day after the feast. Tarcísio, a Tariana from Urubuquara who had taken a lift with us on the way there, was inspired by our workshop and invited us to talk to his co-villagers and family about teaching Tariana in his native village, and the neighboring Ipanoré.

Urubuquara has a school with a Tariana name, *Enu yumakine* (lit. ‘the Makú of the Thunder’); this same school was established across the Middle Vaupés district in five further settlements. The majority of the population of all these communities are ethnic Tariana who do not speak the language. Very few older people know some names of plants and animals. These Tariana belong to upper-ranking subclans compared to the Wamiarikune. Their resistance against learning a dialect spoken by a lower-ranking clan was high throughout the 1990s.

During our brief meeting in Urubuquara, all agreed that the materials created at the Workshop in 2012, and the Tariana Manual are to be used in the Middle Vaupés schools. I left them copies of all the new materials. These were greeted with excitement, as a new opening for recreating a pan-Tariana identity.

The burden of transmitting knowledge is relegated to the school. The language taught there is mostly for symbolic purposes: to show you are a Tariana, you need to know at least a few greetings and common expressions. And this also demonstrates a major change compared to the traditional attitudes whereby to claim “knowledge of the language” one needed to speak it really well. Now that most of the fluent speakers, and Tariana language activists, are dead, these restrictive attitudes are changing.

Every bit of knowledge of the language is valued: after all, only a few people know anything at all. Jovino Brito and others insisted that we now need to get together with the ethnic Tariana who have such knowledge before they pass away, and start recording it (including traditional stories they could tell in Tucano). The dismissive attitude towards non-fluent speakers appears to now be gone.

Other, non-linguistic, restrictions are also on the way out. Exogamous traditions are still strong in the Tariana areas, even among those Tariana who lost their language generations ago. But they are not as strong as before. Traditionally, the Tariana could not marry the Desano, an East Tucanoan group known for its magic powers and prowess in shamanism and sorcery. (The origins of the Desano are a matter of contention: Dominique Buchillet (p.c., 1999) hypothesizes that they could have been speakers of an Arawak language). The Desano are considered “younger brothers” of the Tariana, and addressed accordingly. Within the Iauaretê region, I have encountered three instances of Desana-Tariana marriages, two of them involving speakers of Tariana or their families. Maria Sánchez Brito, a Piratapuya with good competence in Tariana, described these marriages in a different way than mentioned earlier: “they are like Americans”, that is, like those who have no respect for traditional custom.

While the parents are somewhat upset, saying that children just do what they want, the young people do not seem to mind. In one instance, a Tariana married another Tariana from a different subclan; this is a matter of shame for the father of the bridegroom, and has affected his reputation in the community.

## 10 New era, new challenges

Let’s now compare traditional language attitudes with language attitudes in the 1990s, and in 2012. The differences are summarized in Table 1.

**Table 1:** Language attitudes among the Tariana, and their change over the past decades

Principles	Traditional Tariana	Tariana in 1990s	Tariana in 2012
A. Linguistic exogamy and language identity	The Tariana only married people from other language groups. The language used to be inherited from one’s father, and was a badge of identity. The Tariana would also speak other languages of the area (all from East-Tucanoan family).	The language remained the badge of identity. Many lamented the fact that they’d lost it. Hence the desire to maintain the language, and “learn it back” reflected in the first Tariana teaching workshop run in 2000. Linguistic exogamy remained in place.	Linguistic exogamy is still there, but is occasionally violated. Language remains the badge of identity, but for most people only in theory. Many Tariana lament that their language is being lost, and are relying on the school to “learn it back”.
B. Which language to choose?	The traditional language etiquette required that one should speak one’s father language to one’s father and his siblings. And if one wanted to be polite to someone, one needed to speak their language to them.	A number of Tariana continued following the traditional linguistic etiquette. Due to the rampant language loss, more and more Tariana spoke Tucano to their father and siblings. They were loudly pitied as people who spoke a “borrowed” language.	Traditional language etiquette is all but gone. The Tariana speak Tucano to their fathers, and siblings. Most speakers moved away. A small community in Periquitos remains, but very few children are learning the language.
C. Who is considered a language speaker?	Standards for speaking a language used to be very high: only someone who had a native-speaker-like proficiency was considered a speaker.	Standards for being a speaker of a language remained very high. Semi-speakers or those who were not fully confident in their Tariana never dared speak it.	High standards for claiming “knowledge” of a language are relaxed. Knowledge of just a few words, and a few names is enough to identify with the language, and the ethnic group.
D. Attitudes to loans and code-switches	Inserting forms from another language into one’s own was seen as a mark of incompetence. The restriction did not extend to calquing and replicating grammatical patterns	Mixing different languages or their dialects was considered inappropriate. The Tariana dialects of Santa Rosa and of Periquitos with their minor differences were kept strictly apart.	The puristic attitudes have relented. Occasional code-switching with Tucano and Portuguese (the national language) is no longer considered a mark of incompetence. The two Tariana dialects are no longer kept apart. People speak Tucano to each other.

The Tariana language attitudes in the 1990s, when many members of older generation were alive, were similar to the traditional views described by earlier anthropologists and linguists. The Tariana of Santa Rosa were particularly concerned with not having any Tucano code-switches. The Tariana of Periquitos were more relaxed, and were accused by those of Santa Rosa of “mixing” their language. The Tariana of higher-ranking clans, whose language had been lost generations ago, were reluctant to learn the dialect of a lower-ranking group.

The Tariana Teaching Workshop run in 2000 reflected these values. It created the basis for teaching Tariana in a specialized Tariana school in Iauaretê and a few other locations within the area. By 2012, teaching Tariana within the school has been established. Wamiarikune Tariana – the language of former underlings – has a stable position in the regional school system. Their language is the language to be proud of, and the basis for the unity of all ethnic Tariana.

The speech communities as such are on the wane. The school is now the means of language maintenance and transmission. This has come at a cost of leveling dialect differences. Compromise, rather than staunch purism, is more conducive to language maintenance. As fewer and fewer people speak the language, some purists “relent”: code-switching with Tucano and with Portuguese is no longer considered as a mark of incompetence as it was a decade ago.

Nowadays, the quest for language learning is boosted by its being officially acknowledged as an asset in the eyes of official organizations. Those who do not know their language and cannot write it can be openly ridiculed.

The ethnic Tariana are relying on the school system to maintain some, mostly symbolic, knowledge of the language. The teaching program in the dialect of Santa Rosa and Periquitos has been accepted by the Tariana of all clans. The language of the former “underlings” is now the status symbol.

There is overwhelming community support for teaching Tariana, production of school materials, and learning as much as possible of language, and culture in the form of dances. This is also due to the fact that knowing one’s language is seen as a pathway to securing an indigenous certificate from the government, and with it the benefits it might bring. Knowing a few words in Tariana is a status symbol. These positive developments are somewhat countered by a risk of “tokenism”: in other words, the erstwhile high standards of language proficiency in the Vaupés are waning. Pride in being Tariana and being able to produce a few Tariana words will not stop the process of its obsolescence as a spoken language.

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