Multilingualism in the Northwest Amazon, Revisited[*]

Kristine Stenzel
Federal University of Rio de Janeiro / Museu Nacional, Brazil
kristine.stenzel@colorado.edu / krstenzel@terra.com.br

Keywords: multilingualism, linguistic exogamy, Amazonian languages, Eastern Tukanoan languages

1. Introduction

In his seminal article "Multilingualism in the Northwest Amazon," the late Arthur Sorensen first introduced the anthropological and linguistic communities to the fascinating socio-linguistic situation encountered in the Vaupés river basin of Brazil and Colombia, which he described as "a large, culturally homogeneous area where multilingualism—and polylingualism in the individual—is the cultural norm" (Sorensen, 1967:671). Indeed, in a geographic area covering nearly 40,000 square miles, we find indigenous peoples from some 20 language groups belonging to the Eastern Tukanoan (ET) and Arawakan (AR)[1] language families participating in a social system which has linguistic exogamy as a basic defining tenet.[2] The traditional workings of the system establish an ongoing situation of long-term and basically egalitarian language contact with several intriguing linguistic consequences. First, the system engenders widespread multilingualism manifested both in individuals and in communities. Second, it creates a linguistic dynamic in which the forces of convergence and divergence are constantly at work creating significant, though oftentimes subtle, differences among languages in the

[*] My research on Wanano and Waikhana (Piratapuyo) has been funded by grants from the Endangered Languages Fund (2000), the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research (2002-2003), the National Science Foundation (2002-2004), and the National Science Foundation/National Endowment for the Humanities Documenting Endangered Languages Program (2005-2006).

[1] Sorensen identified the participating ET groups as the Barasana, Desana, Eduria/Taiwano, Karapana, Kubeo, Makuna, Waikhana (Piratapuyo), Siriano, Tatuyo, Tukano, Tuyuka, Wanano, and Yurutí. More recent studies include the Bará and Tanimuka/Retuarã (Gomez-Imbert, 1991). The participating AR groups Sorensen identifies are the Tariano (who are now, for the most part, speakers of Tukano), Baré (speakers of Tukano or Nheengatú), and on the northern margin, the Baniwa and Coripako. Current studies, however, do not include the Baré as participants in the Vaupés system, being that they are largely acculturated and generally live outside of the focus region, to the south and east of the Vaupés, along the Rio Negro (FOIRN, 2000:14)

[2] The Vaupés basin is also home to groups speaking languages in the Makú language family, principally Hup and Yuhup. These groups, descendents of what are considered to be the original occupants of the region (Neves, 1988:181-194) live in the interfluvial regions surrounding the Tiquié, Papuri and upper Vaupés rivers and their total population is currently estimated to be about 3,000 (Martins and Martins, 1999:253). Although these groups have traditional social and economic relations with their Tukanoan and Arawakan riverine neighbors—see (Jackson, 1983:chapter 8), (Chernela, 1993:chapter 8) and (Ribeiro, 1995) for descriptions of these relations—they do not participate in the Vaupés marriage system and follow internal norms favoring endogamous unions (Azevedo, 2005:37). Thus, while their presence contributes to general regional multilingualism, they do not exhibit the same feature of individual and community multilingualism found in the Tukanoan and Arawakan groups (see parallel with the Xingu groups in §2.4).

same family on the one hand, and interesting case studies of dissemination of features among languages from different families and indeed different typological profiles on the other.

In the nearly forty years since the publication of Sorensen's article, research in a number of different areas—linguistics, ethnography, history, and archeology—has enriched our knowledge of specific groups in the region as well as our overall understanding of the system and its development. The goal of this article is to revisit some of the main themes originally outlined Sorensen's work in light of these studies and to discuss the current linguistic situation of some of the participating groups.

In §2 I present a profile of the multilingual Vaupés system based on Sorensen's initial description and other related works. Taken together, these studies provide us with a basic understanding of the cultural system as it existed in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Elements of this 'traditional' system will serve throughout the paper as a basis for comparison with the current situation. I also explore similarities and differences between the Vaupés system and the multilingual system in the upper Xingu. In §3 I describe the socio-historical forces which have brought about modifications of the system (as profiled in §2), in particular those which, in a relatively short period of time, have exacerbated situations of language shift and the increasing endangerment of languages spoken by several of the participating groups. In §4, I offer case studies of two ET groups, the Wanano and the Waikhana (Piratapuyo),[3] and discuss the current state of language use for each group. The Wanano are an example of a group within the Vaupés system that still retains many of its traditional characteristics, including high degrees of individual and community multilingualism.[4] In contrast, the introductory case study of the Waikhana shows them to be an example of a group whose language has become highly threatened as a result of adjustments within the system. Finally, I conclude with a brief discussion of recent socio-political changes within Brazil, including policy shifts at the national level and political empowerment at the local level, which are leading to the development of programs related to indigenous education, and cultural and linguistic preservation.

2. Characteristics of the Vaupés system

Figure 1 shows the Vaupés region, the location of the major rivers—the Vaupés (Uaupés on the Brazilian side) and its major tributaries the Papuri, Tiquié, Querarí, and Cuduiarí; the Içana and Aiarí to the north; and the Apaporis and Piraparaná to the west—and the current spatial distribution of language groups within it.

---

[3] In a recent assembly, members of this language group decided to call for use of the traditional name, *Waikhana* ("fish people") to refer to the group and its language, rather than the commonly used Nheengatú term, *Piratapuyo*, which has belittling semantics (pira=fish, tapuya=foreigner, barbarian, one who does not speak a Tupian language). Out of respect for this decision, I will refer to the group according to their traditional name in this paper.

[4] Fieldwork with both the Wanano and Waikhana has been carried out in the town of São Gabriel da Cachoeira, on the Upper Rio Negro in the state of Amazonas, Brazil. Additionally, I work in traditional Wanano communities located on the Vaupés, principally Carurú Cachoeira, and in Waikhana communities located on the Papuri, principally São Gabriel, and among Waikhana living in the mission town of Iauareté.

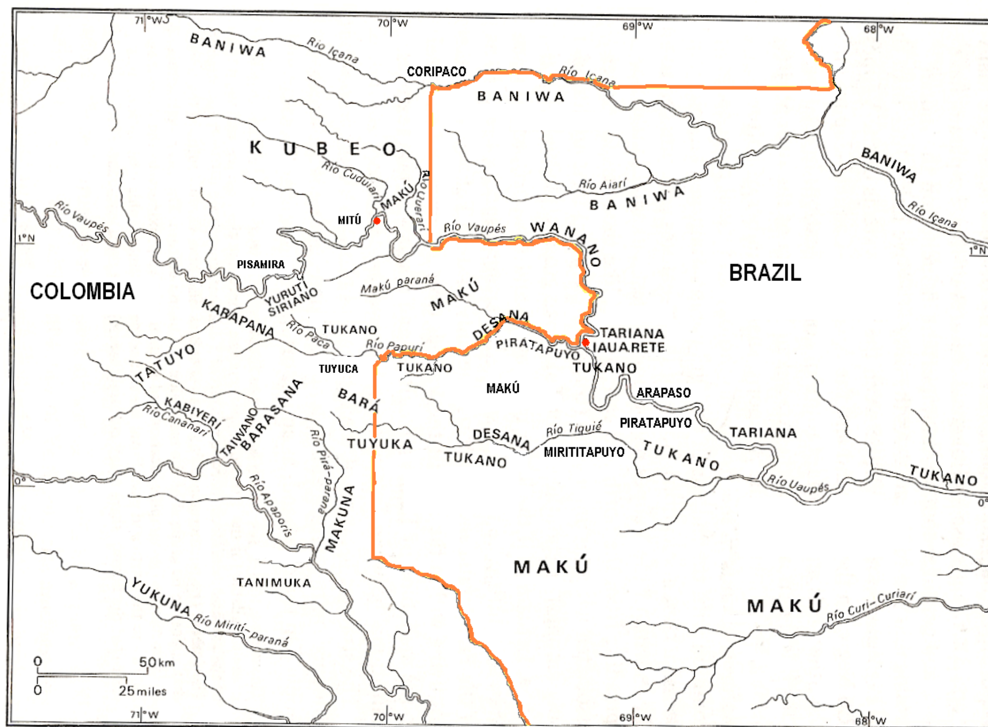

FIGURE 1. THE VAUPÉS REGION AND CURRENT LOCATION OF LANGUAGE GROUPS[5]

2.1. Language and social identity

Multilingualism as it occurs in the Vaupés system is the fruit of several complementary factors. First and foremost is the grounding notion that one's social identity is established by patrilineal descent and has language group[6] affiliation as its primary marker. Sorensen defined such groups as "composed of those individuals who are expected to have used the language as their principal language when they were children in their nuclear family of orientation. The language that identifies the linguistic group is, then, at once the father tongue, the longhouse language,[7] and the tribal language of each member" (Sorensen, 1967:671).

---

[5] This map is a compilation from three different sources: (Hugh-Jones, 1979b), (González de Pérez and Rodríguez de Montes, 2000) and (FOIRN and ISA, 2000).

[6] The terminology used to describe social groups in Tukanoan society varies in the literature. Goldman (Goldman, 1963) and Sorensen employ the term "tribe" though Sorensen also refers to "linguistic group," while Stephen and Christine Hugh-Jones (Hugh-Jones, 1979a; Hugh-Jones, 1979b) prefer the term "exogamous group." I follow Jackson (1983) and Chernela (1993) in use of the term "language group" to refer to a group which shares "a patrilineally inherited affiliation with a language" (Jackson, 1983:7).

[7] Tukanoan groups in fact no longer live in traditional longhouses (in Brazil these had all been destroyed by Salesian missionaries by the late 1950s (Chernela, 1993:41)), but they continue to occupy sites where longhouses once stood. Nowadays nuclear families, each inhabiting an individual dwelling, form "communities" at these same sites. Modern communities function socially in accordance with most of the "longhouse" norms as referred to in Sorensen's article and in the ethnographic studies produced shortly

Although arguably language is an important component of every human's individual identity, in the Vaupés context, the relationship is fundamental. Patrilineal descent and identification with one's father's language group (whether or not accompanied by de facto language use, as we will see in §4) form the foundation of social organization in the Vaupés, establishing boundaries between groups and imbuing in each individual an unalterable identity, a means of defining his or her relationships to all other individuals in the system. In Sorensen's words, "an individual *belongs* to his (or her) father's tribe, and to his father's linguistic group, which is also his own" (Sorensen, 1967:677), while Jackson states that "although everyone [in the Vaupés system] is multilingual, individuals *identify with and are loyal to only one language*, their father language" (Jackson, 1983:164, emphasis mine in both quotes).

This grounding relationship between the individual and a language group is reinforced by a number of other social practices, one of which is virilocal residence—marriage entails the bride going to reside with her husband's group, often in her husband's natal community. Though nowadays not all couples reside in the husband's original community, there is a very strong tendency toward settlement in the husband's region of origin, as shown in a recent study of marriages in the Vaupés region.[8] Overwhelmingly, married males continue residing in the sub-region in which they lived before marriage, the statistics being 75% for the Iauaretê sub-region and 80-90% for the Tiquié/Vaupés sub-region. For women in the same regions, the statistics drop to 58% and 50% respectively (Azevedo, 2005).

Virilocal residence itself reflects and reinforces another of the grounding tenets of the system: the fundamental relationship between each language group and an established territory. Tukanoan creation myths establish territory occupation as a birthright:[9] each group's original ancestors emerge at different locations along a particular section of a river from an extended underwater canoe (usually in the shape of an anaconda) within which they have traveled on their journey from spiritual to human form. The anaconda canoe, after traveling upstream to the headwaters of a river, turns around to face downstream and portions of its body surface at different locations. At each location an ancestral "brother," finally taking on full human form, emerges and claims the site, which is then to be perpetually occupied by his descendents. The order of emergence and the part of the anaconda's body from which each original ancestral brother emerges establish the group-internal hierarchy of

---

thereafter such as (Jackson, 1983; Hugh-Jones, 1979a; Hugh-Jones, 1979b). Recently, as a result of movements to renew cultural practices, several groups have rebuilt longhouses, which function as important community centers. For more on the history and symbolic significance of longhouses see (Hugh-Jones, 1979b; Neves, 1988:163-167).

[8] The study is based on data from the *Censo Indígena Autônoma do Rio Negro* (CIARN), which was carried out among 16,897 people in 314 indigenous communities as well as the city of São Gabriel da Cachoeira. The data are analyzed in relation to 5 geographic sub-regions: Iauaretê, Tiquié/Uaupés, Içana, Upper Rio Negro, and Lower Rio Negro.

[9] Though each language group has its own set of myths, there is a general template with similar features. Analyses of these features can be found in a number of sources, among them (Hugh-Jones, 1979a:chapter 2) (Chernela, 1993) and (Andrello, 2004:chapter 3). Versions of Desana, Tukano, Tariana, and Baniwa myths, recounted by elders, have been published in Portuguese by the Federation of the Indigenous Organizations of the Rio Negro (FOIRN) in the series *Narradores Indígenas do Rio Negro*.

ranked sibs: higher-ranked sibs (elder brothers) are associated with the head and lower-ranked ones (younger brothers) with the tail. Virilocality functions to preserve intra-group unity by continued occupation of these sites by descendents of the ancestors; in contrast, the circulation of women through marriage provides the dynamic means by which inter-group relationships and alliances are established and maintained (Jackson, 1983:chapters 5 and 7).

In regard to language use, because no individual's language group affiliation ever changes—regardless of where he or she may reside—a married woman continues to identify with and use her own language with other in-marrying wives from her group as well as with her very young children. Indeed, this is an essential contributing factor to multilingualism: children are exposed to their mother's language first and tend to understand it well (see §2.2 below). Nevertheless, a couple's offspring inherit the social identity of the father (in other words, they *belong* to his language group) and all children from the age of about five must switch to public use of their father's language. They are expected to become proficient speakers of and show loyalty to this language, the "public, social, and dominant" language of the community into which they are born (Chernela, 2004:14).[10]

2.2. Linguistic exogamy: the foundation of multilingualism

The Vaupés social system establishes a classificatory distinction between agnates (members of one's own group, understood to be one's relatives) and affines (potential marriage partners, members of other groups). In the simplest possible terms, all people who identify with one's father's language as their own are one's "relatives" (Sorensen, 1967:673). Agnate classification renders all males and females of one's own generation one's classificatory "brothers" and "sisters," all males of one's father's generation classificatory "uncles," and so forth, though the actual terms used to refer to kinship relations and the vocatives used in everyday life reflect complex distinctions of rank within more general categories.[11] Outside "affinal" groups with which one's group maintains ongoing affiliation through marriage (represented in the flesh by the set of married women in any given community) are collectively referred to as "in-laws." Marriage between agnates (in other words, between sisters and brothers), is expressly prohibited; one must marry outside of one's own group to avoid it—thus is the principle of linguistic exogamy established.

Figure 2 presents a simplified model of the system in which five language groups and three generations are represented. At the top level we find two sets of siblings, three Wanano siblings—two male and one female—and two Tukano siblings—a brother and sister. Eight exogamic marriages are represented, with marriage C

[10] Chernela (2004) offers an analysis of the essential role of women in the process of father-language socialization. She argues that this role has been largely ignored in the literature, which presents father's language socialization as a spontaneous rather than guided process, one which is undertaken, to a large degree, by women. Chernela's study is the only one I am aware of which attempts to look at aspects of language acquisition in this multilingual context, though surely this is an area of study which can offer important insights and is ripe for more detailed investigation.

[11] See, for example, the discussion of such terms in Wanano in chapter 5 of (Chernela, 1993) and in Barasana in (Hugh-Jones, 1979a:appendix 2).

representing a union between the two sets of siblings at the top level. We can see at the middle and lower levels of descent that the language group affiliation of the offspring of each marriage is determined by patrilineal descent: the children of marriages A and E are Tariana, those of marriages B, C, F and G are Wanano, those of marriage D are Tukano, and those of marriage H are Desana.

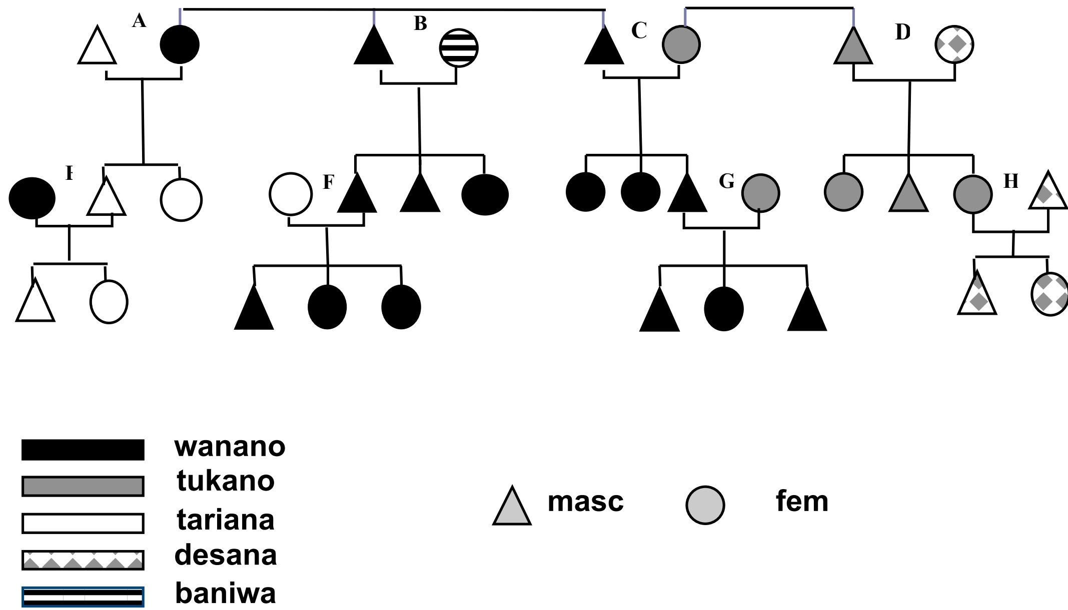

FIGURE 2. LINGUISTIC EXOGAMY

A direct association of the type language group=exogamous group does not, however, hold in absolute terms for all of the participating Vaupés groups. Sorensen himself pointed out that the true exogamous unit is the phratry, composed of all people who identify themselves as the direct descendants of a single set of 'original,' mythical brothers (as described in §2.1).[12] For most, but not all of the participating language groups, the phratry includes all of the group's internal sibs as well as at least one other language group whose members are also considered "relatives."[13] The Wanano and Waikhana, for example, constitute two different language groups, but they refer to each other as "relatives," thus demonstrating an agnatic, phratric relationship to which

[12] The Vaupés Indians recognize phratric groups in terms of exogamic restrictions but have no name for the phratric group itself, the highest-level named group being the language group (Neves, 1988:154, 159).
[13] The two documented exceptions among the ET groups are the Kubeo and the Makuna, both of which have language-group internal phratries, as do the Arawakan Baniwa. For these groups, phratric exogamy may, but does not necessarily correspond to linguistic exogamy. See discussions in (Goldman, 1963; Chernela, 1989; Gomez-Imbert, 1991; Azevedo, 2005).

exogamic norms apply. Many other phratric pairs have been identified among the participating groups, including the Tukano and the Bará, the Desana and the Tuyuka, and the Yurutí with both the Bará and the Tuyuca (Jackson, 1983:90-92); the Tatuyo marry neither the Pisamira nor the Siriano, and the Taiwano are brothers with the Karapana (Gomez-Imbert, 1991:549); and, according to Aikhenvald, phratric relations hold between the Desana and the Tariano as well (Aikhenvald, 2002:22).

It is interesting that speakers explain prohibition of marriage between certain groups by claiming that they once spoke the same language and are therefore "brothers." However, Sorensen noted, and subsequent linguistic research confirms that internal linguistic proximity does not generally coincide with established phratric relations. In other words, the languages spoken by groups who call each other "brothers" are usually not the closest "sister" languages by linguistic standards (such as percentages of cognates, shared structural features, and speakers' own perceptions of intelligibility).[14] For example, both Desana/Siriano and Bará/Tuyuca are close linguistic "sister" pairs, yet socially, the groups do not belong to the same phratries and may thus intermarry. Gomez-Imbert notes that in general "it is *not* the languages of phratric groups which are the most similar, but those between groups who maintain relations of alliance. This observation is our first indication of the complex and constant underlying tension between the forces of fusion (linguistic interference and convergence via contact) and fission (the need for linguistic differentiation of languages spoken by allied groups)" (Gomez-Imbert, 1993:256). It is only in the case of the Wanano/Waikhana pair that true linguistic proximity and phratric relations coincide. High percentages of cognates and shared phonological and syntactic features render Wanano and Waikhana mutually intelligible (approximately to the same degree that Spanish and Portuguese are mutually intelligible) and clearly establish them as a subgroup of sister-languages within the ET family (Waltz, 2002); at the same time, the Wanano and Waikhana are "brothers" in socio-cultural terms and do not intermarry.

The picture of Vaupés multilingualism that has emerged so far includes the following elements: first, we have multiple groups participating in a shared cultural system in which an individual's basic social identity is defined by language group affiliation, processed by patrilineal descent, and buttressed through the practice of virilocal residence. Second, we find that social identity is directly linked to norms regarding marriage; phratric exogamy is a prescribed element of the system and, in most cases entails *linguistic* exogamy. The model thus establishes, minimally, use of two languages in each household; husbands and wives are speakers of different languages and their children learn both. The foundation is thus laid for systematic bilingualism. However, as Sorensen pointed out, the norm among participants in the Vaupés system is not bilingualism but *polylingualism*, with individuals commonly speaking five or six languages (see §4.1). And so we may wonder: where do these additional languages come from?

The answer to this question lies in additional nuances of the system of exogamy, to which we return as a key organizing element. What we find upon closer

[14] Proposals of internal classification of the ET languages can be found in (Sorensen, 1969 ; Waltz and Wheeler, 1972; Ramirez, 1997; Barnes, 1999); for discussion of these proposals see also (Gomez-Imbert, 1993; Franchetto and Gomez-Imbert, 2003).

examination is that there are additional constraints which work to narrow the potential pool of marriage partner candidates for a given individual, constraints which have important linguistic consequences. An individual's choice of marriage partner is limited not only by the norm of proscribed marriage between agnates, but also by a prescribed ideal. One's preferred marriage candidates are one's cross-cousins (the child of one's mother's brother or of one's father's sister), the ideal marriage being one which completes a bilateral de facto or symbolic exchange of sisters (Jackson, 1983:126). Marriages E and F, on the second level of Figure 3 represent this ideal of "sister-exchange." The Tariana male in marriage E (child of marriage A) marries Wanano female *m* (child of marriage B) and in exchange, his sister *h* marries a male Wanano (child of marriage B).

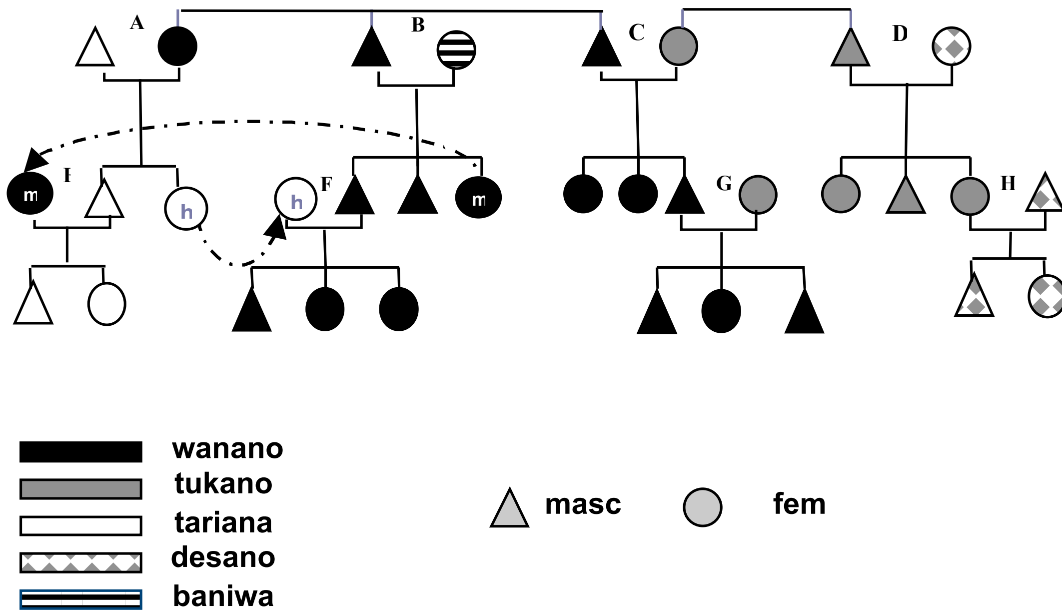

FIGURE 3. "SISTER EXCHANGE" MARRIAGES

Jackson's research with the Bará in the late 1960s showed that such ideal exchanges involving real sisters did not constitute the actual norm (though approximately 19 percent of the marriages did conform to this ideal model). She found, however, that a considerable degree of latitude is allowed in order for the "ideal" to be satisfied—for example, the sisters exchanged may be classificatory rather than actual blood sisters or the exchange may be fulfilled over more than one generation. When these types of "adjusted" marriages were contemplated in Jackson's study, she found the conformity rate jumping to 63 percent. We see, then, that while not absolute, the ideal of cross-cousin unions effectively serves to reduce and constrain the potential marriage pool for any given individual and reinforces existing social ties between groups.

In linguistic terms, the ideal of cross-cousin marriages also serves to greatly increase the chance that marriage partners, though members of different language groups, will already know, or at least have been exposed to each other's languages. If, for example, a man marries his mother's brother's daughter (real or classificatory), his wife will be a speaker of his mother's language, the language he learned as a young child, one he probably had occasion to use during visits to his mother's village and in which he is most likely quite proficient. Marriage E of Figure 3 is an example of this situation—the Tariana male, whose mother is Wanano, marries his mother's brother's daughter, also Wanano. If a man marries a woman from any of the groups into which his father's sisters married, there will not be this same direct generational repetition of language. Still, such a union is likely to yield a wife who speaks a language that is to some degree familiar to him, because he has heard it spoken by other in-marrying women of his village. Thus, whereas in theory, exogamy could lead to any combination of languages between couples and within communities, exogamy in conjunction with the ideal of cross-cousin unions in fact results in a reduced pool of "in-law" group candidates. This in turn leads to the long-term effect of reducing the set of languages heard in a given community. Over time, patterns evolve which reveal ongoing exchanges of women within a rather circumscribed set of affinal groups, and marriages outside this set, while not prohibited, are certainly the exception (as we see in the case studies in §4) .

The languages with the most representatives in a community tend to become part of the collective "repertoire" (to use Sorensen's term) of the community and hence of most of the children raised there. Through contact with in-marrying women "an individual is exposed to at least two or three languages that are neither his father's nor his mother's language . . . as an individual goes through adolescence, he actively and almost suddenly learns to speak these additional languages to which he has been exposed, and his linguistic repertoire is elaborated" (Sorensen, 1967:678). Sorensen characterizes such acquisition as fruit of much "passive" exposure and observation of languages throughout childhood (though one would suppose that there might also be a considerable deal of 'active' child-to-child language transmission as well).

There is, nevertheless, a conceptual and de facto dichotomy between the active use of one's father's language (and usually of one's mother's language) and passive use of these additional languages, which speakers often claim to understand but not to speak fluently. Gomez-Imbert notes that in the Piraparaná region, there is a lexical distinction made between these two types of linguistic competence: one "speaks" one's own language but "imitates" the languages of others (1991:543-544).

2.3. The consequences of contact

Besides the ideal of sister exchange as a secondary constraint, geographic location is also an important factor which effectively determines which language groups end up maintaining long-term contact through marriage exchanges. A number of classic studies, including (Goldman, 1963) (Hugh-Jones, 1979a) and (Jackson, 1983), as well as more recent studies such as (Cabalzar, 2000) and (Azevedo, 2005) demonstrate that in general, the in-law groups for any given community tend to be those who are geographically more accessible. Creating and maintaining affinal relations with neighboring groups not only facilitates practical matters such as courtship visits by unmarried men to the communities

of potential brides, exchanges of goods with and post-marriage travel to in-law communities, but is also an important means of strengthening regional social, political, economic, and (in the past) defensive alliances.[15]

In the Vaupés system, the tendency for groups in any given sub-region to intermarry (creating, as it were, region-specific multilingual "repertoires") undoubtedly produces important linguistic consequences, over time leading to the development of identifiable shared features among the languages involved. Granted, such features will probably never be glaringly obvious given the fact that most of the languages involved in the system are from the same language family. Being genetically related in the first place, they naturally share a number of inherited basic features, making contact-induced changes all the more difficult to discern. Nevertheless, convergence, or "fusion" of different types of linguistic features is a recognized product of language contact situations, and the Vaupés is certainly a fascinating, albeit extremely complex, case study. Shared features attributable to contact, or convergence, can only be discerned through very careful linguistic analyses of individual languages and comparative studies such as those realized by Gomez-Imbert on the ET languages of the Piraparaná region. These studies show that regional differences can indeed be discerned on phonological, morphological and syntactic levels (Gomez-Imbert, 1991; Gomez-Imbert, 1993; Gomez-Imbert, 1999; Gomez-Imbert and Hugh-Jones, 2000).

It is important to note, however, that the linguistic results of contact, in other words, the types of features which may converge and the direction of influence between languages, will always be determined in part by social and cultural factors such as the relations of power between groups and speakers' attitudes toward the languages involved (Gomez-Imbert, 1993; Aikhenvald, 2002). In this regard, there are several additional characteristics of the Vaupés system which should be highlighted. First, the use of multiple languages by participants in the Vaupés system is generally not accompanied by an attitudinal ranking of the languages involved. Loyalty to one's father's language is, of course, expected because the use of this language is a badge of identity. But loyalty does not entail a view of this language as inherently better (or more beautiful, expressive, complete, complex or any other evaluative notion commonly associated with language) than any other. Languages in the system are, in Jackson's words, conceived of as "separate but equal" (1983:174).

Second, considering further the notion of separateness, Sorensen noted several important things about speaker behavior: a) that speakers consistently affirm the languages in the system to be mutually unintelligible; b) that while learning a new language, speakers display respect for its integrity by not attempting to speak it imperfectly; and c) that speakers do not overtly mix the languages they do know. In other words, in the Vaupés system there is very little of the lexical borrowing and code-switching which is so commonly heard among bilingual speakers in contact situations.[16] Aikhenvald too notes these behaviors and refers to them as characteristic of the "language etiquette" of the system. Overt mixing of languages is only allowed in specific, restricted contexts and is severely frowned upon in everyday circumstances; speakers

---

[15] For a summary of the literature addressing this issue, see (Azevedo, 2005:39-40).

[16] See chapter 1 of (Aikhenvald, 2002) for an overview of such typical language contact phenomena.

who overtly mix languages are considered “incompetent and sloppy” (Aikhenvald, 2002:187).

We should be careful, however, not to interpret such language etiquette, speakers’ statements regarding the unintelligibility of languages, or their sometimes exaggerated efforts to highlight differences between languages to be proof that convergence is somehow blocked in the system. On the contrary, the efforts speakers make to maintain languages as separate systems and the weight they accord the often subtle ways in which languages do diverge are an obvious (though probably unconscious) reaction to convergence and a perceived danger related to loss of difference. The equilibrium of the entire system indeed depends on delicate balances between difference and sameness, be they in the social or linguistic spheres.

Returning to the question of the linguistic consequences of Vaupés social organization, we can understand the basic workings of the system to engender what Aikhenvald calls “multilateral diffusion” (Aikhenvald, 2002:15), in other words, a context in which languages of equal status and in constant contact mutually influence each other. We can also assume that different sub-regions, having unique “repertoires” comprised of sub-sets of languages, will display patterns of convergence reflecting elements of each particular mix. The details of convergence identified in Gomez-Imbert’s studies of the ET languages spoken in the Piraparaná sub-region—Bará, Karapana, Tatuyo, Barasana, Taiwano, Makuna, and Tanimuka—will thus necessarily be different than those in sub-regions characterized by other ET language groups and by sustained relations between these and groups speaking languages from the genetically unrelated Arawakan family.

Two examples can serve to demonstrate how widely the socio-linguistic contexts of individual language groups can vary. Aikhenvald’s studies, for example, focus on the results of contact in the region occupied by the Arawakan Tariana for approximately the last 700 years—roughly extending from the grand rapids at Ipanoré (in the middle Vaupés) to the region just north of Iauaretê (Aikhenvald, 1996; 1999; 2002). There is historical evidence that the Tariana population was formerly much larger, that there was a continuum of related Tariana languages and that there was, generally, a larger Arawakan presence (of Tariana and Baniwa groups) in the region now occupied by ET groups (Wright, 2005:39). Nowadays, however, the Tariana population numbers only about 1500 and no more than 100 of these can still speak the language (Aikhenvald, 2002:27). Their traditionally preferred in-law groups are the neighboring Tukano, Desana, Waikhana and Wanano, all speakers of ET languages, and the Tariana themselves have undergone a nearly complete shift to Tukano. Aikhenvald’s analysis has thus profiled in detail the more uni-lateral influences of ET language structures on the now severely endangered Tariana (uni-directionality being exacerbated by the imposition of Tukano as the dominant regional language and of ongoing and nearly terminal Tariana language attrition (Aikhenvald, 2002:16)).

Moving just upriver to the territory of the Wanano we find a very different multilingual environment. In contrast to the situation of the Tariana, who are completely surrounded by ET groups, the Wanano are an ET group which has as its closest neighbors two Arawakan groups and the ET group whose language is most divergent within the family. Following the norm of establishing marriage alliances with neighboring groups,

the Wanano historically have among their preferred in-laws both the Arawakan Tariana (downriver to the south) and Baniwa (to whom they have access via several relatively short overland trails linking the Vaupés and the Aiarí rivers, described in (Koch-Grünberg, 1995b:167-176))[17] as well as the upriver Kubeo (ET, but with notable historical Arawakan influence).[18] A number of linguistic innovations in the Wanano language, including post-aspirated consonants, a tendency for pronoun doubling (before and after the predicate), reduction and cliticization of possessive pronouns, use of shape classifiers with animates, and the development of a preverbal negator are currently under investigation as features which may be attributable to prolonged Arawakan influence.

A final factor which contributes to overall, systemic multilingualism as well as to each individual's repertoire of languages is the use of regional linguas francas. It is not known which, if any, regional language may have been used as a lingua franca before the arrival of Europeans in the area, though it is likely that linguas francas were employed, given the archaeological evidence suggesting a long-standing and widespread system of regional trade between Arawakan and Tukanoan groups in place in the 1400s (Neves, 1988:chapter 2). Increased European presence in the Upper Rio Negro during the 17th and 18th centuries introduced Nheengatú (also known as *Língua Geral Amazônica*, of the Tupi-Guaraní family) into the area, and it remained the main lingua franca throughout the 19th century. Indeed, the influence of Nheengatú in the region is evidenced by the predominance of Nheengatú place names, terms for flora and fauna, as well as names used to refer to many of the local indigenous groups themselves (such as "Pira-tapuyo," mentioned earlier). However, use of Nheengatú waned with the decline of rubber extraction activities in the area, and in the early 20th century, Koch-Grünberg noted that Tukano was already on the rise as a second regional lingua franca (Koch-Grünberg, 1995a:23).

By the time of Sorensen's studies a half-century later, Nheengatú use in the Vaupés region had all but ceased, and the Tukano language was clearly the dominant lingua franca.[19] Sorensen attributes this in part to the numerical strength of the Tukano group and to their widespread distribution along the various waterways, though he also speculates on the possible political predominance of the Tukano group and their language in earlier times. A number of historical factors have probably contributed to the rise of Tukano (see §3 below), but the breakdown of communities in traditional territories and migration to mission centers or to communities with mixed ethnic populations have certainly contributed to its present status as the dominant common language. In Iauaretê, a mission center located at the confluence of the Papuri and Vaupés rivers in Tariana

[17] Historical and archeological evidence show that these trails are part of a much larger network of overland trails which, since pre-colonial times, have linked the entire northwestern Amazon region, facilitating trade, communication, and migration in a "system of regional interdependence" (Neves, 1988:116-117).

[18] For more on the historical and linguistic relations between the Kubeo and Baniwa, see (Goldman, 1963; Koch-Grünberg, 1995a:68; Wright, 2005:11).

[19] Nheengatú continues to be an important language, however, along the margins of the Upper Rio Negro, where many people still speak it as a first language. It is also one of the three officially recognized indigenous languages of the municipality of São Gabriel da Cachoeira, the other two languages being Tukano and Baniwa. Both of these names, not surprisingly, are of Nheentagú origin, the former (borrowed into English as *toucan*) denoting the bird and the latter being a variant of the word for manioc: *maníba, maniva,* or *baniba*. For more on the history of Nheengatú in the region see (Freire, 2004).

territory, by far the most commonly heard language is Tukano (followed by Portuguese), although only 24% of the population belong to the Tukano language group. The same trend is found even in smaller communities located in territories historically recognized as Desana or Waikhana. If migratory patterns have resulted in a mixed population of families from several different groups, the common language will be Tukano rather than the language originally associated with the territory, even though the different "father" languages may continue to be used, at least for a generation or so, in each separate home.

Aikhenvald further calls attention to the fact that outside interference on the part of Salesian missionaries, beginning in the early 1920s, has had much to do with the increased influence and expanded use of Tukano. The Salesians "imposed Western-style schooling on the Indians, forcing children into boarding schools where they were made to speak just one language of the area, Tucano (sic) . . . chosen because it was, numerically, the majority language . . . The Salesians also considered the traditional multilingualism of the area a 'pagan' habit, and strived to make Indians monolingual 'like other civilized people in the world'" (Aikhenvald, 2002:243).

Not surprisingly, in the Salesians' view, the category of "civilized people" included the national populations of Brazil and Colombia, and it was monolingualism in Portuguese or Spanish that was the ultimate intended goal. In fact, any discussion of linguas francas cannot ignore the increasing use and imposition of the socially powerful national languages. While still not the dominant languages of everyday life—at least not in most Vaupés village settings—the national languages are dominant in all spheres of contact between the Indians and the outside world, including all official domains such as registrations of births, marriages, and deaths; acquisition of identification documents; voting; enlistment for military service; requests for retirement pensions; as well as all banking and medical services; and, until very recently, formal education at all levels. For Indians who migrate from their villages in indigenous areas to urban centers such as São Gabriel da Cachoeira, the path to monolingualism in Portuguese is short and within two generations, the indigenous languages are irretrievably lost.

Finally, to complete this introductory picture of Vaupés social organization we should pull back and view multilingualism, as Sorensen did, as a component of a cultural system which is a unified whole. This "whole" is united by shared cultural characteristics including a preference for riverine habitation in communal longhouses (up to the mid-nineteenth century) or (nowadays) in communities of smaller dwellings occupied by a set or sets of brothers and their families; subsistence economy based on the cultivation of bitter manioc, fishing, gathering and some hunting; strict sexual division of labor; norms of exogamic marriage; Dravidian-type kinship organization and preference for cross-cousin marriages; patrilineal descent and virilocal residence; ritualized ceremonial and economic exchanges between allied groups; internal organization of ranked sibs; a series of shared myths; and social identity based on language group affiliation, phratric relations, territory, use of and association with certain sacred or ceremonial objects (Gomez-Imbert, 1991:539 summarizing Hugh-Jones, 1979b).

Like a mosaic in which the "big picture" can only be perceived if the discrete differences between each contributing component are sufficiently marked, the Vaupés system, as a cultural whole, has been bound together by the engendering and maintenance of discrete social differences defined in "ethnic" and linguistic terms. Indeed, it is a

system whose equilibrium has long been maintained by the complementary forces of "cultural homogeny" and "ethno-linguistic diversity." Attitudinal features related to the status of languages and the appropriate ways to use them complement common aspects of the social structure in such a way as to create a balance between marked, overtly maintained differences in the linguistic sphere and a system of shared cultural practices in the social sphere.

2.4. Multilingualism in the Xingu

Having outlined the basic characteristics of multilingualism in the Vaupés system, it is interesting to briefly explore some of the similarities and contrasts of this system with another well-documented context of multilingualism in Brazil, that being the situation found in the upper Xingu River in the state of Mato Grosso. There we find populations who speak ten different languages from the Karib (Kuikuro, Nahukwá, Kalapalo, Matipu), Arawak (Waurá, Mehinako, Yawalapiti), and Tupi (Kamayurá, Aweti) families, as well as the isolate language Trumai.

As in the Vaupés, the Xingu groups participate in a shared cultural system with a common cosmological model and set of ritual ceremonies. Differentiation within this common system occurs not only in the linguistic sphere, but also in the association of groups with mythical and geographic elements, and in terms of specialization in the manufacture of certain objects which circulate over wider geographic areas (Neves, 1988:73). As in the Vaupés context, language is used among the Xingu groups as an important marker of identity, "as an emblem of belonging to a specific group and of boundaries" (Franchetto, 2001:142). Linguistic differentiation is symbolic of social differentiation and is used as a means of preserving group unity. Norms of language etiquette dictate that languages be respectfully maintained as separate systems, and though the skills of bilingual individuals may be valued in situations which require interpreters, there is generally little social incentive for individuals to learn the languages spoken in neighboring villages. With the exception of certain ceremonial contexts, the general norm in Xingu society is that one simply does not use a language other than one's own.

We see, then, that unlike the Vaupés system, multilingualism at the regional level in the Xingu has not led to the development of a social system which engenders systematic multilingualism at the community or individual levels. Despite sustained contact between groups, there is a generally low level of bilingualism and there is no common lingua franca employed for communication between groups.[20] While exogamic marriages do occur between partners from different Xingu groups, there are no equivalents to the norms of exogamy and virilocal residence which contribute so fundamentally to the development of community and individual multilingualism in the Vaupés system. Indeed, *endogamous* marriages are preferred in the Xingu system; they are seen as a means by which group unity is reinforced and local alliances are strengthened. Exogamic marriages are viewed as problematic; they not only entail negotiations as to where the mixed

[20] Interestingly, though, there is recognition that contact inevitably leads to convergence and there are recognized semantic spheres in which widespread borrowing (generally from Arawakan sources) has occurred (Franchetto, 2001:148).

married couple will reside but are considered potentially less stable than endogamous unions (Franchetto, 2001:141).

Exogamous marriages also lead to the problematic issue of which language the children of a mixed union will use. In the Vaupés system, patrilineal descent reinforced by virilocal residence automatically determine the social identity and language allegiance of the offspring in any union, while in the Xingu, identity is determined by a composite of elements which include language use, familial relations, public opinion, and, above all, the village in which the couple resides. In the case of mixed marriages in the Xingu system, each spouse uses his or her language with the children, who become bilingual, but group affiliation and language loyalty are for the most part determined by location: children belong to the village in which they reside, be it their mother's or their father's.

There are only two groups in the Xingu system—the Trumai and the Yawalapiti—whose particular histories of contact have led to the development of internal bilingualism and/or systematic language shift. Both populations are at this point greatly diminished and their languages are on the edge of extinction (there are only about 50 remaining speakers of Trumai and fewer than 10 of Yawalapiti (Moore, 2005)). The current situation in the Trumai villages is one of generalized shift to Portuguese as the result of successive waves of contact, inter-ethnic marriage and acculturation. In contrast, the few remaining speakers of Yawalapiti share their village with members of the Kuikuro, Kamayurá, Kalapalo, Waurá and Mehinako groups, and all remaining Yawalapiti speakers know at least one of these other languages as well. This is a unique example of a *multilingual village* within the Xingu complex, but one which "continues to distinguish itself as a local [Yawalapiti] group in relation to others. The Yawalapiti language still functions as an emblem of this identity to outsiders, reinforcing the distinctive importance [of language] in Upper-Xingu society. However, group cohesion is reproduced through a network of alliances which has incorporated the heterogeneity of the local unit" (Franchetto, 2001:145).

In sum, though the Vaupés and Xingu contexts are alike in some ways—the participating groups in each share a common cultural system and there is a close association of language with social identity—the "multilingualisms" of the two regions are of two different types. In the Xingu system, multilingualism is a feature of the regional level only. Norms of endogamous marriage and restrictions on language use in public domains effectively block the development of multilingual villages (with the exceptions noted above) and systematic bilingualism in individuals, both of which threaten to undermine group unity. In the Vaupés system, on the other hand, multilingualism is manifested at all levels: regional, community and individual. Norms of exogamous marriage systematically create bilingual households and multilingual villages, and engender polylingualism in individuals. There is, however, no perceived threat to the maintenance of social identities, as these are exclusively and inexorably determined by patrilineal descent.[21] In fact, traditionally, the penetration of multilingual practices at all levels of social organization serves to strengthen networks of relations between groups.

[21] Additionally, it is important to note that in the Vaupés context, social identities defined by language group association are maintained even in situations of real-life language shift, as is the case of the Tukano-speaking Tariana, Arapaso, Miritítapuyo, etc.

3. Interference and its consequences

Although a number of the tenets of Vaupés social system outlined in §2 still remain in effect, 400 years of outside contact and interference in Vaupés culture have resulted in major changes affecting the system's equilibrium and the lifestyle, to a greater or lesser extent, of all of the participating groups. It would, of course, be naïve to assume that the history of the region began with the arrival of Europeans in the area and that all modifications to the system are the result of outside European influence. We know, for example, of important internal migrations (the most recent being that of the Tariana, some 300 years before the arrival of the Europeans[22]), of inter-group warfare, and of other types of conflict which certainly brought about adjustments to the system. However, such adjustments can in no way compare to the devastating impact which resulted from European contact with Vaupés society.

European influence in northwest Amazonia dates to the early 1600s when the Dutch, occupying territories to the north, began trading manufactured goods for slaves captured by Carib groups further inland in the Rio Branco and Rio Negro river basins (Chernela, 1993:17). The first major European *presence* in the Vaupés region, however, came in the form of slaving expeditions in the early 18th century, in particular, during the decade of the 1740s. Although there are no exact records, the registries that do exist suggest that during this period approximately 20,000Indians from the Upper Rio Negro region were captured by Portuguese and Spanish troops and taken downriver as slaves (Wright, 2005:51).[23] Raiding expeditions arrived from the south, traveling upstream along the Rio Negro and into its major tributaries. Although virtually no groups inhabiting the region escaped enslavement, groups whose territories lay in the direct path of the invading troops were most hard hit. Records show that over 25% of the slaves taken from the Upper Rio Negro region were ethnic Makú, Boaupé (Tariana), Baniwa, and Werekena.[24] The latter three of these populations were speakers of Arawakan languages, which indicates that at that time there was an overall greater Arawakan presence along the main arteries into the area than what we currently find (see the present-day distribution of groups in Figure 1). Presently, the Arawakan groups occupy areas on the fringes of what was once the "heartland" of the region. Indeed, as a result of slaving expeditions in this heartland, the Tariana population was drastically reduced in number, the Baniwa were forced to retreat north to the Aiari and Içana, and the Makú groups fled further into the interfluvial areas of the jungle.

The current, nearly exclusive occupation of this heartland by Tukanoan groups is, therefore, partially the result of downstream migration of groups who had previously lived further upriver or inland but then relocated to areas emptied by slave trade (Neves,

---

[22] For different accounts of this migration see (Wright, 2005:chapter 1 ; Chernela, 1993:chapter 2 ; Andrello, 2004:chapter 5).

[23] We do not know for sure what the size of the population was before European contact, but archeological evidence indicates that it was much larger than it is today (Neves, 1988:95). Indeed, the current population of the region is only approximately 30,000 (Ricardo, 2000:243), a statistic which underscores the magnitude of the impact of slaving activity in the area and shows that the indigenous population has never returned to its pre-colonial size.

[24] Neves (1988:374) indicates that the Werekena occupied the lower Vaupés at this time; presently there are no Werekena in the area.

1988: 147; Wright, 2005:49). These migrations, part of what Neves considers to be an ongoing Tukanoan regional expansion, also contributed to the present-day discontinuous occupation of the rivers and splintering of different groups such as the Tuyuca, Desana, and Waikhana (Piratapuyo).[25] Smaller Tukanoan groups whose territories lay along in the direct path of the slaving expeditions, such as the Arapaso and Miritítapuyo, were all but eradicated during this period.[26] The reduced surviving populations, like the Tariana, have retained a nominal separate ethnic identity but have acculturated and integrated, to a certain extent, into the more populous Tukano groups; they have, for example, all since adopted the Tukano language.[27] Thus, we see that the period of slaving activity not only affected changes in the distribution of population within the region but also prompted adjustments to cultural definitions and relations, including some in the linguistic domain.

After the decline of the slaving expeditions came a period of increased investment on the part of the government and their missionary allies in the removal and settlement of Indians to larger, urban (mission) centers. The express objectives of this policy were to expand extraction of forest products and augment the labor available for government projects and national defense (Chernela, 1993:30). Such efforts, which spanned nearly a century (roughly from the 1790s to the 1870s), met with quite a bit of resistance on the part of the indigenous populations, who continued their struggle to reestablish their greatly reduced population base in traditional community settings and to live in accordance with their cultural and linguistic norms.

Thereupon came another period of exploitation in the form of forced labor in rubber extraction, beginning in the early 1870s and lasting for nearly fifty years. The Vaupés basin, though not rich itself as an area of extraction, was unfortunately close enough to more productive areas of collection in Colombia and along the Rio Negro to be a target area for recruitment—or in many cases capture—of laborers. Descriptions of the rubber traders' reprehensible exploits can be found in sources such as (Koch-Grünberg, 1995a:58-67), and it is well known that many youngsters were kidnapped, women were abused and men from all groups were forced to labor away from their families and communities. As a result, some groups again resorted to migration to more remote areas, leading to a new wave of territory fragmentation and breakdown of long-standing alliances and social relations.

Parallel to these destructive economic practices and political policies, we should also note that there has been constant missionary presence and intervention in the area dating from the late 1600s, with successive waves of occupation by different religious orders: the Jesuits and Carmelites throughout the 1700s, the Capuchins and Franciscans in the 1800s, and since the early 1900s, the Salesians. Despite their somewhat different philosophical and political orientations, the activities of each of these orders and the

[25] We can see in Figure 1 that these groups occupy discontinuous areas on the Papuri, Tiquié, and Vaupés rivers.

[26] Among Arapaso narratives collected by Neves are some recounting a period of "organized collective suicide," which he correlates with "the trama inflicted upon the Arapaso because of slave trade" (Neves, 1988:372).

[27] According to Aikhenvald, the Tarianas' gradual adoption of the Tukano language probably pre-dates this period (Aikhenvald, 2002). Certainly, though, language shift was exacerbated by population decline due to slavery, and then received a final, fatal push when missionaries imposed use of Tukano as a lingua franca in schools.

alliances they formed with governmental forces to convert, cajole, and "civilize" the Indians have led to a common result: the dislocation of indigenous populations and the breakdown of their own organizational and cultural categories.

The activities of the Salesians in Brazil over the past eighty years have been particularly devastating. Not only did the national government allow the Salesians to intervene in the Indians' way of life by destroying their multi-family longhouses, devaluing and/or prohibiting their ceremonies and use of artifacts, and denigrating their norms of social organization (such as cross-cousin marriage), but they also founded an alliance with the Salesian order in the realm of education. For nearly 80 years, the Salesians were in charge of village grade schools (grades 1-4) and ran three boarding schools for older indigenous children. This "education program" had serious social and linguistic consequences. First, while it generally discouraged use of indigenous languages—labeling them as "slang" or "dialects"—and encouraged use of Portuguese as the language of instruction, it also promoted use of the Tukano language as *the* lingua franca in other settings, bestowing on it a kind of recognition and status no language within the system had previously been accorded and which is completely contrary to the traditional "egalitarian" status of participating languages. Moreover, the removal of children from their families and communities in the name of "education" has contributed to the breakdown of transmission of traditional forms of knowledge. Several generations of Vaupés Indians were taught to be ashamed of their cultural heritage and were encouraged to seek meaning and belonging in a national culture which in turn view them as primitives with little to offer.

Damage has continued in a different way since the late 1980s, when the "boarding" element of the Salesian schools ended. With the ideal of formal education now firmly established in the hearts and minds of the Vaupés population, entire families are migrating to the communities which offer secondary education, and once displaced, few return to their communities of origin. As we shall see in the next section, migration motivated by education is draining entire populations of villages and threatening the languages of the smaller language groups, for as mentioned earlier in §2.3, the creation of multi-ethnic communities tends to lead to situations of diglossia and language shift, with home languages gradually being phased out in favor of Tukano and, increasingly, of Portuguese.

4. Two case studies: the Wanano and the Waikhana (Piratapuyo)

In the previous section we saw that a number of historical factors have brought about changes to the Vaupés system and affected different groups in different ways. In this section, I offer brief case studies of two of these groups and show how geography and other factors have worked to create their current contrasting profiles of language use.

4.1. The Wanano

The Wanano are one of the ET groups participating in the Vaupés system whose social organization still displays many of the characteristics outlined in §2. The Wanano are a bi-national population—approximately 68% of the population (estimated as 1,600) lives in Colombia and 32% in Brazil (FOIRN and ISA, 2000:43)—and they continue to

occupy their traditional territory, which covers most of the east-west stretch of the Vaupés River where it forms the border between Brazil and Colombia. There are currently twelve Wanano communities along this stretch of river; an additional two communities are located further upriver to the west, within Colombian territory. Historical records analyzed by Wright (2005:80-81) show Wanano occupation of this same territory in the 1740s, and the history of the region reconstructed through oral narratives and archeological evidence indicates an even older occupation, pre-dating the Tariana migration to the Vaupés region approximately 700 years ago (Neves, 1988: 158,206; Wright, 2005:13).

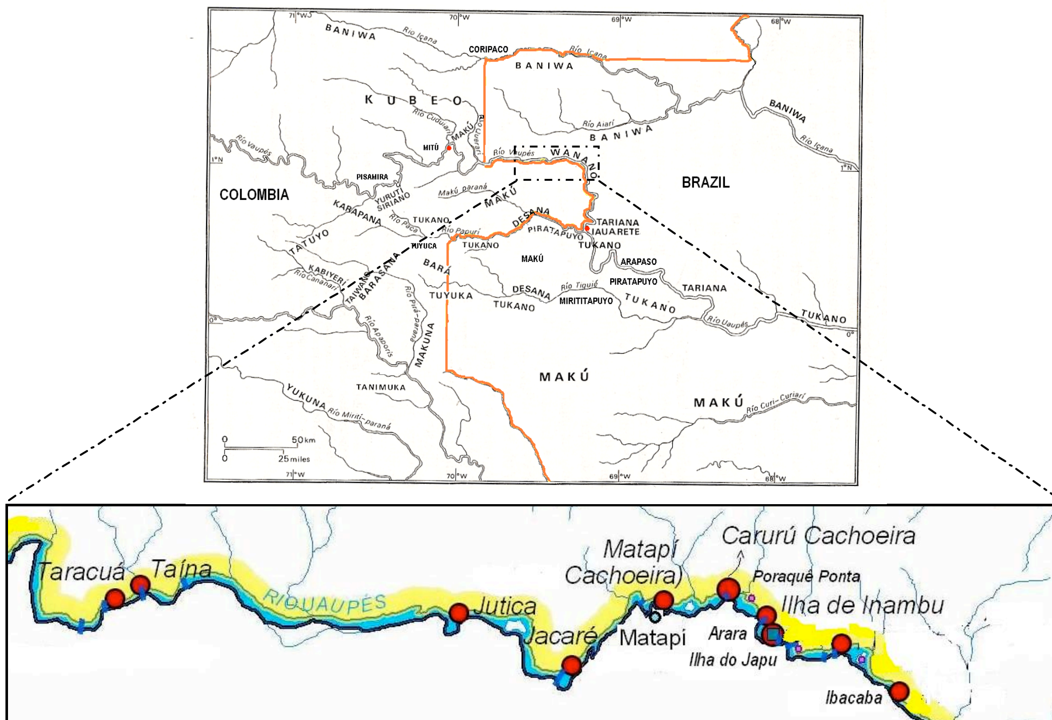

FIGURE 4. WANANO COMMUNITIES

In accordance with the tenets of the system, the Wananos' closest geographic neighbors are also their preferred in-laws groups. Taken together, marriages between Wanano men and Baniwa, Tariana, Kubeo, and Tukano women comprise 71% of the 55 marriages recorded in a recent census carried out in the 12 communities shown in Figure 4.[28] It is interesting to note that besides these four neighboring groups, the number of marriages between Wanano men and Desana women is also significant. What we find is that although most Desana live on the Papuri River and tend to intermarry with *their* neighbors—the Waikhana, Tariana, and Tukano—within Wanano territory there is one community which has a number of Desana residents. This community is a local source of

[28] Census data were collected in September, 2004, by the author and Lucia Alberta Andrade de Oliveira of the Instituto Socioambiental.

Desana wives for Wanano men and provides a link to the Desana population as a more geographically distant in-law group.[29]

Wives of Wanano Men		%
TARIANA	14	25
TUKANO	13	24
KUBEO	7	13
BANIWA	5	9
DESANA	5	9
TUYUCA	4	7
WAIKHANA	3	5
SIRIANO	2	4
ARAPASO	1	2
WANANO	1	2
totals	**55**	**100**

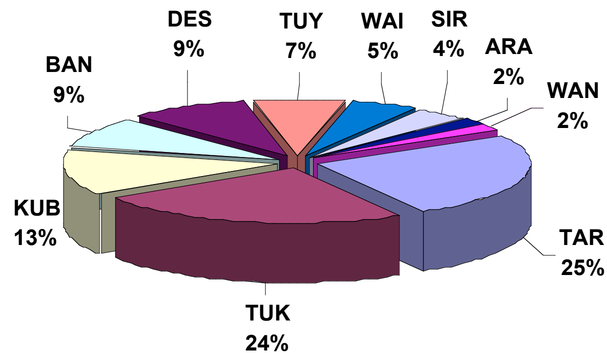

TABLE 1. WANANO MARRIAGES

The marriages between Wanano men and Tuyuca, Waikhana, Siriano and Arapaso women are actually somewhat surprising given that these groups are usually identified as having phratric (agnatic), rather than affinal relations with the Wanano (Chernela, 1993:25). The small but, taken on the whole, noteworthy number of marriages to women from these groups suggest that long-standing phratric classifications may be undergoing some adjustment. Throughout the Vaupés region such "incestuous" marriages between agnates have always occurred, but they normally represent a lower percentage—somewhere around 5%—of the total (Azevedo, 2005).

The Wananos' continued occupation of their territory and general maintenance of traditional marriage alliances in turn reinforce the principles of virilocal residence and the norms regarding language use within Wanano communities. In-marrying wives are still expected to learn their husbands' language and to use it in public settings, and children acquire and use Wanano as their language of identity. Thus, in Wanano community settings, the language remains robust and patterns of individual and community multilingualism of the type described by Sorensen can still be found.

Indeed, in Table 2 we see the self-evaluated language proficiency of 38 Wanano men between the ages of 12 and 65.[30] These data reveal, first of all, that multilingualism is still very much the norm in Wanano communities, with individuals reporting to speak

[29] Data on marriages of Wanano residing in Iauaretê show the same patterns, with only slight variation in the percentages of marriages to Tariana (30%), Kubeo (14%), Baniwa (9%), and Tuyuka (5%). The percentages of marriages to Desana and Tukano women, however, are 18% and 12% respectively, most likely the result of greater availability of Desana women in Iauaretê.

[30] Data on language proficiency were collected during a language workshop in 2002 and in conjunction with the census. Individuals were asked to self-assess their language proficiency and to identify their father's and mother's languages and the language of the community in which they reside. A total of 69 people provided information, but only 38 were Wanano males (Wanano females live in their husbands' communities). The remainder of individuals, both male and female, were from other language groups.

an average of six languages. It also shows that among the languages most speakers know well are Tukano—reflecting its status as a lingua franca and the fact that it is the language used by most of the Tariana (a preferred in-law group)—as well as each individual's mother's language, as shown in the final line.

	Self-assessment of proficiency		
Language	Speak and understand well	Understand most and speak so-so	Understand some but don't speak well
WANANO	38		
TUKANO	31	6	1
KUBEO	3	1	2
WAIKHANA	3	17	5
TUYUCA	1	4	7
DESANA		9	5
BANIWA	1	2	4
TARIANA			2
SIRIANO		1	
BARASANO	1	1	
MAKU			1
PORTUGUESE	22	13	
SPANISH	19	16	4
MOTHER'S LANGUAGE[31]	20	9	1

TABLE 2. LANGUAGES SPOKEN BY WANANO MEN

To summarize, we find that the fundamental characteristics of the Vaupés social system—continued occupation of traditional territory, virilocal residence, and preservation of traditional marriage norms and geographic alliances—can still be found among groups such as the Wanano, and that the linguistic results are sustained multilingualism and relatively healthy use and transmission of the language in traditional communities. The fact that the Wanano are, compared to some of the other groups in the system, in pretty good shape both culturally and linguistically should not, however, be taken to mean that the system has not and is not still undergoing profound changes.

Indeed, in the previous section we saw that there are many forces of change underway and that the Wanano case should cannot be taken as representative of the norm. That any of the Vaupés groups have managed to withstand these forces and to maintain so many aspects of their traditional lifestyle, including use of their languages, speaks both to an unimagined resilience in the face of adversity, to the underlying strength of the system itself, its internal mechanisms of adjustment to change, and probably to a bit of geographic luck. The fact that the Wanano occupy a territory with difficult access on the outer edges of the region has undoubtedly contributed to their being better able to withstand some of the most devastating effects of these processes.

[31] For 8 speakers, mother's language was not identified.

4.2. The Waikhana (Piratapuyo)

The current situation of the Waikhana, in contrast to that of the Wanano, shows how the breakdown of certain aspects of the social organization outlined in §2 can create conditions for language loss. Like the Wanano, the Waikhana are a bi-national population; approximately 70% of the population (estimated as 1,300) lives in Brazil and 30% in Colombia (FOIRN and ISA, 2000:44). Waikhana territory covers part of the east-west stretch of the lower Papuri river and the downstream section of one of its tributaries, the Makú Paraná (or Macucú, in Colombia). However, several waves of out-migration have led to dispersal of Waikhana from this area to the mission town of Iauaretê, to mixed communities on the middle Vaupés, to São Gabriel da Cachoeira, and to communities south of São Gabriel on the Rio Negro, as shown in Figure 5.[32]

In Waikhana territory there are eight communities on the Brazilian Papuri and seven on the Colombian Papuri and on the Makú Parana (the largest community being Teresita, site of a Monfortian mission). Outside this territory there are five communities on the middle Vaupés which, though nominally Waikhana, in fact have mixed Waikhana, Desana, Tukano and Tariana populations. In these communities, the predominant "public" languages are Tukano and Portuguese, though home languages may reflect patrilineal language norms (that is, if the men are still speakers of their ancestors' languages, increasingly rare among the Tariana, and Desana, for example). Waikhana who have migrated to São Gabriel da Cachoeira or to communities farther downstream on the Rio Negro no longer speak their language at all.

FIGURE 5. WAIKHANA TERRITORY AND OUT-MIGRATIONS

[32] According to a recently published study, *Levantamento Socioeconômico, Demográfico e Sanitário da cidade de São Gabriel da Cachoeira* (September, 2005 FOIRN/ISA), there are 166 Waikhana (13% of the total population) currently living in the city of São Gabriel da Cachoeira.

Language use is most vigorous in the Papuri and Makú Paraná communities, although even in these communities we find that use of the Tukano language is on the rise.[33] To understand the reasons for this, we must examine the delicate interplay between traditional cultural practices, the historical processes mentioned in §3 and the important role that geography has played in the fate of different groups.

First of all, we find that unlike the Wanano territory, which lies in a slightly more remote and difficult-to-access region, the territory of the Waikhana is quite near the confluence of the Papuri and the Vaupés, where the town of Iauaretê is located. This setting made the Waikhana communities not only more accessible targets for all incoming outside forces, but has also maintained them directly within the sphere of influence of the Iauaretê mission. Indeed, the current generation of Waikhana elders consistently point to the actions of priests in their fathers' and grandfathers' times as directly motivating Waikhana out-migration to communities downstream on the Vaupés. Demoralized by priests and embittered by the loss of their homes and prohibition of their ceremonies, dozens of families simply fled.

The proximity of Waikhana communities to Iauaretê also contributes to the current part or fulltime residence of Waikhana families in Iauaretê, principally during the school year.[34] After the late 1980s, when the mission schools ceased boarding students, many couples were left with no choice but to take up residence in Iauaretê if they wanted their offspring to continue in school past the 4th grade. Many families thus embark on long periods of estrangement from their villages, returning only during school vacations or for short periods in which they tend to their gardens, fish and hunt.[35] Use of the Waikhana language in these families inevitably declines in Iauaretê, where Tukano is predominant in all public communication and in school settings. Children quickly become equally or more fluent in Tukano (usually their mother's language) than in their father's language and continue to use Tukano during the periods of time they spend in the villages for school vacations and upon their return after completing their education. But, of course, not all families return to village life once their children complete school, and those who do return cannot always convince their older children to go back to village life after becoming accustomed to life in more urban Iauaretê.

---

[33] Precise language census data for the Waikhana are still being gathered and a full diagnosis of language use is forthcoming. Statements relating to tendencies in community language use are based on discussions with the Waikhana in a language/education workshop which took place in September, 2005. Approximately 50 Waikhana from nine communities participated in these discussions and provided information on language use in the different regions.

[34] Waikhana workshop participants listed 38 families from the Papuri region as currently living in Iauaretê, and the 2002 *Levantamento Socioeconômico, Demográfico e Sanitário de Iauaretê/Centro* (August, 2002 ISA) recorded the Waikhana as the third most populous group in Iauaretê, after the Tariana and the Tukano. The study indicates the Waikhana population as 376, representing 30% of the total of this language group and 15% of the Iauaretê population. In comparison, the Wanano population in Iauaretê was less than half that number—140—representing 6% of the total.

[35] This tendency is very obvious in the Papuri communities, many of which remain virtually abandoned for much of the year. For example, five of the seven families of the community of São Gabriel (Papuri) live at least part of the year in Iauaretê; only the very old and families whose children are very young remain. The same situation is repeated in all of the Brazilian villages on the lower Papuri.

Wives of Waikhana Men		%
TARIANA	37	39
TUKANO	31	32
DESANA	21	22
MAKUNA	2	2
WANANO	2	2
YURUTI	1	1
BANIWA	1	1
KUBEO	1	1
totals	**96**	**100**

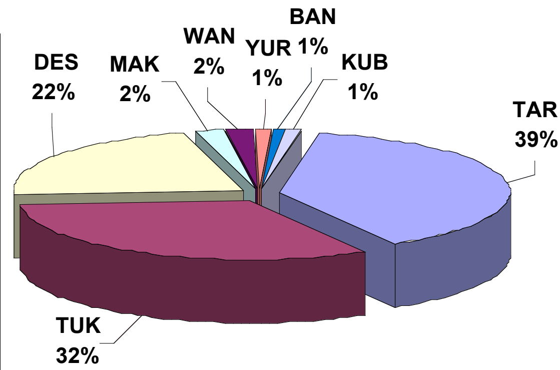

TABLE 3. WAIKHANA MARRIAGES

Like other Vaupés groups, the Waikhana continue to adhere to norms of exogamic marriage and seek partners from their neighboring in-law groups, in their case, the Tariana, Tukano and Desana, as we see in Table 3.[36] For the Waikhana, however, preservation of marriage alliances actually works *against* them as far as language maintenance is concerned, because both the Tariana and the Desana have shifted almost completely to the Tukano language. In other words, nearly all in-marrying wives of Waikhana men—93% of the total—though they come from three ethnically distinct groups, are speakers of Tukano. This situation, in contrast to that of the Wanano (whose in-law groups still speak a variety of languages), undermines the creation of the traditional multilingual community and the switch to father's language, both of which would serve to fortify the Waikhana language.

The situation of the Waikhana as compared to that of the Wanano demonstrates that although the same kinds of historical forces may have influenced all the Vaupés groups and that many aspects of their shared culture persist, there is really no way to talk about the present state of affairs of the "Vaupés groups" as a whole. Each group's current situation has been shaped in unique ways by a number of factors which, as we have seen, include the size of the population, their internal, collective strategies and reactions to outside interference, and aspects of their geographic location.

5. Conclusions

In this brief overview of the Vaupés system today several things have become clear. First of all, it is obvious that the system still survives and that most of the defining characteristics and cultural categories persist despite a history of interference and enormous changes in the demographics and lifestyles of individual participating groups. This survival can be linked to a regional dynamic which tolerates adjustments and redefinitions and to an internal flexibility which has allowed certain categories to move from the "practical" to the "ideological" sphere.

One such category appears to be that which defines social identity in relation to language. We have seen that a number of groups have experienced or are experiencing de

[36] Data from (Azevedo, 2005) for the Iauaretê and Tiquié/Uaupés sub-regions.

facto language shift and that this shift has not entailed a loss of identity as far as other internal norms of the system, such as exogamy, are concerned. One can, thus, retain one's patrilineal social identity as Tariana, Arapaso, Desana, Waikhana, etc. and adhere to social norms of exogamy and virilocality even if the language one speaks is Tukano. That the system survives despite such cases of language shift should not, however, be taken as an indication that members of these language groups are indifferent to the process, that they do not equate language loss with loss of culture and group distinctiveness on some vital level. Moreover, such redefinitions, while allowing the overall survival of the cultural system, are certainly leading to changes in the "multilingual" nature of the system.

As far as specific linguistic issues are concerned, we can conceive of a "language vitality" continuum for the Vaupés Indians with groups whose languages are still robust (such as the Wanano, the Kubeo, the Tukano, and the Baniwa) on one end and groups who have experienced complete or nearly complete language shift (such as the Arapaso, the Miritiapuyo and the Tariana) on the other. Groups such as the Waikhana, the Tuyuca, and the Desana can be diagnosed as falling somewhere in between. Regardless of where groups fall on the continuum, however, it is clear that none of the languages can be thought of as "safe", as shielded from the threat of language loss. Even the languages with the largest numbers of speakers are minority languages in a region in which the influence of Portuguese and Spanish is constantly growing. Moreover, it is clear to the Indians themselves that migration leads to the loss of indigenous languages, be they those spoken by larger or smaller groups. Languages removed from their cultural context and no longer supported by traditional social structures are quickly silenced.

Accordingly, among the Vaupés groups today there is both growing awareness of the circumstances and forces which lead to language loss and proactive investment in strategies that can counteract these forces. Groups throughout the region are working to revitalize or maintain language use through education and cultural documentation projects. Such projects are bolstered by legislation such as the 1988 Federal Constitution, which specifically recognizes and guarantees to indigenous peoples their right to cultural diversity, native language use, and territorial integrity; by subsequent changes in education policy which created the legal category of "indigenous school" and established guidelines as to their functioning; and by the official demarcation of five Indigenous Areas in the region in 1998.[37] The Vaupés indigenous groups also receive much needed practical and political support for their projects from organizations such as FOIRN, the Federation of Indigenous Organizations of the Rio Negro, and ISA, the Instituto Socioambiental, as well as from programs such as the PDPI.[38]

Tangible results can already be observed even though most of the local projects are still in the beginning stages: the Tariana have founded a cultural center and school in Iauaretê and have realized a number of language workshops in an effort to revitalize the

[37] These are the Alto Rio Negro, Médio Rio Negro I, Médio Rio Negro II, Rio Teá, and Rio Apaporis areas, comprising a total of nearly 41,000 square miles.

[38] *Projetos Demonstrativos de Povos Indígenas*, a program organized through the Ministry of Environment/Secretary for Sustainable Development. The program finances small projects in three thematic areas—territorial protection, sustainable economic activity, and cultural recognition and/or documentation—which are developed and administered by indigenous communities and organizations.

Tariana language; the Tuyuca have established an indigenous school on the Tiquié whose primary goal is to rejuvenate the language among children, and the Waikhana and Desana of the Papuri are in the initial stages of similar projects; the Baniwa, Tukano, and Wanano have also established indigenous schools and have begun publishing books in their languages with the objective of fortifying language use among children and adults. Moreover, parallel to these educational programs, all groups are developing plans for cultural documentation and the registry of forms of traditional knowledge, and all are experiencing a generalized renewal of pride in their indigenous heritage.

Although this profile of the northwest Amazon has pointed out a number of changes within the system which have led to contexts of language endangerment and cultural loss, we must also recognize this growing process of political empowerment that is currently underway. Thus, we can close our "revisitation" on a positive note, with the hope that these efforts will contribute to the preservation of this fascinating social system, or, that in the very least, future changes will be self-determined rather than outwardly imposed.

6. References

Aikhenvald, Alexandra Y. (1996). Areal diffusion in North-West Amazonia: the case of Tariana. Anthropological Linguistics 38;73-116.

— (1999). Areal diffusion and language contact in the Içana-Vaupés basin, North West Amazonia. In R. M. W. Dixon & A. Y. Aikhenvald (Eds.), *The Amazonian Languages*. Cambridge: CUP. pp. 385-415

— (2002). *Language Contact in Amazonia*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Andrello, Geraldo L. (2004). *Iauaretê: transformações sociais e cotidiano no rio Uaupés (alto rio Negro, Amazonas)*. Unpublished PhD dissertation, Universidade Estadual de Campinas.

Azevedo, Marta Maria (2005). Povos indígenas no Alto Rio Negro: um estudo de caso de nupcialidade. In H. Pagliaro, M. M. Azevedo & R. V. Santos (Eds.), *Demografia dos Povos Indígenas no Brasil*. Rio de Janeiro: Fiocruz/Abep. pp. 33-58

Barnes, Janet (1999). Tucano. In R. M. W. Dixon & A. Y. Aikhenvald (Eds.), *The Amazonian Languages*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. pp. 207-226

Cabalzar, Aloisio (2000). Descendência e aliança no espaço tuyuka. A noção de nexo regional no noroeste amazônico. Revista de Antropologia, 43:61-88.

Chernela, Janet M. (1989). Marriage, language, and history among Eastern Tukanoan speaking peoples of the Northwest Amazon. Latin American Anthropology Review 1:36-41.

— (1993). *The Wanano Indians of the Brazilian Amazon: A Sense of Space*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

— (2004). The Politics of Language Acquisition: Language learning as social modeling in the northwest Amazon. Women and Language 27:13-21.

FOIRN, & ISA (2000). *Povos Indígenas do Alto e Médio Rio Negro: Uma Introdução à Diversidade Cultural e Ambiental do Noroeste da Amazônia Brasileira*. Brasília: MEC/SEF.

Franchetto, Bruna (2001). Línguas e História no Alto Xingu. In B. Franchetto & M. Heckenberger (Eds.), *Os Povos do Alto Xingu: História e Cultura.* Rio de Janeiro: Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro. pp. 111-156

Franchetto, Bruna, & Gomez-Imbert, Elsa (2003). Review: The Amazonian Languages, Edited by R.M.W. Dixon and Alexandra Y. Aikhenvald. IJAL 69:232-241.

Freire, José Ribamar Bessa (2004). *Rio Babel: a histório das língus na Amazônia*. Rio de Janeiro: Atlântica/Ed. UERJ.

Goldman, Irving (1963). *The Cubeu: Indians of the Northwest Amazon.* Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

Gomez-Imbert, Elsa (1991). Force des langues vernaculaires en situation d'exogamie linguistique: le cas du Vaupés colombien, Nord-Ouest amazonien. Cahiers des Sciences Humaines 27:535-559.

— (1993). Problemas en torno a la comparación de las lenguas tucano-orientales. In M. L. R. de Montes (Ed.), *Estado actual de la clasificación de las lenguas indígenas de colombia*. Santafé de Bogotá: Instituto Caro y Cuervo. pp. 235-267

— (1999). Variétés tonales sur fond d'exogamie linguistique. Cahiers de Grammaire, 24:67-93.

Gomez-Imbert, Elsa, & Hugh-Jones, Stephen (2000). Introducción al Estudio de las lenguas del Piraparaná (Vaupés). In M. S. G. de Pérez & M. L. R. de Montes (Eds.), *Lenguas Indigenas de Colombia, Una Visión Descriptiva*. Santafé de Bogotá: Instituto Caro y Cuervo. pp. 321-356

González de Pérez, Maria Stella, & Rodríguez de Montes, Maria Luisa (2000). Lenguas Indígenas de Colombia, Una Visión Descriptiva. Santafé de Bogotá: Instituto Caro y Cuervo.

Hugh-Jones, Christine (1979a). *From the Milk River: Spatial and temporal processes in Northwest Amazonia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hugh-Jones, Stephen (1979b). *The palm and the Pleiades*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Jackson, Jean E. (1983). *The Fish People. Linguistic Exogamy and Tukanoan Identity in Northwest Amazonia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Koch-Grünberg, Theodor (1995a). *Dos años entre los indios; viajes por el noroeste brasileño 1903/1905*. Vol. 1. Santafé de Bogotá: Editorial Universidad Nacional. (originally published Berlin, 1909).

— (1995b). *Dos años entre los indios; viajes por el noroeste brasileño 1903/1905*. Vol. 2. Santafé de Bogotá: Editorial Universidad Nacional (originally published Berlin, 1909).

Martins, Silvana, & Martins, Valtier (1999). Makú. In R. M. W. Dixon & A. Y. Aikhenvald (Eds.), *The Amazonian Languages*. Cambridge: CUP. pp. 251-267

Moore, Denny (2006). Brazil: Language Situation. In Keith Brown (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of Language and Linguistics*. Second Edition. St. Louis: Elsevier.

Neves, Eduardo Góes (1988). Paths in the Dark Waters: Archaeology as Indigenous History in the Upper Rio Negro Basin, Northwest Amazon. Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Indiana University.

Ramirez, Henri (1997). *A Fala Tukano dos Ye'pâ-Masa, Tomo 1 Gramática*. Manaus: CEDEM.

Ribeiro, Berta G. (1995). *Os índios das águas pretas: modo de produção e equipamento produtivo*. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras - EdUSP.

Ricardo, Carlos Alberto (2000). *Povos indígenas no Brasil*. São Paulo: Instituto Socioambiental.

Sorensen, Arthur P. Jr. (1967). Multilingualism in the Northwest Amazon. American Anthropologist 69:670-684.

— (1969). *Morphology of Tucano*. Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation. Columbia University.

Waltz, Nathan E. (2002). Innovations in Wanano (Eastern Tucanoan) when compared to Piratapuyo. IJAL 68:157-215.

Waltz, Nathan, & Wheeler, Alva (1972). Proto Tucanoan. In Matteson *et. al.* (Eds.), *Comparative Studies in Amerindian Languages*. The Hague: Mouton. pp. 119-149.

Wright, Robin M. (2005). *História indigena e do indigenismo no Alto Rio Negro*. Campinas/São Paulo: Mercado de Letras/Instituto Socioambiental.