A GRAMMAR OF TARIANA,
FROM NORTHWEST AMAZONIA

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For my Tariana family
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Preface

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

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

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

Tariana is spoken in the multilingual area of the Vaupés basin, characterised by strong cultural inhibition against language mixing – viewed predominantly in terms of loan morphemes. The long-term interaction between East Tucano languages and the Tariana dialect continuum has resulted in a rampant diffusion of patterns and calquing of categories – which include classifiers, tense-evidentiality, number marking and even pronominal cross-referencing. There is a strong areal convergence of patterns – rather than of forms – without, however, implying anything like the emergence of an 'identical' grammar. When appropriate, information on the areally diffused or genetically inherited character of a pattern is included in this grammar. A full analysis of contact-induced developments in Tariana is dealt with in a separate study (Aikhenvald forthcoming-a).
Detailed exemplification is provided for every grammatical point. Most examples come from texts, and a few from spontaneous – or carefully directed – conversation. An additional objective is to convey as much of the Tariana culture as possible through using naturally occurring examples. I avoid using elicited sentences; elicitation was limited to lexicon and to paradigms.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Cross-references are of two kinds:

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

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MAP. ARAWAK AND TUCANOAN LANGUAGES IN NORTH-WESTERN AMAZONIA