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Wendell Jones and Paula Jones

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Foreword

Colombia, land of El Dorado, land of gold and emeralds! But even more precious are the gems found—not beneath its soil—but within its indigenous languages. Among these gems I would count the auxiliary verb system of Kogi, the positional verbs of Ika, the compound verbs of Epena, the evidential systems of Tucanoan languages, as well as their noun classifier systems.

For ten weeks in the fall of 1984, it was my privilege to lead a workshop, guiding several SIL colleagues in writing grammar sketches from a typological and functional perspective. What began as mere ‘sketches’ have become valuable grammars, and now with the publication of the second of these, we must acknowledge the authors’ success.

The following impress me as the most significant reasons why this project yielded such rich fruit:

1. The typological/functional perspective provided an excellent framework for writing—as was our intention—broad, useful, descriptive grammars. Linguists and nonlinguists alike should be able to derive from them an accurate and fairly complete picture of what these languages are like, without the prerequisites that a more theoretical approach would have demanded.

2. All of the participants brought to the workshop an extensive knowledge of the language, acquired through months or years of study, and (with some exceptions) an exhaustive morpheme concordance of texts collected in their fieldwork. These slip concordances served as sources of examples, insights, and challenging ‘residue’. And each participant brought

a terrific amount of energy, expended in long hours writing drafts at a very arduous pace.

3. At the beginning of the workshop, the authors were given a very general outline, and for each language, the corresponding files (empty except for the headings) were created on the disk in the computer center. The authors worked 'on-line', adding descriptive text and examples under the various headings, all the while refining and modifying the initial outline to fit the structure of the language being described. Consequently, there is some commonality to the structure of the various grammars, but without the negative effects of 'squeezing' the descriptions into a fixed, predetermined outline. (Mark Nelson and Bob Reed made the environment for working on-line very congenial.)

4. In addition to writing grammars, Paul Frank and Grace Hensarling served as consultants-in-training to other authors. Other linguists contributed occasional suggestions, most worthy of mention being Janet Barnes, Terry Malone, and Bob Reed.

5. At the end of the workshop, there were drafts of most sections of the grammars. Obviously, a terrific amount of work has been done since that time to bring these up to their current form. The person most responsible for keeping alive the vision of seeing them finished and published is Paul Frank; without his carrying the torch, they might never have seen the light of day.

6. Finally, if these grammars are a source of delight, it is because the languages they describe are marvelous objects, reflecting the creativity both of the One who gave language to Man and of the speakers who—in using language—continually shape it to serve their purposes in their environment.

David Weber