This monograph describes in detail the language contact situation between speakers of Arawakan and Tucanoan languages in the Vaupés river basin in Colombia and Brazil. Tucano, the lingua franca of the area, and Tariana, a highly endangered Arawakan language are discussed in more detail than other languages in the two families. However, the complex situation in the Vaupés region necessitates the consideration of other languages as well.

Multilingualism used to be – and to a great extent still is – the cultural norm… and marriage is exogamous… Marrying someone who belongs to the same language group is considered akin to incest (p. 21).

Synopsis

Chapter 1 summarizes the different ways that languages can resemble each other and focuses on the similarities that are due to language contact. Types of linguistic change are also discussed and Aikhenvald’s use of terms delineated. Arawakan-Tucanoan contact in Amazonia, and specifically in the Vaupés area, is described in some detail. Tucano has emerged as the dominant language of the area; not surprisingly, modern diffusion is unilateral from Tucano to Tariana, and many Tariana have abandoned the Tariana language in favor of Tucano. Today “Tariana is actively spoken by only about 100 people” (p. 18). Other languages of the area and interrelationships between them are also discussed.

Chapter 2 discusses diffusional phenomena in phonology and describes in detail the influence of East Tucanoan languages on various aspects of Tariana phonology including the gradual loss of some phonological contrasts found in closely related Arawakan languages. There are “hardly any examples of Tariana phonological influence in East Tucanoan languages. On the other hand, the contact situation between Retuarã (Central Tucanoan) and Yucuna (Arawak) illustrates a mutual adjustment of the two phonological systems” (p. 55).

Chapter 3 gives a typological profile of East Tucanoan languages and of Tariana and shows that Tucanoan impact on Tariana “mostly involves indirect diffusion” (p. 59). New categories in Tariana include case marking, evidentials, and switch-reference. New grammatical systems are borrowed but the actual forms are created “from the borrowing language’s own resources” (p. 59).
Tariana continues to lose some structures, e.g. the indefinite prefix, that have no equivalents in Tucano. On the other hand, between Retuarã and Yucuna convergence has “resulted in creating a ‘common ground’” (p. 75) since the contact is one-to-one without dominance.

Chapter 4 discusses nominal categories and diffusion. The development of vocative forms of kinship terms in Tariana is attributed to East Tucanoan influence since it is not present in the closely related Baniwa. (Note, however, that most Arawakan languages of Peru have vocative forms for many kinship terms; so this may be an Arawakan trait rather than from East Tucanoan.) Numerals and demonstratives have also been restructured in Tariana, following Tucanoan patterns.

Chapter 5 describes the diffusion of verbal categories. Tariana “passive and causative have been fully restructured in agreement with East Tucanoan languages” (p. 113). A four-term evidentiality system and a three-term tense system have developed in Tariana paralleling those found in Tucanoan languages. Chapter 5 also describes in some detail verb-compounding (which Tariana calqued from East Tucanoan): “a lexical root is followed by another verb root with a modal or aspectual meaning” (p. 130).

Chapter 6 discusses borrowed clause types in Tariana, e.g. the use of copular verbs and relative clauses involving the use of nominalized verbs. There are many parallels in constituent order, order of clauses within a sentence, and in discourse patterns in speakers of all ages.

Chapter 7 describes the impact of Portuguese on Tariana. Portuguese words are freely inserted into Tariana speech when there is no readily available Tariana equivalent. Tariana speakers recognize these as foreign insertions. There are also a few old lexical loans from Portuguese and a few borrowed grammatical morphemes but the degree of diffusion of Portuguese in Tariana is relatively low “due to the comparatively recent spread of Portuguese” (p. 186).

Chapter 8 shows how the strong inhibition against “language-mixing, mostly viewed in terms of foreign morphemes and unlawful ‘insertion’ of words from a different language” (p. 187), is the main way of maintaining multilingualism in the Vaupés. Mixing Tariana dialects is also discussed.

Chapter 9 continues the discussion of language awareness and notions of correct speech among the Tariana. Being proficient and speaking correct Tariana is considered a great asset (p. 221).

Chapter 10 reviews the indirect diffusion of East Tucanoan patterns into Tariana and limited indirect diffusion of Portuguese in a diglossic situation.

Chapter 11 discusses language obsolescence: the Santa Rosa dialect of Tariana is not being learned by children; Tucano is mainly used in everyday interaction. There are, however, some revitalization efforts, e.g. teaching Tariana at the secondary level, preparation of books by Aikhenvald and the Brito family (Tariana speakers with whom she worked), and a course to teach Tariana language and literacy.
Chapter 12 summarizes the outcomes of language contact between Arawakan and Tucanoan languages and between Tariana and Portuguese. There is a useful chart summarizing language contact in four situations. The chapter points out other contact situations in the area which need more systematic study.

The appendices give a classification of Arawakan, Tucanoan, and Maku languages; a grammatical profile of Arawakan languages; a summary of phonological systems of Arawakan languages of the Upper Rio Negro area; grammatical and lexical comparisons of Arawakan languages north of the Amazon; a summary of Portuguese of the Vaupés area; and an evaluation of language proficiency among the Tariana of Santa Rosa.

Evaluation

Some inaccuracies occur in table A1.1. For example, Huachipairi is listed on p. 283 as an extinct Arawakan language of the Purus and its tributaries. In fact, Huachipairi is a variety of Harakmbut whose speakers live along the Madre de Dios and its tributaries; it is not extinct. Adelaar’s (2000) proposal of a genetic relationship between Harakmbut and Katukina is quite convincing. At any rate, Harakmbut is almost certainly not an Arawakan language (Wise 1999:312). Several errors of location also occur on that page; for example: Amuesha should be located in Junín and Pasco rather than Cuzco and Loreto.

There are occasional overstatements. For example, on p. 56 the author asserts: “No Arawak language has this phoneme [g].” Both Nomatsiguenga and Machiguenga have a voiced velar stop. Another example is: “every grammatical word must be at least disyllabic” (p. 288). Probably this is true for most Arawakan languages but Amuesha (Yanesha’) has many monosyllabic nouns, e.g. kon ‘drum,’ n-e:t (1SG-ear) ‘my-ear’.

Another minor problem, to this reviewer at least, is the use of the term “Arawak” for the language family rather than “Arawakan.” “Arawak” is an alternate name for the Lokono language; it would be better to distinguish the language and language family, as in the case of Tucano and Tucanoan. (See, for example, the use of Tucano and Tucanoan as separate terms on pp. 5 and 285.)

On p. 20 there is reference to “the Baniwa dialect of Hohôdene,” but usually the reference is to “the Hohôdene dialect of Baniwa.” It is clear from the languages lists on pp. 19 and 29 that the latter is correct.

These infelicities aside, Language Contact in Amazonia is must reading for students of Amazonian languages, language change, convergence, areal linguistics, lexical and grammatical borrowing, and many other areas in the sociology of language.

Aikhenvald began field work among the Tariana in 1991 and counts many of the Tariana who taught her their language as her classificatory kin. A Tariana-Portuguese dictionary (Aikhenvald 2002), a collection of Tariana texts (Aikhenvald 1999), and a Tariana grammar (Aikhenvald 2003) are among her published efforts to preserve the language and contribute to its revitalization. Those works along with this detailed study of language contact provide a model for field
linguists. I, along with Aikhenvald, (p. xiv.) “hope that this book will encourage linguists to go out into the field and describe contact situations involving languages threatened by extinction.”

References


