

## **PHONEMIC SYSTEMS OF COLOMBIAN LANGUAGES**

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# **PHONEMIC SYSTEMS OF COLOMBIAN LANGUAGES**

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## **EDITOR'S NOTE**

The studies of this monograph are presented as tentative, as Dr. Waterhouse indicates in her introduction. Bibliography and discussion of related languages in the literature are, therefore, omitted. The studies were prepared in a field seminar held in Lomalinda, the base of the Summer Institute of Linguistics operation in Colombia, from February to April 1965 under Dr. Waterhouse's direction.

The papers are data oriented and all cast in the same format for easy comparison. It is hoped that the volume will be useful in shedding light on some of the little-known languages of South America.

## INTRODUCTION

This volume is composed of preliminary phonological statements of seven indigenous languages of Colombia, South America. The authors, with one exception, had resided less than a year in the areas where the languages are spoken, hence no claim is made that these papers represent the last word on these languages. Rather, an attempt is here made to present routine structural statements, in a more or less uniform format, of preliminary (but I am convinced solid) data from a group of hitherto little-known languages.

The first two languages described, Tucano and Guanano, are members of the Eastern Tucanoan family, spoken in the Vaupés area. Yucuna and Guajiro are classed as Arawakan, Muinane as Boran, Camsá as Mocoa, Guahibo as Guahibo-Pamigua. Muinane and Yucuna are spoken to the south of the Tucanoan area, Guahibo to the north. The other two are found in the western part of the country, Guajiro in the Guajiro peninsula to the north, Camsá in the Sibundoy valley in the south.

Of interest to area linguistics is the similar six-vowel system found in six of the seven languages, the complex consonantal system of Camsá, and the diversity of suprasegmental systems encountered.

The specific characteristics of each language are presented in a brief note before each paper.

Viola G. Waterhouse

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## **GUAHIBO PHONEMES**

Victor and Riena Kondo

1. Introduction
2. Phoneme chart
3. Consonants
4. Vowels
5. Suprasegmental phonemes
6. Distribution
7. Observations on special phonetic characteristics

1. Introduction. The Guahibo (or Sicueni) tribe lives in the eastern plains of Colombia and in Venezuela. Other related languages and dialects include Amarua, Chiricoa, Cuiva, Guayabero, and Yaruru.

The population of the Guahibo tribe is estimated at 10,000-20,000. The Guahibo live in small family groups scattered over a large area. They were formerly nomadic but most have now settled down to an agricultural economy. The chief product of the economy is yuca.

The research for this paper took place between 1963 and 1966. The principal informants were Eutimio Vargas and Manuel Granados from Barranco Colorado, near Orocué on the Meta River.

## 2. Phoneme chart.

### Consonants

	Bilabial	Dental	Alveolar	Palatal	Velar	Glottal
Voiceless stops	p	th	t		k	
Voiced stops	b		d			
Affricate			ts			
Voiceless fricatives	f		s		x	h
Voiced fricatives	v		r			
Nasals	m		n			
Lateral			l			
Semivowel					y	

### Vowels

#### Oral

#### Nasal

	Front	Central	Back		Front	Central	Back
High	i	ë	u	High	í	ë	ú
Low	e	a	o	Low	é	á	ó

3. Consonants. There are twenty-nine segmental phonemes: seventeen consonants and twelve vowels. The consonants consist of two series of stops, one affricate, two series of fricatives, two nasals, one lateral, and one semivowel.

The voiceless stops are the following: /p/ [p] voiceless bilabial stop, as in [pa'pabë] /papábë/ 'a monkey', ['apa] /ápä/ 'to drink', ['puna] /púna/ 'to fly'; /th/ [th] voiceless dental aspirated stop, as in ['t̪ihai] /thihai/ 'hard', [ne'vethë] /nevéthë/ 'tiger', [do'vathil] /dováthi/ 'devil'; /t/ [t] voiceless alveolar stop, as in ['tanata]

/tánata/ 'to shell', [to'vinabo] /tovínabo/ 'worm', ['tenapa] /ténapa/ 'paddle'; and /k/ [k] voiceless velar stop, as in ['kanalil] /kánali/ 'a pot', ['ekal] /éka/ 'to sit', ['bahakol] /báhako/ 'a greeting'.

The voiced stops are the following: /b/ [b] voiced bilabial stop, as in [bu] /bu/ 'hammock', [o'faebë] /ofáebë/ 'a rodent', [a'behe] /abéhe/ 'bad'; and /d/ [d] voiced alveolar stop, as in ['domael] /dómae/ 'fever', [a'kadale] /akádale/ 'tern', [du'nusito] /dunúsito/ 'pineapple'.

The affricate is /ts/ [ts] voiceless alveolar grooved affricate. Examples are ['tseval] /tséva/ 'to be dry', ['étsëxë] /étsëxë/ 'smoke', ['atsa] /átsa/ 'dirt'.

The voiceless fricatives are the following: /f/ [f] voiceless labiodental fricative freely fluctuating with [ph] voiceless bilabial aspirated stop and [ɸ] voiceless bilabial fricative, as in ['fafanal], ['phaphana], ['papanal] /fáfana/ 'light in weight', [o'foto], [o'photol], [o'potol] /ofót/ 'termite', [o'faebë], [o'phaebë], [o'paebë] 'a rodent'; /s/ [s] voiceless alveolar grooved fricative, as in ['saëba] /sáëba/ 'to force', [ma'lisi] /malísi/ 'a fish', [a'saë] /asáë/ 'to be strong'; /x/ [χ] voiceless velar fricative, as in ['xaina] /xáina/ 'to have', [e'xanal] /exána/ 'to make', ['xuraxi] /xúraxi/ 'parrots'; and /h/ [h] voiceless glottal fricative, which is always a consonant, as in [homo'bëtol] /homobéto/ 'spider', [a'hibil] /ahíbi/ 'none', ['naehava] /náehava/ 'tree'.

The voiced fricatives are the following: /v/ allophone [w] voiced labial semivowel occurs only adjacent to /o/ and preceding /a/ utterance-initial, with allophone [vʷ] voiced labialized (or rounded) labiodental fricative ranging to [v] in other environments, as in [pe'wonoto] /pevónoto/ 'tooth', [wa'vWahai] /vaváhai/ 'to shout', [wo'konal] /vokóna/ 'to split', [homo'wabil] /homovábi/ 'boa', [o'webil] /ovébi/ 'deer', [a'vʷirí] /avíri/ 'dog', [vi'tsaba] /vitsába/ 'to grow', ['bava] /báva/ 'sweet yuca', ['kaehava] /káehava/ 'one thing'; /r/ [Z] voiced retroflexed grooved fricative that

fluctuates freely with [r̩] voiced alveolar trill, as in ['raëna] /ráëna/ 'blue', ['mera] /méra/ 'water', ['peri] /péri/ 'cassava bread'.

The nasals are the following: /m/ [m] voiced bilabial nasal, as in ['maha] /máha/ 'a large parrot', ['emal] /éma/ 'rain', ['meral] /méra/ 'water'; and /n/ [n] voiced alveolar nasal, as in ['naehaval] /náehava/ 'tree', [ma'nepato] /manépato/ 'flea', ['ena] /éna/ 'your mother'.

The lateral is /l/ [l̩] voiced retroflexed lateral flap, as in ['malí] /málí/ 'an egret', [a'l'erito] /alérito/ 'a palm worm', ['lisibo] /lísibo/ 'a basket'.

The semivowel /y/ [y] voiced palatal semivowel ranges to [dy] as in ['yahol] /yáho/ 'salt', [a'yaihaval] /ayáiava/ 'a lot', [pe'yérë] /peyérë/ 'a figure'.

**3.1. Contrasts.** Consonant phonemes are in contrast in analogous environments in the following examples:

- |       |  |
|-------|--|
| b/p/v | [ <i>'hoba</i> ] /hóba/ 'to bark', [ <i>'hopal</i> ] /hópa/ 'to fall', [ <i>'hova</i> ] /hóva/ 'to diminish'.  |
| d/t   | [ <i>'dainato</i> ] /dáinato/ 'fly', [ <i>'taikal</i> ] /táika/ 'to grab', [ <i>duhu'ainë</i> ] /duhuáinë/ 'fish', [ <i>tu'hubë</i> ] /tuhúbë/ 'armadillo'.                                |
| d/y   | [ <i>da'kalinael</i> ] /dakálinae/ 'a tree', [ <i>ya'kali</i> ] /yakáli/ 'a basket', [ <i>'daëthë</i> ] /dáëthë/ 'a potato', [ <i>'yáëta</i> ] /yáëta/ 'to arrive'.                        |
| d/r   | [ <i>'daëthë</i> ] /dáëthë/ 'a potato', [ <i>'raëna</i> ] /ráëna/ 'blue', [ <i>'kudeto</i> ] /kúdetö/ 'firefly', [ <i>'sureto</i> ] /súreto/ 'cricket'.                                    |
| d/l   | [ <i>'diribatsi</i> ] /díribatsi/ 'to have a rash', [ <i>li'robatsi</i> ] /liróbatsi/ 'to be wiped', [ <i>du'nusito</i> ] /dunúsito/ 'pineapple', [ <i>'lumanael</i> ] /lúmanae/ 'a tree'. |
| t/th  | [ <i>pe'taxul</i> ] /petáxu/ 'foot', [ <i>pe'thamul</i> ] /pethámu/ 'froth', [ <i>'thihail</i> ] /thíhai/ 'hard', [ <i>'tinel</i> ] /tíne/   |

	'to itch!', [thi <thika] 'to="" [ti'tika]<br="" chip',="" thithíka=""></thika]> /titíka/ 'to tear'.
t/ts	[ <i>'tsane</i> ] /tsáne/ 'marker for future tense', [ <i>'tanel</i> /táne/ 'to see'.
ts/s	[ <i>'tseva</i> ] /tséva/ 'dry', [ <i>'seba</i> ] /séba/ 'to roast', [ <i>'seta</i> ] /séta/ 'to cook', [ <i>'tsönë</i> ] /tsónë/ 'an anteater', [ <i>'sono</i> ] /sóno/ 'butterflies'.
k/x/h	[ <i>'kua</i> ] /kúa/ 'to dig', [ <i>'xua</i> ] /xúa/ 'this', [ <i>'hual</i> /húa/ 'to swim'.
v/f	[ <i>xania'vaeta</i> ] /xaniaváeta/ 'to pack', [ <i>a'faetabi</i> /afáetabi/ 'to be lazy', [ <i>humeko'venëta</i> ] /humekovénëta/ 'to obey', [ <i>nako'fénëta</i> ] /nakofénëta/ 'to forget'.
f/p	[ <i>a'faetabi</i> ] /afáetabi/ 'to be lazy', [ <i>a'paena</i> /apáena/ 'will drink', [ <i>'puranal</i> ] /púrana/ 'gray', [ <i>'fu'rana</i> ] /furána/ 'blister'.
r/l	[ <i>'bula</i> ] /búla/ 'rattlesnake', [ <i>'xural</i> ] /xúra/ 'a parrot', [ <i>si'ripibol</i> ] /sirípibo/ 'blow-gun', [ <i>'silipil</i> ] /sílipi/ 'a toucan', [ <i>'bole</i> ] /bóle/ 'bad omen', [ <i>ro'bore</i> ] /robóre/ 'pull!'.
m/n	[ <i>'ema</i> ] /éma/ 'rain', [ <i>'ena</i> ] /éna/ 'your mother'.

4. Vowels. The vowels consist of two series, one of oral vowels and a second of nasal vowels.

The oral vowels are the following: /i/ [i] voiced high close front unrounded vocoid, as in [*'ikotia*] /íkotia/ 'sun', [*'hitsipa*] /hítsipa/ 'to want', [i'sotol] /isótó/ 'fire'; /ë/ [ë] voiced high open central unrounded vocoid, as in [*'ëtsëxë*] /étsëxë/ 'smoke', [*pëné*] /péñë/ 'intestines', [pe'vënë] /pevénë/ 'name'; /u/ [u] voiced high close back rounded vocoid, as in [*'unul*] /únu/ 'forest', [*bul*] /bu/ 'hammock', [*bu'suto*] /busúto/ 'toad'; /e/ [e] voiced mid front unrounded vocoid, ranging from close to open, as in [*'ema*] /éma/ 'rain', [pe'korofeto] /pekórofeto/ 'feather', [pe'korofe] /pekórofe/ 'feathers', [pe'etol] /peéto/ 'spine', [pe'e] /péé/

'spines'; /a/ [a] voiced low open central unrounded vocoid ranging to [e] voiced mid close central unrounded vocoid and following [i] to [ɛ] voiced mid open front unrounded vocoid, as in [a'faetabil] /afáetabi/ 'to be lazy', ['xurə] /xúra/ 'a parrot', ['perira] /périra/ 'a drink', [itsiéta] /itsiáta/ 'always'; and /o/ [o] voiced mid close back rounded vocoid, as in [o'vWebi] /ovébi/ 'deer'. [bo] /bo/ casa, [pebo'soto] /pebosóto/ 'tail'.

High vowels /i/ and /u/ are slightly less syllabic when they occur unstressed as first member of a vowel cluster. There is no contrast between /e/ and /a/ after /i/; the [e] vocoid which occurs there is arbitrarily assigned to /a/.

The nasal vowels are the following: /í/ [í] voiced high close front unrounded nasal vocoid, as in [ái'ästol] /áiästo/ 'tigrillo', [íë'íëtol] /iáiáto/ 'a small hawk'; /ë/ [ë] voiced high open central unrounded nasal vocoid, as in ['setahë] /sétahë/ 'I cook'; /ü/ [ü] voiced high close back rounded nasal vocoid, as in [ühüë] /ühüë/ 'vocative for younger relative', [üärä] /üärä/ 'a duck'; /ë/ [ë] voiced mid close front unrounded nasal vocoid, as in [ühüë] /ühüë/ 'vocative for younger relative'; in /ä/ [ä] voiced low open unrounded nasal vocoid, as in ['hähä] /hähä/ 'yes', ['yäihäf] 'tsanukae' /yäihäf tsánukae/ 'quiet'; and in /ö/ [ö] voiced mid close back rounded nasal vocoid, as in ['höko] /höko/ 'a bird'.

4.1. Contrasts. Oral vowels are in contrast in analogous environments as indicated in the following examples:

i/e/a ['iril] /fri/ 'mouse', ['irel] /frie/ 'coals', ['iral] /íra/ 'soil'.

i/ë ['tahani] /táhani/ 'I am hungry', ['tahanë] /táhanë/ 'my animal'.

ë/u ['tahë] /tähë/ 'far', [a'tahul] /atáhu/ 'hot', ['bënë] /bénë/ 'a rodent', ['bunuhu] /búnuhu/ 'a fish'.

u/o [bol] /bo/ 'house', [bul] /bu/ 'hammock'.

o/a ['apa] /ápa/ 'to drink', ['apo] /ápo/ 'not'.

a:ë [tahë] /tähë/ 'far', [a'taha] /atáha/ 'tough', [xanë] /xánë/ 'I', [e'xana] /exána/ 'to make'.

Nasal vowels contrast with oral vowels in the following examples: ['setahë] /sétahë/ 'I cook' ['tahë] /tähë/ 'far'; and [ühüé] /ühüé/ 'vocative for younger relative', [ahué] /ahué/ 'slippery'.

The nasal vowels have a limited distribution and therefore a low functional load. For this reason they are not indicated when they occur in the first two environments below which are predictable. They occur: 1) following a nasal; 2) following an /h/ which follows a nasal vowel, as in ['bunühü] /búnuhu/ 'a fish', ['nëhë] /néhë/ 'howler monkey'; 3) in the suffix [-hë] /-hë/, 'first person subject marker', as in ['setahë] /sétahë/ 'I cook'; and the word [ühüé] /ühüé/ 'vocative for younger relative'; and 4) in certain onomatopoetic words, as in ['yälhäf 'tsanukae] /yálhäf tsánukae/ 'quiet', [höko] /höko/ 'a bird', [faiáto] /faiáto/ 'a small hawk', [hähä] /hähä/ 'yes', [üárä] /üárä/ 'a duck'.

5. Suprasegmental phonemes. Suprasegmental features include phonemic stress.

5.1. Stress. Stress is phonemic, as seen in the following examples: /aké/ 'to be cold', /áke/ 'scorpions'; /tásito/ 'fecal material', /tasíto/ 'my leg bone'; /yáhota/ 'with salt', /yahóta/ 'to carry inside'. High pitch tends to occur on stressed syllables.

## 6. Distribution.

6.1. Syllable patterns. A syllable is defined as a unit of potential stress placement. It may consist of a vowel, or a consonant plus a vowel, as in the following patterns: CV as in ['bol] /bo/ 'house', ['se.tal] /séta/ 'to cook', [hi.'ka]

/hiká/ 'a greeting'; CV.V as in [a.'na.'e.pa.na] /anáépana/ 'to be angry', ['ma.pa.na.e] /mápanae/ 'a tree', ['ku.a] /kúa/ 'to dig'; V as in [i.'so.tol] /isóto/ 'fire', ['i.sol] /íso/ 'firewood', [a.hu.'e] /ahué/ 'slippery', cf. [a.ko.be.hu.'e] /akobehué/ 'slippery hand'; V.V as in ['a.u.ra] /áura/ 'embarrassed', cf. [a.hu.me.'u.ra] /ahumeúra/ 'embarrassed to speak', [a.e.'ko.no.xa.e] /aekónoxae/ 'in a short time'.

**6.2. Single consonants.** Any consonant may occur as C in the CV syllables, with the following exceptions: /v/ does not occur preceding /u/, /y/ does not occur preceding /i/, and no examples have been found of /th/ preceding /e/. See examples in 6.3.

**6.3. Single vowels.** Any vowel may occur as nucleus of a V syllable: /ahéna/ 'today', /éneto/ 'a wasp', /íkotia/ 'sunlight', /ohóba/ 'to sharpen', /úba/ 'to plant', /éva/ 'to be jealous'.

Any vowel may occur as the nucleus of a CV syllable, with the exceptions mentioned in 6.2: /hiká/ 'a greeting', /béxanë/ 'like me', /péri/ 'cassava bread', /bó/ 'house', /bú/ 'hammock', /xámë/ 'you', /pábërë/ 'rack', /mahíta/ 'to sleep', /méra/ 'water', /níkata/ 'to fell', /móya/ 'silently', /núka/ 'to stand'.

**6.4. Vowel clusters.** All vowel glides function as two vowels. Vowel clusters occur in the following combinations: word-medially occur ai /xáina/ 'to have', ae /anáepana/ 'to be angry', au /báupa/ 'door', aë /nakayáëta/ 'to lean against', aa /náava/ 'dress', io /hiópa/ 'skinny', ia /kiáta/ 'to wash', /ukubíaba/ 'to cut', iu /xiúta/ 'to sharpen', ee /peéto/ 'spine', ua /súaba/ 'to spit', ui /xuípa/ 'a root', ue /tikuéku/ 'a bird', éa /naxéana/ 'to sing', éë /kéëtatsi/ 'tied', oo /póona/ 'grass'; word-initially occur ai /áitakiri/

'dark', ae /ae<sup>k</sup>ónoxae/ 'a short time', au /áura/ 'embarrassed', io /iópoka/ 'to twist', ee /eéka/ 'to sit for a duration', ua /üárra/ 'a duck'; word-finally occur ai /yórai/ 'hat', ae /pomónae/ 'they', aë /oxáë/ 'a palm', ia /xúalia/ 'to throw', iu /tsáliu/ 'a fish', ee /peé/ 'spines', ua /húnua/ 'to enter', ui /xúrui/ 'a fruit', ue /basué/ 'sugar cane', ëa /béxëa/ 'late'.

Vowel clusters occur following certain consonants as follows: ai follows x, h, y, n, t, p, v, d, r, m, th, b, k, f; ae follows k, h, n, m, p, v, f, ts, x; au follows b; aë follows k, s, y, r, t, p, m, v, x, d; aa follows n, p, th; io follows h, n; ia follows k, h, s, n, b, v, f, l, p, t, th, ts, m, r, x; iu follows x, k, s, l; ee follows n, p, b; ua follows k, x, h, s, n, b, m, t, f, p; ui follows x, h, r, t, ts, p, s, th; ue follows k, x, h, s, p, l, r, ts, n; ëa follows x, r, b, h, n; ëë follows k, v; oo follows p, k, m.

One cluster of three vowels /uai/ occurs in the dialect of some speakers following k and h. The dialect variants are as follows: /kuai<sup>k</sup>uáihai/, /kuikuáihai/ 'to chat'; /pekuáibo/, /pekuíbo/ 'mouth'; /kuái<sup>h</sup>o/, /kuít<sup>h</sup>o/ 'frog'; /pekuáito/, /pekuít<sup>h</sup>o/ 'fruit'; /vatsukuáito/, /vatsukáito/ 'a weevil'; /naruhuáita/, /naruháita/ 'to hunt'; /duhuái/, /duhái/, /duhué/ 'fish'.

Two clusters of four vowels occur. These consist of initial clusters of two vowels reduplicated. aëaë /aëáëhai/ 'to cry', iai<sup>i</sup>a /iáfáto/ 'a hawk'.

7. Observations on special phonetic characteristics. Glottal stop [?] does not function as a phoneme. Phonetically it optionally occurs in the following locations: 1) before an initial vowel, as in ['?emal freely fluctuating with ['emal /éma/ 'rain'; 2) between identical vowels at a syllable boundary as in [e'?ekahë] freely fluctuating with [e'ekahë] /eékahë/ 'to sit for a duration of time'; 3) after a final vowel as in [a'faetabi?] freely fluctuating with [a'faetabil] /afáetabi/ 'to be lazy'; 4) as transition between a vowel and

/b/, /p/, or /d/ as in [pi'b'i'sianë] freely fluctuating with [pibi'sianë] /pibisfanë/ 'an ugly man', ['tsa'bana] freely fluctuating with ['tsabana] /tsábana/ 'to decay', [a'ka'dale] freely fluctuating with [a'kadale] /akádale/ 'a tern'; 5) in the word ['hähä?] /háhå/ 'yes'.

A consonant cluster optionally occurs in fast speech where a vowel is dropped between two consonants which have the same point of articulation, as in [ira'bërtol], [ira'bérëtol] /irabérëto/ 'clay grill'; [paa'tahumbeje], [paa'tahumëbeje] /paatáhumëbeje/ 'the two of you are warm'; [hava'sirtol], [hava'siritol] /havasírito/ 'a bat'.

Vowels tend to be slightly longer on stressed than on unstressed syllables.