

6-2001

## Review of: Handbook of Amazonian Languages

Edward J. Vajda

Western Washington University, [edward.vajda@wwu.edu](mailto:edward.vajda@wwu.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: [http://cedar.wwu.edu/mcl\\_facpubs](http://cedar.wwu.edu/mcl_facpubs)



Part of the [Modern Languages Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Vajda, Edward J., "Review of: Handbook of Amazonian Languages" (2001). *Modern & Classical Languages*. 45.  
[http://cedar.wwu.edu/mcl\\_facpubs/45](http://cedar.wwu.edu/mcl_facpubs/45)

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Humanities at Western CEDAR. It has been accepted for inclusion in Modern & Classical Languages by an authorized administrator of Western CEDAR. For more information, please contact [westerncedar@wwu.edu](mailto:westerncedar@wwu.edu).

The catalogue of languages is followed by a number of maps. The book ends with a bibliography of over one hundred pages, providing an even more up-to-date list of references than that found in the *Handbook of North American Indians*, volume 17. This is followed by an index of languages and topics.

Whether one sits down and reads *LNNA* from cover to cover, picks it up now and then to browse, or uses it as a reference, one cannot help but be struck by the combination of breadth and depth. Linguists should find the book invaluable in many ways—as an introduction to the languages, as a source of information for work on typology, as a place to find a language that illustrates a particular phenomenon, as an introduction to the major characteristics of a family, as a source of evidence bearing on theoretical issues. Having had her/his interest piqued, the reader can seek original sources to learn more. For a nonlinguist, the book provides a wonderful initiation into the intricacies of native languages of North America, and teaches something about linguistics. We owe a deep debt of gratitude to Marianne Mithun for taking on this project—the work is without equal. M not only succeeds in her goal of introducing the languages, but she sets a new standard for future books in the Cambridge Language Surveys Series. The final decade of the twentieth century will be remembered as a time where the literature on native languages of North America expanded enormously, opening the doors to many new areas of exciting research.

#### REFERENCES

- CAMPBELL, LYLE. 1997. *American Indian languages: The historical linguistics of Native America*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- GODDARD, IVES. 1996. *Handbook of North American Indians, Languages*. Vol. 17. Washington: Smithsonian Institution.
- JACOBSON, STEVEN. 1984. *Yup'ik Eskimo dictionary*. Fairbanks, Alaska: Alaska Native Language Center.

Department of Linguistics  
University of Toronto  
130 St. George Street  
Toronto, Ontario, Canada M5S 3H1  
[rice@chass.utoronto.ca]

**Handbook of Amazonian languages.** Vol. 4. Ed. by DESMOND C. DERBYSHIRE and GEOFFREY K. PULLUM. Berlin & New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 1998. Pp. ix, 646.

Reviewed by EDWARD VAJDA, *Western Washington University*

This thick book is the first supplement to the *Handbook of Amazonian languages* (henceforward, *HAL*) to appear in nearly a decade. Building upon the best tradition of missionary-inspired descriptive linguistic work fostered in connection with Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) activities, editors Desmond Derbyshire and Geoffrey Pullum launched *HAL* during the mid-1980s as a means of attracting scholarly attention to one of the world's most persistently ignored linguistic areas. With the appearance of Vol. 4, *HAL* coverage of the Amazon now increases to three typological studies, four historical-comparative analyses, and ten grammatical descriptions of languages belonging to eight different genetic groupings. Unfortunately, this tally barely begins to approach exhaustive coverage of the region, since the rain forests of South America are home to at least 300 languages divided among about 20 families and two dozen isolates. Nevertheless, given the spate of new publications on Amazonian languages over the past decade, many by linguists with SIL affiliation or who were inspired by exposure to earlier volumes of *HAL*, the series has clearly achieved the goal of drawing the serious attention of a growing number of linguists to the Amazon.

This rapid progress finds clear illustration in the editors' introduction (3–20), which contains a fairly good overview of the current state of Amazonian linguistics. Before the 1980s, few

Amazonian languages had been described in any detail. Much of this early work had been done by missionaries rather than university linguistics professors, who in many cases were absorbed in debating the latest theoretical formalisms rather than dealing with the exigencies of documenting indigenous languages. Very few serious linguistic articles on the Amazon had yet appeared outside such specialized venues as the *International Journal of American Linguistics*. More importantly, few linguists at South American universities were actively involved in the documentation or analysis of the region's indigenous languages. And no Brazilian-born linguist had ever published a monograph on a native Brazilian language. In fact, before the closing years of the twentieth century, the only such book authored by a Brazilian resident was a grammar of Tupinambá (Anchieta 1595), a now extinct Tupí-Guaraní language once widely spoken in coastal Brazil. Sadly, during the ensuing four centuries of near total inactivity, many South American languages vanished unrecorded.

The turning point in this unfortunate narrative of scholarly neglect comes during the 1970s, with the appearance of books and articles by D and his SIL colleagues. These include monographs on individual languages such as Hixkaryana (Derbyshire 1979) as well as articles discussing such rare typological features found in the Amazon as object-initial basic word order (Derbyshire 1977). These were followed by the first three volumes of *HAL* (Derbyshire & Pullum 1986, 1990, 1991), which significantly increased the linguistic data available on the region and for the first time brought together an international collective of linguists, many of whom established a long-term cooperative effort to study the Amazon's linguistic diversity.

During the past decade, this cooperation has produced an accelerating number of publications on Amazonian languages. These include short monographs on two North Arawak languages, the recently extinct Bare (Aikhenvald 1995) and the moribund Tariana (Aikhenvald 1999), as well as an important historical study tracing the evolution of actant agreement typology in Cariban (Gildea 1998). Several other monograph-length studies are now in preparation, some by native-born Brazilian linguists (Seki 2000), others by members of the Research Centre for Linguistic Typology (La Trobe University, Melbourne, Australia), where full-length grammars of Tariana (Aikhenvald, 2000) and Jarawara (Dixon & Vogel, 2000) will soon be completed. A particularly bright point for the future of Amazonian linguistics is the ongoing cooperation between Spike Gildea (University of Oregon) and Denny Moore (Museu Goeldi, Belém) which has already resulted in several Brazilian graduate students initiating work on Amazonian linguistics. Perhaps the most important single publication in the field to date, *The Amazonian languages* (Dixon & Aikhenvald 1999), is also reported (4) to owe at least some of its early inspiration to *HAL*. This book appeared a year after *HAL 4* and now provides the best available general coverage of native languages of the Orinoco and Amazon basins, a vast region sometimes collectively referred to as 'Lowland South America'.

The editors' introduction displays a few omissions. It mentions the *Journal of Amazonian Language*, begun in 1997 under the editorship of Daniel L. Everett at the University of Pittsburgh. But this journal has unfortunately ceased publication, upon Dr. Everett's return to Brazil, a fact not mentioned by D & P since this development occurred only after their book went to press. Also absent is any mention of *Amazonian linguistics: Studies in Lowland South American languages* (Payne 1990), an important collection of genetic and typological studies, the authors of some of which continue to be involved with SIL work on the region. Finally, Lyle Campbell's *American Indian languages: The historical linguistics of Native America* (Campbell 1997) deserves significant mention in any recent linguistic historiography of the Amazon for its exhaustive inclusion of genetic and areal data relating to the entire continent of South America.

Like the earlier three volumes, *HAL 4* is divided into three parts. Part 2 contains two substantial grammatical sketches, both more complete than any available elsewhere for the given language. The first (25–224), by ROBERT E. HAWKINS, describes Wai Wai, a Cariban language spoken on both sides of the Guyana-Brazil border as well as in neighboring Surinam. The author has had extensive field experience with this language, having begun serious linguistic work as a missionary among the tribe nearly 50 years ago. Wai Wai is atypical sociolinguistically for the Amazon in that the number of native speakers has been growing rather than decreasing over the past few

decades and has now reached a total approaching 1,800. Part of this increase, however, is due to language loss and shift to Wai Wai on the part of neighboring indigenous tribes, so that the editors' general optimism (9) regarding the future prospects for native language maintenance in Amazonia as a whole is likely overstated. Hawkins's discussion of Wai Wai particles (129–47), a complex and hitherto poorly understood aspect of sentence structure, is particularly valuable. In terms of genetic linguistics, the sketch demonstrates that Wai Wai is most closely related within Cariban to Hixkaryana but divergent enough to be considered a separate language.

The second grammatical sketch (225–439), by ALEXANDRA AIKHENVALD, is devoted to Warekena (Guarekena), a moribund North Arawak (Maipuran) language spoken by a dwindling number of people living in the extreme north of Brazil near the border with Colombia and Venezuela. The author, who has already done extensive fieldwork on closely related languages of the northwestern Amazon (Aikhenvald 1995, 1999, 2000), shows that Warekena should be considered a dialect of the Baniwa language of Guainia (spoken in Venezuela). Warekena sentence structure lacks the 'pesky little particles' (an apt term coined in Grimes 1975) which so complicate the analysis of discourse and phrase structure in Wai Wai and many other Amazonian languages. A map (226) illustrates the relative locations of Warekena and several neighboring languages, and a map of South America (viii) pinpoints the general location of Wai Wai and Warekena.

Both of these grammatical sketches conform to the order of description laid out in previous volumes (21), beginning with syntactic categories and only afterward proceeding to phonology and morphology. This idiosyncratic presentation has received mild criticism elsewhere (Dixon & Aikhenvald 1999:3). Although the coverage of discourse and phrase structure categories is extensive and based upon abundant and clearly-glossed examples, such a layout renders the description of word-internal morphology correspondingly impoverished. This is all the more unfortunate in that Amazonian languages tend toward agglutinative polysynthesis, and noun or verb construction often conforms to a highly elaborate series of morpheme positions. Nevertheless, in the present volume the morphology of Wai Wai (165–214), at least, receives fairly substantial treatment. Finally, each grammatical sketch ends with a native text nicely laid out with interlinear glossing and idiomatic English translation: 'The story of Kîrîyme's death' (221–24) for Wai Wai; and 'The deer and the turtle' (428–39) for Warekena.

Part 2 consists of a single typological study by MARGARETHE W. SPARING-CHÁVEZ on interclausal reference in Amahuaca, a Panoan language of lowland southeastern Peru. The editors had originally hoped to include a grammatical sketch of a Panoan language in one of the *HAL* volumes (12). Although no such contribution materialized, Sparing-Chávez's study is particularly valuable as it covers one of the most interesting and salient grammatical features of the Panoan family. It demonstrates that the Amahuaca system of suffixes involved in expressing switch-reference also conveys tense-aspect and transitivity-related distinctions. This intricate study of a 'non-canonical' switch reference system has relevance for a broader cross-linguistic understanding of the phenomenon of interclausal reference. The sketch ends with a detailed discourse analysis of a sample narrative in Amahuaca (472–76).

Part 3 likewise contains a single study, by CHERYL JENSEN, entitled 'Comparative Tupí-Guaraní morphosyntax' (489–618). Comparing material from members of the family spoken both in the Amazon and beyond as well as, wherever possible, from extinct languages such as Tupinambá, Jensen focuses mainly on reconstructing morphology and grammatical relations in proto-Tupí-Guaraní. The study finishes with several appendixes listing the reconstructed morphemes discussed (588–603), proto-Tupí-Guaraní morphemes and their reflexes (604–6), phonological rules (607–13), rules that define family subgrouping (614–16), and distinguishing features of Tupí-Guaraní languages in general (617–18). The last appendix closely follows comparative work published elsewhere (Rodrigues 1984/85).

Like its three predecessors, this book contains much that should be of acute interest to typologists, sociolinguists, and historical linguists. It concludes with a cumulative index to all four *HAL* volumes (619–46) which both updates and expands a similar index in *HAL* 3. This helps to make the series a unified set.

The editors have fittingly dedicated this excellent volume to the memory of Grace Derbyshire, one of the pioneers in modern Amazonian linguistics, who passed away just as the manuscript was being readied for publication. Although scholarly research on Amazonian linguistics is still far too sparse to guarantee that the timely documentation of all languages will in fact be accomplished, the appearance of new publications such as this can only boost a discipline that already promises to grow considerably as the 21st century progresses.

## REFERENCES

- AIKHENVALD, ALEXANDRA Y. 1995. *Bare*. (Languages of the world/materials 100.) Munich: Lincom Europa.  
 —. 1999. *Tariana texts and cultural context*. (Languages of the world/text collections 7.) Munich: Lincom Europa.  
 —. 2001. *A grammar of Tariana*. To appear.  
 ANCHIETA, JOSEPH DE. 1595. *Arte de grammatica da lingua mais usada na costa do Brasil*. Coimbra: Antônio Mariz.  
 CAMPBELL, LYLE. 1997. *American Indian languages: The historical linguistics of Native America*. (Oxford Studies in Anthropological Linguistics 4.) Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press.  
 DERBYSHIRE, DESMOND C. 1977. Word order universals and the existence of OVS languages. *Linguistic Inquiry* 8.590–99.  
 —. 1979. *Hixkaryana*. (Lingua descriptive series 1.) Amsterdam: North-Holland.  
 —, and GEOFFREY C. PULLUM (eds.) 1986. *Handbook of Amazonian languages*, 1. Berlin & New York: Mouton de Gruyter.  
 —, —. (eds.) 1990. *Handbook of Amazonian languages*, 2. Berlin & New York: Mouton de Gruyter.  
 —, —. (eds.) 1991. *Handbook of Amazonian languages*, 3. Berlin & New York: Mouton de Gruyter.  
 DIXON, R. M. W., and ALEXANDRA AIKHENVALD. 1999. *The Amazonian languages*. (Cambridge language surveys.) Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press.  
 —, and ALAN R. VOGEL. 2001. *The Jarawara language of southern Amazonia*. To appear.  
 GILDEA, SPIKE. 1998. *On reconstructing grammar: Comparative Cariban morphosyntax*. (Oxford studies in anthropological linguistics 18.) Oxford: Oxford University Press.  
 GRIMES, JOSEPH. 1975. *The thread of discourse*. The Hague: Mouton.  
 PAYNE, DORIS L. (ed.) 1990. *Amazonian linguistics: Studies in Lowland South American languages*. Austin: University of Texas Press.  
 RODRIGUES, ARYON D. (1984/85). *Relações internas na família linguística Tupi-Guaraní*. *Revista de Antropologia*, 27/28.33–53.  
 SEKI, LUCY. 2000. *Grammática da língua Kamaiurá*. Campinas: Editora da Unicamp.

Western Washington University  
 Modern and Classical Languages-9057  
 Bellingham, WA 98225  
 [vajda@cc.wvu.edu]

**Slavic gender linguistics**. Ed. by MARGARET H. MILLS. (Pragmatics and beyond: New series 61.) Amsterdam & Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 1999. Pp. xviii, 251.

Reviewed by CYNTHIA M. VAKARELIYSKA, *University of Oregon*

As noted in its introduction, this eleven-paper volume is the first published English-language monograph devoted to gender linguistics issues in Slavic languages. As such, it provides a very useful and interesting introductory sampling of gender linguistics issues in morphology and discourse that are specific to individual Slavic languages, as well as a wealth of language data for other linguists to draw on. The volume title is a little misleading since nine of the articles are on Russian; in addition there is one article on Polish (JILL CHRISTENSEN'S discourse study of Mrozek's play *Tango*) and one on Czech (JITKA SONKOVA'S examination of gender and age differences in the distribution of grammatical forms) but no representation of the modern South Slavic languages (Bulgarian, Macedonian, Serbian/Croatian, and Slovenian), currently the least studied with respect to gender issues. With the exception of LAURA JANDA'S comprehensive