THE AMAZONIAN LANGUAGES

The Amazon Basin is arguably both the least-known and the most complex linguistic region in the world today. It is the home of some 300 languages belonging to around 20 language families, plus more than a dozen genetic isolates, and many of these languages (often incompletely documented and mostly endangered) show properties that constitute exceptions to received ideas about linguistic universals. This book is the first to provide an overview in a single volume of this rich and exciting linguistic area. The editors and contributors have sought to make their descriptions as clear and accessible as possible, in order to provide a basis for further research on the structural characteristics of Amazonian languages and their genetic and areal relationships, as well as a point of entry to important cross-linguistic data for the wider constituency of theoretical linguists.

R. M. W. DIXON and ALEXANDRA Y. AIKHENVALD are Director and Associate Director of the Research Centre for Linguistic Typology at the Australian National University (the Research Centre will relocate to La Trobe University in Melbourne from January 2000). Professor Dixon’s book publications include grammatical studies of the Australian languages Dyirbal and Yidiny, of Fijian and of English, as well as The Languages of Australia (1980) and Ergativity (1994). One of his current projects is a grammar of Jarawara (Brazil). Professor Aikhenvald has published 6 books and nearly 100 papers in Russian, English, Portuguese and Yiddish, covering a range of subjects including Berber, Hebrew, Indo-European and Native South American languages. Her monograph Classifiers: A Typology of Noun Categorization Devices will be published in 1999. She is currently completing a full-length grammar of Tariana.
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This series offers general accounts of the major language families of the world, with volumes organized either on a purely genetic basis or on a geographical basis, whichever yields the most convenient and intelligible grouping in each case.

Each volume compares and contrasts the typological features of the languages it deals with. It also treats the relevant genetic relationships, historical development and sociolinguistic issues arising from their role and use in the world today. The books are intended for linguists from undergraduate level upwards, but no special knowledge of the languages under consideration is assumed.

Volumes such as those on Australia and the Amazon Basin are also of wider relevance, as the future of the languages and their speakers raises important social and political issues.

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THE AMAZONIAN LANGUAGES

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CONTENTS

List of maps page xvii
List of contributors xviii
Acknowledgements xx
List of abbreviations xxi
Conventions followed xxiv

1 Introduction by R. M. W. Dixon and Alexandra Y. Aikhenvald 1
   1 Cultural background 3
   2 Linguistic diffusion 7
   3 Genetic relationship 11
   4 The punctuated equilibrium model 16
   5 Organization of this book 19
   Bibliography 20

2 Carib by Desmond C. Derbyshire 23
   1 Introduction 23
   2 Phonology 26
      2.1 Segmental 26
      2.2 Phonotactics and suprasegmentals 26
      2.3 Morphophonology 28
   3 Morphology, particles and pronouns 31
      3.1 Inflectional morphology 31
         3.1.1 Person-marking affixes on verbs, nouns, adverbials and postpositions 32
         3.1.2 Tense, aspect, mode and number suffixes on verbs 37
         3.1.3 Possession, tense and number suffixes on nouns 40
         3.1.4 Inflectional suffixes on locative postpositions 42
      3.2 Derivational morphology 43
         3.2.1 Verb derivational affixes 44
         3.2.2 Nominalizing affixes attached to verb stems to form nouns 45
### 4 Tupi by Aryon D. Rodrigues

1 Introduction 107
2 Phonology 110
   2.1 Vowels 110
   2.2 Consonants 112
   2.3 Tone 114
3 Grammatical overview 114
4 Nouns 115
5 Pronouns 117
6 Verbs 118
7 Demonstratives 120
8 Questions 120
9 Subordinate clauses 121
10 Pivots 121
Bibliography 122

### 5 Tupi-Guarani by Cheryl Jensen

1 Introduction 125
2 Identification of Tupi-Guarani languages 128
   2.1 Distinguishing characteristics of Tupi-Guarani languages 128
   2.2 Subgroups within Tupi-Guarani 129
3 Proto-Tupi-Guarani phonology 133
   3.1 Proto-Tupi-Guarani phonemes 133
   3.2 Proto-Tupi-Guarani allomorphs 134
   3.3 Possible Tupi-Guarani morphophonemic phenomena 135
      3.3.1 Replacement by nasal consonants 135
      3.3.2 Strategies for the loss of consonant clusters formed at morpheme juncture 136
4 Phonological changes within Tupi-Guarani 137
   4.1 Weakening of *tf and *ts 137
   4.2 Palatalization 138
   4.3 Labialization 140
   4.4 Merger of *β with *w 141
x

Contents

4.5 Final-consonant phenomena 142
   4.5.1 Devoicing 142
   4.5.2 Nasalization 143
   4.5.3 Loss 143
4.6 Vowel shift 144
5 Stems 146
   5.1 Categories of stems 146
   5.2 Stem classes 146
6 Person markers 146
7 Nouns 148
   7.1 Case marking 148
   7.2 Possession 150
   7.3 Noun composition 151
   7.4 Indication of number 151
   7.5 Noun phrases 152
   7.6 Possession classes 152
8 Postpositions 153
9 Verbs 154
   9.1 Independent verbs 155
   9.2 Oblique-topicalized verbs 156
   9.3 Serial verb constructions 157
   9.4 Temporal subordinate clause constructions 157
   9.5 Valency-changing devices 158
      9.5.1 Causatives 158
      9.5.2 Detransitivizers 159
      9.5.3 Object incorporation 159
10 Nominalizations 159
11 Semantics 160
Bibliography 161

6 Macro-Jê by Aryon D. Rodrigues 165
1 Historical survey 165
2 Distribution 166
3 Linguistic scholarship 169
4 Phonology 171
   4.1 Vocalic systems 171
   4.2 Consonantal systems 174
   4.3 Tone 180
5 Morphology 180
   5.1 Inflection for contiguity of a determiner 180
   5.2 Inflection for possession 182
   5.3 Number 183
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>Noun classification</td>
<td>184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>Agreement marking on the verb</td>
<td>185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Syntax</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>Constituent order in declarative sentences</td>
<td>187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>Adpositional phrases</td>
<td>188</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>Genitive phrases</td>
<td>190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>Demonstrative phrases</td>
<td>192</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>Numeral phrases</td>
<td>192</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>Adjectival phrases</td>
<td>193</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>Ergativity</td>
<td>193</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>Valency-changing processes</td>
<td>195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.8.1</td>
<td>Reflexives and reciprocals</td>
<td>195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.8.2</td>
<td>Causativization</td>
<td>195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>Switch-reference</td>
<td>197</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>About the consistency of Macro-Jê as a genetic group</td>
<td>198</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>A brief appraisal of the grammatical affinity</td>
<td>198</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>Phonological equations</td>
<td>198</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>201</td>
</tr>
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</table>

**Tucano**

7. Tucano by Janet Barnes

1. Introduction

2. Phonology

   2.1 Syllable structure

   2.2 Segmental phonology

   2.3 Nasalization

   2.4 Accent

3. Morphology

   3.1 The verb

      3.1.1 Evidentials

      3.1.2 Aspect

      3.1.3 Mood and modality

   3.2 Pronouns

      3.2.1 Personal pronouns

      3.2.2 Possessive pronouns

   3.3 Classifiers

   3.4 Specificity marker

   3.5 Nouns

   3.6 Adjectives

   3.7 Negation

   3.8 Nominalized verbs

   3.9 Switch-reference

4. Syntax

   4.1 Constituent order in declarative sentences

   4.2 Adpositional phrases

   4.3 Genitive phrases

   4.4 Demonstrative phrases

   4.5 Numeral phrases

   4.6 Adjectival phrases

   4.7 Ergativity

   4.8 Valency-changing processes

      4.8.1 Reflexives and reciprocals

      4.8.2 Causativization

   4.9 Switch-reference

   4.10 Phonological equations

   4.11 About the consistency of Macro-Jê as a genetic group

   4.12 A brief appraisal of the grammatical affinity

   4.13 Phonological equations

   4.14 Switch-reference
4.1 Time and location 224
4.2 Noun phrase 225
Bibliography 225

8 Pano by Eugene E. Loos 227
1 Introduction 227
2 Phonology 230
  2.1 Segmental phonology 230
  2.2 Common phonological variations 231
3 Grammar 234
  3.1 Word classes and noun phrase formation 234
    3.1.1 Noun phrase 235
    3.1.2 Pronoun classes 235
    3.1.3 Relative clauses 236
    3.1.4 Noun phrase pluralization 236
  3.2 Transitivity concord 236
    3.2.1 Switch-reference 237
    3.2.2 Adverbial suffix concord 239
    3.2.3 Locative phrases 239
    3.2.4 Ergative marking 240
  3.3 Noun incorporation 243
  3.4 Verb formation 243
    3.4.1 Verb roots 243
    3.4.2 Suffixes 244
  3.5 Mood indicators 248
  3.6 Deictics 248
Bibliography 249

9 Makú by Silvana and Valteir Martins 251
1 Introduction 251
2 Genetic classification 253
3 Phonology 255
4 Word structure 257
5 Word classes 257
6 Nominal categories: possession, classifiers, number 258
7 Verb structure 259
8 Valency-changing derivations 260
9 Incorporation 261
10 Grammatical relations 263
11 Negation 264
12 Syntax 265
13 Lexicon 265
Bibliography 266
## Contents

10 **Nambiquara** by Ivan Lowe  
1 Introduction 269  
2 Phonology 271  
  2.1 The variants of phonemes 272  
  2.2 Syllable structure 272  
  2.3 Stress 272  
  2.4 Morphophonemics 272  
3 Morphology 273  
  3.1 Verbs 274  
    3.1.1 Main verbs 274  
    3.1.2 Subordinate verbs 277  
  3.2 Adjectives 279  
  3.3 Nouns 280  
  3.4 Pronouns 283  
  3.5 Adverbs 283  
  3.6 Interjections 284  
  3.7 Ideophones 284  
4 Syntax 284  
  4.1 Main clauses 284  
  4.2 Subordinate clauses 287  
  4.3 Clause coordination 288  
  4.4 Noun phrases 289  
  4.5 Nominalizations 290  
Bibliography 291

11 **Arawá** by R. M. W. Dixon  
1 Introduction 293  
2 Phonology 295  
3 Word classes 298  
4 Nouns 298  
5 Noun phrase structure 299  
6 Verbs 300  
7 Predicate structure 300  
8 Pronouns 302  
9 Demonstratives and interrogatives 304  
10 Construction types 304  
Bibliography 306

12 **Small language families and isolates in Peru** by Mary Ruth Wise  
1 Introduction: the languages and families 307  
2 Phonology 312  
3 Morphology 318  
  3.1 Nominal morphology 319
## Contents

3.1.1 Classifiers 319  
3.1.2 Case 320  
3.2 Pronouns 321  
3.3 Adjectives 323  
  3.3.1 Comparative and superlative grades 323  
3.4 Verbal morphology 324  

4 Syntax 329  
  4.1 Constituent order 329  
  4.2 Relativization 332  
  4.3 Subordination and coreference/switch-reference 333  

Bibliography 335  

13 Other small families and isolates by Alexandra Y. Aikhenvald and R. M. W. Dixon 341  
1 Brazil 341  
  1.1 Yanomami 341  
    1.1.1 Phonology 345  
    1.1.2 Word structure and word classes 346  
    1.1.3 Nominal categories 346  
    1.1.4 Classifiers 347  
    1.1.5 Grammatical relations 348  
    1.1.6 Verb structure 349  
    1.1.7 Noun incorporation and verb compounding 350  
    1.1.8 Syntax 350  
  1.2 Trumai by Raquel Guirardello 351  
    1.2.1 Phonology 352  
    1.2.2 Features of the grammar 352  
  1.3 Mura-Pirahã 353  
    1.3.1 Phonology 354  
    1.3.2 Features of the grammar 355  
  1.4 Jabuti 357  
    1.4.1 Phonology 357  
    1.4.2 Features of the grammar 357  
  1.5 Chapacura family 358  
    1.5.1 Phonology 359  
    1.5.2 Features of the grammar 359  
  1.6 Máku 361  
  1.7 Aikaná and Koaia 362  

2 Bolivia 364  
  2.1 The Tacana family 364  
    2.1.1 Phonology 365  
    2.1.2 Features of the grammar 366  
  2.2 Isolates 367
Contents

3 Colombia 369
  3.1 Phonology 370
  3.2 Morphology 372
    3.2.1 Word structure and typological profile 372
    3.2.2 Nominal morphology 373
    3.2.3 Grammatical relations 375
    3.2.4 Verbal morphology 375
  3.3 Syntax 376
4 Venezuela 377
  4.1 Phonology 377
  4.2 Features of the grammar 378
Bibliography 379

14 Areal diffusion and language contact in the Içana-Vaupés basin, north-west Amazonia 385
  by Alexandra Y. Aikhenvald
  1 Areal diffusion in north-west Amazonia 385
  2 Linguistic situation in the Içana-Vaupés basin 386
    2.1 Languages spoken 386
    2.2 Cultural setting and language attitudes 388
    2.3 Historical evidence 390
  3 The Vaupés region as a linguistic area 391
    3.1 General observations 391
    3.2 Phonological characteristics 394
    3.3 Grammatical structure 396
      3.3.1 Typological profile and word structure 396
      3.3.2 Nominal morphology 397
      3.3.3 Grammatical relations 403
      3.3.4 Verbal morphology and predicate structure 404
    3.4 Syntax and discourse techniques 405
    3.5 Semantics 406
  4 Properties shared by languages of the Içana and Vaupés region 406
    4.1 Pitch accent 406
    4.2 Topic-advancing verbal derivation 407
    4.3 Possessive classifiers and -ya- possessive marker 409
    4.4 Complex systems of classifiers 410
  5 Conclusions 411
Bibliography 413

15 The Upper Xingu as an incipient linguistic area 417
  by Lucy Seki
  1 The Upper Xingu and its languages 417
    1.1 Languages spoken 417
    1.2 Historical background 419
## Contents

1.3  The mobility of groups, language loss and further contacts 423  
2  The Upper Xingu as a culture area 423  
3  Linguistic situation 424  
4  Incipient areal diffusion in the Upper Xingu 426  
5  Conclusions 428  

Bibliography 428  

Index of authors 431  
Index of languages and language families 436  
Subject index 445
MAPS

Map 1  Carib languages with approximate locations  page 22
Map 2  Arawak languages with approximate locations  66
Map 3  Tupí languages with approximate locations  108
Map 4  Tupí-Guaraní languages with approximate locations  126
Map 5  Macro-Jê languages with approximate locations  164
Map 6  Tucano languages with approximate locations  208
Map 7  Pano languages with approximate locations  228
Map 8  Makú languages and dialects with approximate locations  252
Map 9  Nambiquara languages and dialects with approximate locations  268
Map 10  Arawá languages and dialects with approximate locations  292
Map 11  Small language families and isolates of Peru with approximate locations  308
Map 12  Small language families and isolates of Brazil, Bolivia, Colombia and Venezuela with approximate locations  342
Map 13  Languages in the Içana-Vaupés Basin with approximate locations  384
Map 14  Languages of the Upper Xingu with approximate locations  418
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ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbreviations are used for the states of Brazil:

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The following abbreviations are used in the bibliographies:

IJAL  International Journal of American Linguistics
SIL   Summer Institute of Linguistics

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</tr>
<tr>
<td>DENMLZR</td>
<td>denominalizer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>determinate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DETRZR</td>
<td>detransitivizer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIF.LOC</td>
<td>diffuse locative case</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>diminutive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIST</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>DL, dl</td>
<td>dual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>different A/S referent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EMPH</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>ERG</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>EVID</td>
<td>evidential</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EXCL, excl</td>
<td>exclusive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EXIST</td>
<td>existential</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FEM, fem</td>
<td>feminine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FOC</td>
<td>focus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FUT</td>
<td>future</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>genitive</td>
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</table>
### List of abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PAST.2</td>
<td>second past tense</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PERF</td>
<td>perfect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PERFV</td>
<td>perfective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PL, pl</td>
<td>plural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POSSD</td>
<td>possession/possessed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POSSR</td>
<td>possessor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POSSV</td>
<td>possessive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>punctual aspect</td>
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<td>punctual locative case</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>recent</td>
</tr>
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<td>reciprocal</td>
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<tr>
<td>REFL</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>relative clause marker</td>
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<tr>
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<td>relativizer</td>
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<td>reversative</td>
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<tr>
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<td>intransitive subject</td>
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<td>serial verb</td>
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<tr>
<td>SF</td>
<td>stem formative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>singular</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SO</td>
<td>A/S referent same as O referent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPEC</td>
<td>specificity marker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SS</td>
<td>same A/S referent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAMN</td>
<td>tense, aspect, mood and number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TR</td>
<td>transitive</td>
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<tr>
<td>V</td>
<td>verb/vowel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VBLZR</td>
<td>verbalizer</td>
</tr>
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</table>
CONVENTIONS FOLLOWED

1 SPELLING

We have tried to avoid spelling conventions that are particular to one language, using instead those which are most generally accepted.

(a) Spanish ‘hu’ and ‘j’. The sounds [w] and [h] are shown by ‘hu’ and ‘j’ respectively in Spanish orthography. We have generally preferred plain ‘w’ and ‘h’, e.g. Witoto rather than Huitoto, Cashinawa rather than Cashinahua, Guahibo rather than Guajibo. (We have allowed just a few exceptions, e.g. Jivaro [Hivaro] is always spelt with ‘J’ and this has been retained. Cahuapana and Chayahuita are almost always spelt with ‘hu’ and this is retained here.)

The sound [k] is variously written as ‘k’ or ‘c’ or ‘qu’. For names that include a [k] we have, as a rule, retained the spelling which is best known.

(b) English ‘-an’. English-speaking linguists often put ‘-an’ on the end of the name of a language family, e.g. Arawakan, Cariban, Tupían. (Although this is not done consistently. Mercifully we have never seen Jêan or Makúan.) Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking linguists avoid names ending with an English suffix. We think it most useful to have one universal name for each family (rather than a certain name when writing in English and another name when writing in Spanish or Portuguese), and so avoid the ‘-an’. This does mean that sometimes a language family and one language within the family may be referred to by the same label, but context is almost always sufficient to avoid confusion.

There are additional reasons for our following this convention. The term ‘Arawak’ is used by Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking linguists for a well-established language family. A number of English-speaking linguists use ‘Arawakan’ for something quite different, a chimerical high-level grouping (see §3 of chapter 1) which is said to include what South American linguists term ‘Arawak’ but is in this classification named ‘Maipuran’. We follow the traditional (and current South American) practice of using ‘Arawak’ (not ‘Maipuran’) for the established language family, and avoid the term ‘Arawakan’.
The term ‘language’ can be used with two quite different meanings. One is the
linguistic sense, when forms of speech that are mutually unintelligible are desig-
nated to be distinct languages. Two forms of speech that are mutually intelligible
are then dialects of one language. The other is the political sense, when each separ-
ate nation or tribe likes to say that it has its own language. The two senses of ‘lan-
guage’ often give the same result but sometimes they do not. One linguistic language
may relate to several political languages, as when the Swedish and Norwegian
peoples each say that they have a distinct language, whereas these are mutually intel-
ligible and are thus, on linguistic grounds, dialects of a single language. Or one
political language may relate to several linguistic languages as when the Chinese say
that they all speak the Chinese language, but in a number of dialects. In fact the
‘dialects’ are not mutually intelligible and are, on linguistic criteria, separate lan-
guages.

In this book we employ the term ‘language’ in the linguistic sense. Note that
earlier work on South America has used the term ‘language’ sometimes in the lin-
guistic and sometimes in the political sense. For instance, there are seven Makú
tribes, each of which has its own political language, but there are just four separate
languages in the linguistic sense. Yanomami has sometimes been described as
involving four closely related languages, but it seems most appropriate to character-
ize Yanomami as a dialect continuum (effectively, as a single language). Within the
Arawá family, Jamamadi, Jarawara and Banawá are distinct tribes and have been
said to involve distinct languages (indeed, there are currently three missionary
teams, each working on its own Bible translation). In fact these speech forms have
about 95 per cent vocabulary in common and very similar grammars. Each is easily
intelligible to speakers of the others and they are clearly dialects of one language,
on linguistic criteria. Within the Tupí-Guaraní subgroup there is some confusion
about what is a language and what is a dialect; the commentary on table 5.1
attempts to provide some clarification.

We have tried to ensure that the standard criteria for proving genetic relation-
ship between languages are followed in this book. The established term for a group
of languages that is genetically related is ‘language family’. Smaller genetic groups
within a family are called ‘branches’ or ‘subgroups’ of the family. For instance, one
talks of the Germanic branch, or subgroup, within the Indo-European family.
Terms such as ‘stock’ and ‘phylum’ (together with ‘micro-phylum’, ‘macro-phylum’,
‘meso-phylum’) go with the quite different methodology of lexicostatistics and are
best avoided. We thus talk of the Tupí-Guaraní branch, or subgroup, of the Tupi
language family, and so on. (The Portuguese term tronco is sometimes translated...
into English as *stock*, but in many instances *family* would be a more appropriate rendering.)

3 GRAMMATICAL TERMINOLOGY

We intend the linguistic surveys contained in this volume to have lasting value. For this reason, among others, we have avoided use of any of the current (or past) formal linguistic theories. The contributors have written in terms of what has recently come to be called Basic Linguistic Theory. This is the cumulated tradition of linguistic description, that has evolved over the last 2,000 years. Most grammars (certainly, all those that have permanent value) are written in terms of the parameters of Basic Linguistic Theory – what is a phoneme; what is a word; the parameters in terms of which systems of tense, aspect and evidentiality vary; the criteria for recognizing a relative clause; and so on.

(a) Contributors have used standard abbreviations for core semantico-syntactic relations:

- A transitive subject
- O transitive object
- S intransitive subject
- S<sub>a</sub> S that is marked in the same way as A on a transitive verb
- S<sub>o</sub> S that is marked in the same way as O on a transitive verb

The terms ‘active’ and ‘stative’ are typically used for verbs that take S<sub>a</sub> and S<sub>o</sub> arguments respectively.

A language will thus be characterized as, for instance, AVO, SV (rather than just as SVO). There are in fact Amazonian languages where A and S do not occur in the same position, e.g. in Kuikuro, of the Carib family, the basic constituent orders are SV and OVA. (Here a single formula – using ‘S’ to cover both intransitive and transitive subject – could not satisfactorily be employed.)

(b) Verbs typically fall into a number of subclasses:

- **Intransitive** – can only occur in an intransitive clause, with S core argument.
- **Transitive** – can only occur in a transitive clause, with A and O core arguments.
- **Ambitransitive** – can occur in either an intransitive or a transitive clause; there are two varieties of ambitransitive:
  - S = A type, e.g. ‘he (S) has eaten’, ‘he (A) has eaten lunch (O)’
  - S = O type, e.g. ‘the glass (S) broke’, ‘he (A) broke the glass (O)’
Most languages have a subtype of transitive:

**Extended transitive** (or ditransitive) – take A and O arguments and also an oblique argument. Note that, with an extended transitive verb like ‘give’, in some languages the Gift is in O function with the Recipient in oblique function, in some languages the Recipient is O and the Gift is oblique, while other languages have both construction types available (e.g. in English, *John gave the book to Mary* and *John gave Mary the book*).

A few languages (e.g. Trumai, in §1.2 of chapter 13) also have a subtype of intransitive:

**Extended intransitive** – take an S argument and also an oblique argument.

(c) Grammatical terms tend to be used in different ways by different authors. It may be useful to provide a characterization of the way some important terms are employed in this volume.

At the clausal level, a language may mark the syntactic functions of its core arguments (A, S, O) either by **dependent-marking**, which involves function markers (case, adpositions, etc.) attached to NPs which realize the core arguments; or by **head-marking**, which involves bound pronominal elements (relating to core arguments) attached to the predicate. (Some languages combine the two strategies.)

**Passive** is a valency-reducing derivation. Prototypically it applies to a transitive clause, taking the A argument out of the core and placing it on the periphery, with the old O becoming new S. **Antipassive** is similar to passive but here O is moved into the periphery with old A becoming new S. (We know of only one Amazonian language which appears to have an antipassive derivation – Cavineña, in §2.1.2 of chapter 13.)

**Causative** is a valency-increasing derivation. Prototypically it applies to an intransitive clause, bringing in a new argument (the Causer) as A, with the original S becoming O. In some languages causative applies only to intransitives but in others it may also apply to transitives.

**Applicative** is another kind of valency-increasing derivation whose prototypical application is to intransitives. The original S becomes A with what was a peripheral argument being moved into the core as O. There can be a variety of applicatives depending on the original peripheral function of the new O; these include instrumental, comitative, benefactive, dative, locative (see, for example, chapter 3). There is a fuller account (with exemplification) of passive, antipassive, causative and applicative in ‘A typology of argument-determined constructions’, by R. M. W.
A serial verb construction involves a single predicate consisting of several verbs which share certain properties – generally, the same subject (S or A) and often other arguments as well. The verbs usually share a single specification for tense, aspect, modality, mood and polarity; they constitute one prosodic phrase.

In some languages certain types of clause combinations (e.g. main clause plus relative clause, main clause plus purposive clause) are obligatorily marked for whether they have the Same Subject (SS) or Different Subjects (DS). This is referred to as switch-reference marking.

Many Amazonian languages have a set of classifiers which characterize a given noun in terms of its inherent properties, typically animacy, shape, form and material. The classifiers may be attached to numerals, deictics, locatives or verbs. Other languages may have a small closed system of genders (or noun classes) which typically include masculine and feminine terms. Each noun must belong to one gender class. A number of Amazonian languages show both classifier sets and gender systems (e.g. Tucano, in chapter 7).