



Dicionário da Língua Baniwa (Ramirez)

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judging the merit of competing classifications is evidence that we have reached the limit of what can be achieved with informal or lexicostatistical means. From this point forward, we can only expect to make advances via historical methods that systematically build from rigorous reconstructions of lower-level proto-languages to higher-level ones. Second, in a project of this sort, specialists in smaller groupings can play an invaluable role, since they can distinguish good data from poor. The implication of these two observations is that future progress will require collaboration between large numbers of Arawak specialists in carrying out historical reconstruction using established methods. The prospects are exciting.

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DICIONÁRIO DA LÍNGUA BANIWA. By Henri Ramirez. Manaus: Editora da Universidade do Amazonas, 2001. Pp. 381.

With approximately 11,000 speakers in Brazil, Columbia, and Venezuela, Baniwa-Curripaco¹ (BC) is a vital and relatively large Amazonian language. Ramirez's dictionary of this Arawak language is the most comprehensive lexical resource to date and an important addition to the scholarship on northern Arawak languages.

¹ Despite the title, the author uses the name "Baniwa-Curripaco" in the text, as "Baniwa" is a somewhat confusing denomination which has also been applied to other groups.

The dictionary focuses on what Ramirez calls the “Central Super-dialect” (CSD), spoken in Brazil and Columbia on the middle reaches of the Içana River and its major tributaries, the Aiari and Cuiari rivers. On the upper reaches of the Içana and Cuiari, CSD is replaced by the Northern Super-dialect (NSD, a.k.a. Curripaco “proper”) which extends north to Columbia’s Guainía river basin and to some towns on the Infrida River. The Southern Super-Dialect (SSD) is spoken on the lower reaches of the Içana. Ramirez includes some important NSD and SSD forms along with the bulk of CSD forms.

The work begins with a brief discussion of the BC dialect situation, a pronunciation guide, a summary of some essential points of BC grammar, including word classes, person markers, some common phonological rules, word order, and an enumeration of nominal and verbal suffixes.

Lemmas are organized in a fairly traditional manner, beginning with a headword, followed by part of speech, followed by definition and, in many cases, examples of use. Headwords include free forms, bound nominal and verbal roots, derived forms, and affixes. Major distinguished parts of speech include intransitive, transitive, and serial verbs, independent and dependent (i.e., obligatorily possessed) nouns, and adjectives. Curiously, adverbs are left unspecified for part-of-speech. Multiple senses are distinguished by white diamonds (◇), and Ramirez does a good job of providing example sentences to clarify sense distinctions to illustrate their use. In many cases Ramirez also lists under a single headword a set of related forms pertaining to different word classes. These subentries are marked by black diamonds (◆) and numbered. For example, under the headword *iira-*, we find the adjective *írai* ‘red’, the derived transitive verb root *-iiráita* ‘become red’, the obligatorily possessed noun *-iiránaa* ‘blood’, the adjective *keeránaa* ‘bloody’, and the adjective *meeránaa* ‘bloodless’. The forms *-iiráita*, *iiránaa*, *keeránaa*, and *meeránaa* are also listed separately under their own headwords that refer the reader back to the headword. As this example suggests, Ramirez includes a large number of predictable derived forms in the dictionary, a decision probably reflecting a desire to make the dictionary useful to nonlinguists.

Ramirez provides an admirable number of scientific plant and animal names (mostly to genus level), which will be invaluable in comparative Arawak studies. The utility of these entries is somewhat limited to those without the relevant biological knowledge, however, as no physical descriptions are provided.

Finally, the dictionary is generally well formatted and organized. Headwords in boldface capitals identify lemmas clearly, as do spaces between them. Judicious use of italic and boldface text clearly distinguishes part-of-speech, definitions, examples, and translations, making entries easy to read.

Dictionary making is an arduous and somewhat underappreciated aspect of descriptive linguistics (Frawley et al. 2002), yet it is essential both to scholarship and to practical applications of linguistics. Ramirez should be lauded for his painstaking efforts to produce this detailed and well-organized work.

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