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LÍNGUAS ARAWAK DA AMAZÔNIA SETENTRIONAL: COMPARAÇÃO E DESCRIÇÃO.

By Henri Ramirez. Manaus: Editora de Universidade do Amazonas, 2001. Pp. 796.

The Arawak family is the largest and one of the most widespread accepted families of the Americas. In addition, some of the largest languages of the lowland tropical area are Arawak ones, including Wayuu (Guajiro) and Ashéninka (“Campa”). Despite the importance of this family, the historical linguistics of this family is underdeveloped, notwithstanding its long history (Aikhenvald 2002:288 and Campbell 1999:164). Ramirez’s volume is an effort to advance the state of comparative Arawak linguistics, focusing on the languages of northwest Amazonia.

Ramirez opens with the provocative claim that the traditional classification, which distinguishes Northern and Southern Arawak branches, is incorrect; he proposes an alternative classification of the Arawak languages, which I discuss below. From this starting point, Ramirez proposes a novel classification of the Arawak languages of “Northern Amazonia.” He conceives of Northern Amazonia as a cultural as well as geographical area, bounded by the Amazon River in the south, the Andes in the west, the Orinoco and Meta river basins in the north, and the Branco and Essequibo rivers in the east. Ramirez dedicates eight of the book’s ten chapters to descriptions of Arawak languages in Northern Amazonia, drawing on his own fieldwork, recent work by other linguists, and, for the extinct languages, on colonial-era records by missionaries, naturalists, and linguists.

The bulk of Ramirez’s work is devoted to descriptions of languages¹ in what he terms the Japurá-Colômbia division, which corresponds roughly to Aikhenvald’s (1999) Colombian branch plus her Upper Rio Negro branch, and to Campbell’s (1997) Western Nawiki plus Eastern Nawiki branches plus Resígaro. His most detailed chapters include one on Baniwa-Curripaco and Tariana (chap. 2), and another on Achagua and Piapoco (chap. 3). Ramirez presents relatively detailed descriptions of the phonology and morphology of these four languages, and brief discussions of their syntax. Chapter 4 is a set of short descriptions and/or word lists of the remaining languages of the division, ranging from brief presentations of phonological inventories, some phonological rules, and aspects of morphology, as in the cases of Warekena² and Yukuna, to simple word lists, as in the cases of Kauixana and Yumana. Apart from the languages already mentioned, Ramirez presents lexical material and some comments on phonology and morphology for Mandawaka, Wainuma, Mariate, Kabiari, Resígaro, and Passé.

Chapter 5 is devoted to the internal classification of the Japurá-Colômbia languages, based on lexical retention percentages, and to the reconstruction of the Proto-Japurá-Colômbia (PJC) phonological inventory. Ramirez also indicates how a number of PJC reflexes are related to Proto-Arawak (PA) phonemes, making use of Payne’s

¹ The author carried out prolonged fieldwork on Baniwa-Curripaco and briefer fieldwork on Bahuana. Regarding fieldwork on other languages, he writes: “I spent several months in the field in order to determine whether what I found written about the other Arawak languages corresponded to the truth” (p. 31).

² Note that this is a different language from the “Warekena” of Aikhenvald (1998), which Ramirez refers to as “Baniwa de Maroa.”

(1991) reconstructed PA forms. Most of Ramirez's reconstruction of the PJC inventory is straightforward (he provides a 155-page appendix of cognates and their reconstructed forms), although Ramirez himself frames the reconstruction of **ts* and **tʃ* as tentative. Perhaps most surprising is his reconstruction of **nd* or **ʔd* as the reflex in PJC of PA **l*.

The final three chapters are devoted to the four other divisions found in the northern Amazon region: Alto Negro, Alto Orinoco, Negro-Roraima, and Juruá-Jutaí. These brief chapters present phonological inventories of the languages of these divisions, some comments on their relation to PA, and in the case of minimally documented languages like Guinau (Alto Negro division) and Manao (Negro-Roraima division), colonial-era word lists.

It is difficult to succinctly characterize Ramirez's classification in comparison to other recent ones (e.g., Aikhenvald 1999 and Campbell 1997). In place of the long-standing division between Northern and Southern Arawak, Ramirez proposes a division between Western and Eastern Arawak. Eastern Arawak is a small subfamily with only two small divisions: one consisting of Palikur and Marawán (extinct), and another consisting of Waurá and Yawalapiti together in one subgrouping and Parecí in another. Western Arawak is composed of all other Arawak languages, except possibly for Amuesha and Chamicuro, which Ramirez leaves unclassified. Ramirez distinguishes eight major subgroups in Western Arawak, many of which coincide with the lower-level groupings of previous classifications. He proposes one entirely novel grouping, the Juruá-Jutaí division, which includes two extinct languages, Marawa (not to be confused with Marawán, far to the east) and Waraikú. If we compare Ramirez's classification to those of Aikhenvald and Campbell, which are more similar to each other than either is to Ramirez's, the most obvious difference is that Ramirez's classification is "flatter" than those of Campbell and Aikhenvald, exhibiting fewer medium-level groupings.

Ramirez's classification is based solely on percentages of shared lexical retentions. This was the method Payne (1991) employed in his comparative study of Arawak, which Ramirez praises.³ Ramirez's principal criticism of Payne's work is his choice of word lists, and Ramirez views his own use of a slightly modified Swadesh 100-word list as a significant methodological improvement.⁴ Ramirez assigns languages to groupings based on the following cognate percentages: 81–100%, dialects of one language; 50–81%, languages of a division; 35–50%, divisions of a subfamily; 20–35%, subfamilies of a family. Ramirez provides no explanation for the choice of these particular percentage values. In a 57-page appendix, he provides the Swadesh lists for the 47 languages he employed in his lexicostatistical comparison.

As intriguing as Ramirez's classificatory claims are, his methods cast doubt on their value. As Kaufman (1990) and Campbell (1999), among many others, have made clear, lexical retention percentages are simply not a reliable basis for determining ge-

³ Note that Payne, unlike Ramirez, did not consider lexicostatistics a reliable method for identifying subgroupings within Arawak, but merely a guide for generating hypotheses to be tested by the comparative method.

⁴ Differences in the word lists may explain why Payne (1991) and Ramirez arrive at quite different classifications despite employing similar methods.

netic groupings. Only the comparative method—assembling cognate sets, establishing phonological and grammatical correspondences, reconstructing proto-forms and, on this basis, deducing shared innovations—can yield reliable classifications. Moreover, Ramirez never presents the retention percentages to support most of the groupings in his classification of Arawak, providing them only for the internal classification of the Japurá-Colômbia division and to argue for the inclusion of a handful of other languages in other groupings (e.g., Juruá-Jutaí). Perhaps most puzzling, from a methodological standpoint, is his internal classification of the Japurá-Colômbia languages. Having reconstructed the PJC inventory and a large number of proto-forms, he is in an excellent position to implement established methods and determine the subgroupings within the division, based on shared innovations. But he never does so, relying instead only on lexicostatistical methods.

Another potential difficulty for Ramirez's classification stems from his reliance on sources of dubious worth for some of his data outside the ambit of northern Amazonia.⁵ Take, for example, his word list for "Kampa," a grouping with which I am familiar.⁶ This list contains numerous errors, including phonemes not found in any of the Kampan languages (e.g., nasal vowels, as in /gĩntu/, actually /gito/ 'head'); unattested consonant clusters (e.g., /han:rto/, actually /hanto/ 'there'); possible scribal errors (e.g., /epiti/, actually /apiti/ or /pite(ti)/ 'two'); and incorrect glosses (e.g., /aneni/ 'tooth', should be 'our (incl.) tongue'). Worse still, many words in the list do not pertain in any way to a Kampan language (e.g., /eispani/, supposedly 'you', actually /biro/ or /eeroka/). Fewer than half of the forms in the list are correct, and even the correct nominal or verbal roots are frequently accompanied by a motley assortment of inflectional morphology which obscures the roots. Comparing Ramirez's Yine (Piro) list to the most comprehensive dictionary available (Nies 1986) reveals similar, though less severe, problems.

The greatest strengths of Ramirez's work are the descriptions and lexical material that he provides for some of the little-documented Arawak languages of northwestern Amazonia. Regardless of the merits of Ramirez's classification, his descriptive work can serve as a resource for Arawakanists and for those interested in areal questions in northwestern Amazonia. His classification may, of course, withstand the test of rigorous historical methods better than its competitors, but that remains to be seen. To be fair to Ramirez, he is to be commended for being explicit about his methods and for making available the data on which his classifications are based (if not all the relevant retention percentages). In contrast, the methodological and empirical bases of Aikhenvald's (1999) and Campbell's (1997) rival classifications are somewhat less explicit.

Arawakanists can draw two lessons from the comparative component of Ramirez's work and that of competing classifications. First, the lack of any reliable means of

⁵ Unfortunately, Ramirez does not indicate his sources for much of the lexical data he employs, and a perusal of his bibliography fails to resolve the issue.

⁶ Ramirez is here lumping together several languages usually considered distinct (Aikhenvald 1999, Campbell 1997, and Wise 1986). Despite the availability of dictionaries for several Kampan languages (e.g., Kindberg 1980 and Shaver 1996), it does not appear that Ramirez made use of any of them.

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.