



The value of language and the language of value

A view from Amazonia

Alexandra Y. AIKHENVALD, *James Cook University*

The concept of *value* is manifold. Something judged good, proper, and desirable in human life is judged as valuable. Being valuable may have economic connotations of *worth*—to do with the degree to which desirable objects may bring material benefits. In this article, I concentrate on the Tariana, a representative of the Vaupés River Basin linguistic area in the far corner of northwest Brazilian Amazonia. I focus on how the value of language as the mark of identity is expressed in Tariana. I then turn to the expression of meanings to do with evaluation (“good, proper, as it should be” versus “bad, adverse, other,” or “correct” versus “incorrect”), with a special focus on the danger of otherness, as an exponent of a pan-Amazonian perspective on the condition of alterity. The rampant degree of language loss contributes to additional tensions between the traditional value of language knowledge and the modern situation. The concept of monetary worth came into the society, and the language, through the introduction of market economy within the last two or three decades. At the end, the findings are put within the perspective of Amazonian languages and cultures in general.

Keywords: Amazonian languages, alterity, value, Tariana, Arawak family

Value in language

The concept of *value* is manifold. Something judged good, proper, and desirable in human life may be looked upon as valuable. Having value may go together with economic connotations of *worth*—that is, the degree to which desirable objects may bring material benefits. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the term “value” in English (and also French, Portuguese, and some other familiar Indo-European languages) extends beyond worth and evaluation and into “the ability of a thing to serve a purpose or cause an effect, as in *news value*” (s.v. “value”). These overtones belong to the domain of English semantics and usage, and are a matter for a different study.

The ideas of value are articulated through language use. As shown throughout this volume, values as cultural representations can be expressed in numerous ways,

for example through ritual objects and acts. Language is the ubiquitous means of expression of “idea-and-values.” How do peoples from nonmainstream minority cultures articulate value judgments in general? How, if at all, do they value the languages they speak? And what means do they use to express concepts of worth and comparative evaluation of objects, people, activities, and so on? These are some of the questions to be addressed here.

In this paper, I focus on the Tariana group, a representative of the Vaupés River Basin linguistic area located in the far corner of northwest Brazilian Amazonia, and speakers of the only Arawak language in that area. The area is characterized by multilingual exogamy: one must marry someone who speaks a different language. Language is inherited through one’s father, and is the badge of a person’s identity. Language proficiency and the ability to speak the language “correctly” are of primary importance. The Tariana language is highly endangered. For a variety of historical reasons it is being rapidly replaced by Tucano, the major indigenous language of the Vaupés, and by Portuguese, the national language of Brazil. This creates a discrepancy between traditional values placed upon being able to master one’s father’s language and modern reality: many Tariana speak a “borrowed” language, and are thus not “up to standard.” As fewer and fewer people speak the language, some purists relent: code-switching with Tucano and with Portuguese is always noticed but not always considered to be a mark of incompetence (as it was a decade ago).

Language as a synchronic system of expressing the notions of value and morality (in the spirit of Robbins, part one of this special issue) and the social conventions of language use are intricately linked to practices of valuation (also see Henry, Otto, and Wood, part two of this special issue, on the emergent processes of valuation in a broader context). In the Tariana area, widespread language loss and the introduction of commodity exchange have far-reaching consequences for the traditional articulation of language and valuation.

Rampant language loss does not result in downgrading the value and the importance of the language. Its consequence is a discourse of nostalgia for the olden days when the Tariana people could live up to the expectations of their ancestors, and be “proper people.” And the value of knowledge of one’s genealogy gradually starts to override the importance of the language as it is being lost.

The linguistic expression of value in Tariana is manifold. Value judgments often refer to someone’s linguistic proficiency or lack thereof. I focus on a discussion of the terms for “good, proper, as it should be” versus “bad, adverse, (an)other, different.” Terms for “(an)other,” “otherwise,” and “elsewhere” have pronounced negative overtones. That is, value does not necessarily go together with desirable alterity among the Tariana, despite the ongoing quest for material wealth in terms of Western goods. The concept of “monetary worth” is making its way into the society. It is also talked about more and more, thanks to the development of a market economy within the last two or three decades. The versions of the Tariana origin myth told over a few years reflect these changes. The inclusion of the non-Indians and their monetary wealth in the origin myth reflects the societal change and concomitant newly introduced values. However, white traders are outside the classificatory kinship system. We start with a brief overview of the people, the language, and the traditional setting.

Language, people, and identity: The Tariana of the Vaupés River Basin

The traditional setting

The multilingual Vaupés River basin in northwest Amazonia spans adjacent areas of Brazil and Colombia. It is a well-established linguistic area whose major social feature is an obligatory societal multilingualism that follows the principle of linguistic exogamy: As Tariana elder Leonardo Brito put it, “those who speak the same language as us are our brothers, and we do not marry our sisters.” Language affiliation is inherited from one’s father, and is a badge of identity for each person. The major features of the area are summarized in Box 1 (Aikhenvald 2012a: 82).

Box 1: “We don’t marry our sisters”: Marriage network and areal diffusion in the Vaupés River Basin linguistic area

Languages spoken: East Tucanoan and Tariana (Arawak)

Principles of social organization: members of the exogamous network marry someone who speaks a different language: a Tariana cannot marry a Tariana, but can marry a Tucano, a Wanano, a Piratapuya, etc. Shared kinship system is of Iroquoian type.

Subsistence and settlement: banks of the Vaupés River; slash-and-burn agriculture; fishing, some hunting, and limited gathering.

Multilingualism: one’s father’s language is a badge of one’s identity and determines whom one marries. One also speaks (and speaks well!) the language of one’s mother and of one’s mates in the longhouse whose mothers speak other languages in the area.

Language etiquette:

(a) Keep your languages strictly apart: inserting forms from another language into one’s own is seen as a mark of incompetence.

(b) Speak your father’s language to your father and your siblings. If you want to be polite to other people, speak their father’s language to them.

Outcomes: hardly any borrowed forms, numerous similar categories and functions.

What makes Tariana crucial: comparing Tariana with its Arawak-speaking relatives outside Vaupés shows what categories are due to East Tucanoan impact.

Languages traditionally spoken in the area belong to three unrelated genetic groups: East Tucanoan, Arawak, and Makú. Speakers of East Tucanoan languages (Tuc-ano, Wanano, Desano, Tuyuca, Barasano, Piratapuya, and a few others), and of an Arawak language, Tariana, participate in the exogamous marriage network that ensures obligatory multilingualism. The Makú are outside the marriage network. The marriage rules are not fully straightforward: for instance, traditionally the Tucano do not marry the Barasano and the Desano do not marry either

Tariana or Wanano. The Desano are considered younger brothers of the Tariana (this resonates with some hypotheses about their erstwhile Arawak origins: see Aikhenvald 2002). Every group has preferential marriage partners (for instance, the Tariana of Santa Rosa prefer to marry the Piratapuya, and the Tariana of Periquitos tend to marry the Wanano).¹ The exogamy itself is rooted in the distinction between consanguinity (identified with speaking the same language) and affinity (relating to speaking a different language). These two dimensions, and their interrelationships, define the Vaupés society (in the spirit of the principles formulated by Viveiros de Castro 2001).

A striking feature of the Vaupés linguistic area is a strong cultural inhibition against language mixing, viewed in terms of borrowing morphemes. Recognizable loans are traditionally considered tokens of linguistic incompetence. Those who violate the principle of keeping languages strictly apart and commit the “crime” of mixing their languages by introducing lexical and grammatical loans (Tariana *na-namura na-sape* [3pl-mix 3pl-speak] “they speak by mixing”) are ridiculed as incompetent and sloppy. Those people are often referred to, behind their backs, as *mēda-peni* (be.good.for.nothing-ANIMATE.PLURAL) or as “those who are good for nothing” (translated into Portuguese as *à toa*). This is the first value term to be mentioned here—we return to its other overtones below.

A note on the Tariana language is in order. The overwhelming majority of forms are of Arawak origin. But the structures—that is, the meanings of the forms, and the grammatical categories—are overwhelmingly Tucanoan. Much of what will be said below is shared with Tariana’s East Tucanoan-speaking neighbors and relatives.

The Tariana in the context of the Brazilian Vaupés

THE LANGUAGE SITUATION

Multilingualism, social organization, and language attitudes of the peoples of the Vaupés River Basin area on the Colombian side have been discussed in a variety of sources, among them Christine Hugh-Jones (1979), Stephen Hugh-Jones (1979, 1988, 1992), A. P. Sorensen, Jr. (1967), Jean Jackson (1974, 1983), and Alcionílio Alves da Silva Brüzzi (1977). The Brazilian side is markedly different: linguistically so, because of the presence of a non-Tucanoan language (Tariana); and socially so, because of a greater degree of cultural disintegration and loss thanks to a strong impact of the Salesian missionaries, and—prior to that—continuous contacts with the non-Indians, especially during the rubber boom.

According to the language etiquette of the area, one is supposed to speak the language one identifies with—that is, one’s father’s language—to one’s siblings, father, and all his relatives, and one’s mother’s language to one’s mother and all

1. Recently, some of these restrictions have been violated. In addition to one person with a Tucano mother and a Barasano father, I know of three instances of Desano-Tariana marriages (two of them involving speakers of Tariana or their families). While the parents are somewhat upset the young people exhibit no shame. In one instance, a Tariana has married another Tariana from a different subclan; this is a matter of shame to the father, and has affected his reputation in the community. For obvious reasons, I will not mention the names of the people involved.

her relatives. However, during past decades the traditional pattern of language transmission in the Brazilian Vaupés has been affected by a number of factors.

When Salesian missionaries established themselves in the area in the early 1920s, they imposed Western-style schooling on the Indians, and forced children into boarding schools where they were made to speak just one language, Tucano. Salesians aimed at *civilizing* Indians. This implied not only making them into “good Christians.” Salesians also considered the traditional multilingualism of the area a “pagan” habit, and strived to make Indians monolingual “like other civilized people in the world.”

The Salesians in the Brazilian Vaupés chose the Tucano language because it was, numerically, the majority language. Salesian missionaries practiced forceful relocation of Indian settlements closer to mission centers—where the Indians could be more easily controlled—and amalgamation of different settlements, eliminating the traditional longhouse system and introducing European-style nuclear family houses. Another reason for the disintegration of traditional multilingualism was a breakdown of traditional father-child interaction: with the need for cash-flow, all able-bodied men would go off to work for Brazilians—undertaking such tasks as collecting rubber and gold-mining. As a result, children would have a considerably reduced degree of exposure to their father’s language. This resulted in the spread of Tucano, and, to a lesser extent, of other East Tucanoan languages, to the detriment of Tariana.

At present, Tucano is rapidly gaining ground as the major language of the area, at the expense of other languages in the Brazilian Vaupés (which does not appear to be the case in Colombia). The main consequence of the recent spread of the Tucano language in the Brazilian Vaupés is the gradual undermining of the one-to-one identification between language and ethnic group.

Another linguistic success story was the implementation of *Língua Geral Amazônica*² by Catholic missionaries across the whole northwest Amazonia. This language is also known as Nhêngatú, with a literal meaning of “good speech.” The spread of Nhêngatú started in the seventeenth century in the areas of Maranhão and Pará, as a simplified—or semicreolized—variety of Tupinambá (a Tupí-Guaraní language). It was implemented as a major language of interethnic communication in the interior Amazon from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century, to the detriment of a great many indigenous languages (including many Baniwa varieties). It is still in use in the Upper Rio Negro area but is now partly endangered (Rodrigues 1986). Many descendants of the now extinct Baré identify with this language as their ancestral heritage. Some older speakers of Tariana used to know a certain amount of *Língua Geral* and called it Baré (with no reference to “good language”). Nowadays schools operate almost exclusively in Portuguese. This language (known as *Yalana yarupe* “non-Indian language,” or “white man’s language”) is rapidly gaining ground, and may, in the future, pose a threat even to Tucano.

The maintenance of the Tariana language, and the self-esteem of its speakers, were boosted by the establishment of the Association of the Tariana of the Middle Vaupés in 2000, whose founding president Jovino Brito is a fluent speaker of the

2. *Língua Yeral* in Spanish-speaking countries.

language, an expert in the traditional lore, and nowadays a healer.³ Following a general trend toward establishing specialized ethnic schools in the Upper Rio Negro area, a Tariana special school (Portuguese *escola diferenciada*), *Enu irine idakini* (“The grandchildren of the blood of Thunder”) was established in 2005. The name of the school reflects the origin myth of the Tariana as a whole. Its founding director Rafael Brito is the youngest speaker of the Santa Rosa variety, and fluent in the language. The special school offers the same subjects as other schools, in addition to at least two hours a week of the Tariana language. After a rocky start, the school is now well established; as of second semester 2012, the language is being taught by two fluent speakers: Emilio Brito (of Santa Rosa) at secondary level and Edivaldo Muniz (of Periquitos) at primary level. That representatives of different dialect varieties teach the language at school reflects a present day tendency to allow for variation and relent on the strict adherence to just one variety (documented in Aikhenvald 2002, 2003b).

TO KNOW A LANGUAGE: A VAUPÉS PERSPECTIVE

Language is the badge of identity, and the major defining feature of the societal exogamy throughout the Vaupés area.⁴ People who marry someone who speaks the same language as themselves are said to be “like dogs” (Tariana *tsinu kayu-peni*). Those who do not speak their own language are treated with condescension and pity (and refer to themselves this way as well: Tariana *na-sawaya na-sape* [3pl-borrow 3pl-speak] “they speak by borrowing”). One can claim to speak a language only if one has a *right* to do so: that is, if it is one’s father’s language. I have been a witness to a few situations whereby an Indian would deny speaking a language they had just been speaking fluently because this is not “their” language.

To know a language in the Vaupés context means to know it through and through. Only those who have a native-speaker-like proficiency in a language would acknowledge they actually know it (also see Sorensen 1967 and Grimes 1985). The Tariana refer to those who know just the names of flora and fauna but cannot produce a story in the language as *nepitaneta-mia-ka pa-sape-li sede* (3pl+name+CAUSATIVE-ONLY-RECENT.PAST.VISUAL IMPERSONAL-SPEAK-NOMINALIZATION not.have “they only call names, there is no talking”). The term *mēda-peni* (“those who are good for nothing”) is often used to describe those who cannot tell a story and can only “call names” in a language.⁵ Speakers who fail to use the right markers of information source are also *mēda-peni*. We return to this below.

The growing language loss threatens peoples’ identity. Full knowledge of a language is gradually ceasing to be accessible to many people, since the majority of

3. Aikhenvald (2003a: 21) briefly outlines the features of Jovino Brito's spoken Tariana.

4. Aikhenvald (2002: 17–28) discusses the putative age of the area.

5. Recently, José Luis Brito (who has a teacher's diploma and has been working as a librarian for over twenty years) suggested that one should know verbs to be able to claim that one knows a language. It has been suggested, during the Workshop, that this purism among the Tariana may result from the fact that the language is endangered. This is most likely not the case, since the neighboring East Tucanoan speaking groups display the same kind of purist attitude to their languages (see, for example, Sorensen 1967).

languages other than Tucano have become endangered. Some telling figures are in Table 1.

Table 1: The Brazilian Vaupés: Languages and their speakers

	Tucano	Piratapuya	Wanano	Desano	Cubeo	Tariana
People	4,500	1,232	1,000	1,800	3,000	1,500
Language speakers	4,500	200	200	150	300	95

The discrepancy between the number of those who belong to a tribe and those who actually speak the language is particularly marked in the case of Tariana. There are hardly any children learning Tariana: the youngest speaker of the Santa Rosa variety is now in her early twenties. The spread of Tucano is also leading to the gradual disappearance of one of the most fascinating multilingual areas of the world, and the areal phenomena associated with it.

The Tariana close up

THE TRADITIONAL CLANS

Tariana, the only representative of the Arawak family within the Vaupés area, used to be a continuum of numerous dialects, one for each of several hierarchically organized clans. The hierarchically higher clans of the Tariana were a powerful group in the Vaupés area (starting from their first mention in 1755: see Wright 1992). The highest-ranking Tariana were also the first to lose their language; this process was already advanced in the early twentieth century, according to Theodor Koch-Grünberg (1911: 51; also see Giacone 1962: 7). The only dialect still actively spoken is that of the Wamiarikune, traditionally one of the lowest ranking clans.⁶

The myths and oral histories of different Tariana subgroups indicate that they may have taken different migration routes and perhaps assimilated different language groups, before they had arrived in the Vaupés basin.⁷ Having hier-

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6. This article, as all my previous work, is based upon information obtained via original fieldwork over more than twenty years with speakers of all existing dialects of Tariana (mostly the Wamiarikune of Santa Rosa and Periquitos, with less than 100 speakers in all). An overview of previous work on Tariana and the Tariana dialects is in Aikhenvald (2003a). Another quite divergent variety of Tariana is spoken by the Kumandene of Santa Terezinha (Kapinawali) on the Iauari river (Aikhenvald forthcoming); there may be another dialect upstream from San Carlos (in Venezuela) (Jovino Brito, personal communication, April 2012).
 7. The Wamiarikune are, in all likelihood, direct descendants of a group of nomadic hunters and gatherers described by Carl Fredrich Phillip von Martius (1867: 567) and of the Yurupary-tapuya mentioned by Theodor Koch-Grünberg (1911) and Henri A. Coudreau (1886-7). Also see Aikhenvald (2006, forthcoming) for further data on their origins. Historical and traditional evidence suggests that neither Tucano nor Tariana are the autochthonous population of the Vaupés. There is an assumption that the original inhabitants of the area were the Makú groups (see Aikhenvald 2002).

archically organized clans is a feature of all the East Tucanoan groups in the Vaupés area. Establishing the exact position of each clan on the hierarchy is a controversial matter: every group will give you a different hierarchy. According to the Wamiarikune lore, the Tariana groups fall into two large classes: the *upper ranks* who came floating out of the water at Ipanoré rapids and *lower ranks* (also called *surara-ne* “slaves, soldiers”) who appeared out of the smoke of the creator’s cigar. In at least some accounts, the Wamiarikune belong to the latter group. In most accounts, they “floated” (this is reflected in the name of this group *wamiariku-ne* we.float-LOCATIVE-ASSOCIATIVE.PL “people of the place of our floating”). But note that origin myths are not cast in stone: they change depending on the audience and on the times (see Brüzzi 1977; Aikhenvald 2002; and in “The value of language, and discourse of nostalgia” and “The language of ‘worth’: White people in the origin myth” below).

The egalitarian nature of Vaupés societies may appear to be at odds with existing clan hierarchies. According to early sources (see an outline in Wright 2005), in the eighteenth century representatives of higher-ranked clans used to sell members of lower-ranking ones into slavery to Portuguese traders. Nowadays, there does not appear to be any obvious tension between clan hierarchies and the egalitarian organization of each clan. The access to goods and skills within each clan is—at least in theory—equal for all. Clan hierarchies are important for ethnic histories and interclan attitudes, but little else.

Whether or not egalitarianism in itself can be treated as a traditional value is a moot point. Its value overtones are reflected in negative attitudes toward those who want to surpass others in having more, or wanting more. Traditional hierarchies of subclans and division of labor within each subclan (see “Straight men, wayward women, and further expressions of value” below) used to be part of traditional values. Nowadays it is the knowledge of these that is appreciated and valued just as is any traditional knowledge (of which there is little left).

Language loss and the loss of traditional knowledge have resulted in an increased value placed upon linguistic and cultural documentation of Tariana: the dictionary, the existing cultural description, the recorded and transcribed texts, and also web resources. Gradually, the focus is shifting from the spoken to the written word. But this is a topic for another study (see Aikhenvald 2013a).

THE TARIANA, THEIR RELATIVES, AND THEIR NEIGHBORS

For the Tariana, and for the other Vaupés people, humans are divided into two groups. *Nawiki* (lit. people) covers Indigenous people, or Indians. *Yalana* (one of the very few loans, coming from Língua Geral *yara* “man”) covers all non-Indigenous people and roughly correlates with the notion of “white man.” Note however that Asians and Afro-Brazilians are also *Yalana*.

The term for the Vaupés Indians is *Yeposana*, which is also the term for the Cubeo Indians (see Aikhenvald 2002: 22; and Brüzzi 1977; I have no explanation for this at present). That is, a Yanomami from way up to the northeast, or a Baniwa from the Içana River area, would be a *Nawiki* but not a *Yeposana*. A Desano would be a *Nawiki*, and a *Yeposana*. The *Yeposana* divide into *wa-ya-sawa* (1pl-POSS-CL:GROUP “our group”) and *pa:-sawa* (one/another-CL:GROUP “another group”). Normally, any Tariana—no matter what clan they belong to—will be referred to by the Wamiarikune as “our group.” “Another group” covers the non-

Tariana-speaking *Yeposana*.⁸ This nomenclature is remarkably similar across the Vaupés (see Brüzzi 1977). It is notably different from other Amazonian groups, for instance, the Panoans south of the Amazon who tend to have a special term for an “enemy group” (see Erickson 1986).

All the *Yeposana* are classificatory relatives (consanguineal, if they share the father’s language, or affinal if they do not). *Nawiki* are, in theory and sometimes in practice, marriageable. The *Yalana* stand apart from the *Nawiki*.

Anyone who uses recognizably foreign forms from an East Tucanoan language would be condemned as useless. In addition, a complex set of stereotypes is associated with the major group of the *Yeposana*, the Tucano. They, and their language, are perceived as a threat to Tariana (and rightly so) (see Aikhenvald 2002: 187–208, 2003b). However, with the language loss, some Tariana speakers are now becoming more tolerant of occasional switches into Tucano. Unlike about ten years ago, one switch will not earn you a label of “useless.” Regular switches will.

Those who code-switch with Baniwa (which is closely related to Tariana) and insert Baniwa forms into their Tariana are regarded as somewhat weird and may be made fun of. But if they use a Baniwa form that has a different meaning in Tariana and can be interpreted as wrong Tariana, they are called useless. The political stance of the Baniwa has become stronger since 2002 (when Baniwa was proclaimed to be one of the three official indigenous languages of the Upper Rio Negro, together with Língua Geral and Tucano). The Baniwa are reported to possess strong “poison” (Tariana *ya:ne*). Associating oneself with the Baniwa is fraught with danger of being suspect of having access to the poison.

The relationship between the Tariana, the “white man” (*Yalana*), and the “White man’s language” is uneasy. The white people—a dominant group—are identified with access to economic prosperity and education. (The term *yalanata* “to boss,” is derived from the *yala-na* [Non.Indian.person-SUFFIX:PEOPLE].) The white man’s language is a symbol of status (see Woolard 1989: 89 on this multifaceted notion) associated with desirable attributes that imply improvement in the quality of one’s life and access to goods, possible jobs, and so on. But centuries of negative experience in interactions with the white people (stereotyped as the “patron-peon” relationship going back to the tragic events of the rubber boom era: see Meira 1993 and Hemming 1987) have created a feeling of inferiority, dependency, and caution in regard to white people among Indians. In day-to-day discourse one finds that white people (especially men) are stereotyped as endowed with the undesirable qualities of greed and arrogance. These features are also assigned to those who overuse a white man’s language while speaking Tariana, and

8. The terms for other groups of *nawiki* that are not *Yeposana* include *Mayanaku-ne* for Baniwa in general, *ũhũ-nawiki* for the Hohôdene Baniwa, and *Werekhena* for the Warekena of the Xié river and surrounds. And there are of course terms for different groups of the *Yeposana*, e.g., *Desene* “Desano,” *hulipísi-ne* or *wiri-ne* (aphrodisiac-PL) “Barasano,” *kupheme-ne* (fish-PL) “Piratapuya,” *suruphe-ne* (clay-PL) “Tuyuca,” *panuma-pe* (one+mouth-PL) “Guanano,” *yase-ne* (toucan-PL) “Tucano,” *ye:-ne* (armadillo-PL) “Tatuyo.” The Makú people (*ma:ki-ni* “Makú,” including Hupda, Yuhup, Bara, Kakua, Nukak, and also Dâw) are sometimes talked about as *Nawiki*, but mainly discarded as being “like animals” in the jungle.

thus are perceived as go-getters trying to gain access to economic advantages of the “white man’s world.” They are condemned as “wanting to be better than us”—a dangerous attribute (see below). We now turn to our next topic: the language of value, or evaluation, which the Tariana use.

The language of “value”

The Tariana language is comparatively rich in the ways of talking about value and evaluation. We briefly go through the existing terms, and then draw some conclusions.

Good, proper, and straight

The adjective and stative verb *mača-* translated as “good” extends into “proper, correct, appropriate, real, fully accomplished.” A good-looking woman is *mača-ma* (good-CLASSIFIER:FEMININE). A nice, happy person is referred to as *mača ka-kale* (proper/good RELATIONAL-heart). An evil spirit will not harm (or do adverse things to) someone who is *mača*, “good person behaving properly,” as in (1):

- | | | |
|-----------------------------------|--------------|--------------------------|
| (1) <i>mača-ka-nuku</i> | <i>puaya</i> | <i>ma-ni-kade-pidana</i> |
| be.good/proper-SUBORD-TOP.NON.A/S | adverse | NEG-do-NEG-REM.P.REP |

“He (the evil spirit) does not do anything adverse if one behaves properly.”

A very common expression is *mača pi-ni* (be good/proper 2sg-do “be careful, behave appropriate, take care”). Verbs can form compounds with *mača-* (“be proper, be good”); the resulting form means “be really VERB,” as in *mača-hui* (be.proper-be.tasty “be really tasty ones”), *mača-puwhi* (be.proper-be.happy “be really happy”), *mača-nhesiri* (be.proper-like “really like”), *mača-kerā* (be proper-shine “be really shiny”), *mača-makara* (“be really dry” lit. good-dry, cf. English *good and dry* ground after the flood).

The adverb *mayakani* “straight, in a straight line, direct” also means “good, correct, right.” A person who is honest, follows the rules (that is, taboos) and behaves properly can be referred to with this term. Traditionally, women were not supposed to share male traditional knowledge (see below). Numerous place names had two versions: the one only used in the presence of women is referred to as “covert” (Tariana *napianipe*). The other was considered the correct one and could be used only by men in the presence of men; this form is referred to as *mayakani* (“straight, correct”). So, for instance, the covert name of the Ipanore Rapids to be used in the presence of women is *Pa-hwa-le-dapana* (lit. “the house where one lies”). The correct and straight name is *Miaka-dapana* (lit. “the house of yore”). (In my experience, those women who still speak Tariana are aware of both names, and now use the “correct” one.)

In Piapoco, an Arawak language closely related to Tariana but spoken in distant locations in Colombia and Venezuela, *machakani* (“right, straight”) also has the meaning of “correct.” This suggests that the association between correctness and following a straight line goes beyond the Vaupés area. The term for “correct,” *pa-wa-li* (IMPERSONAL-sound, play-NOMINALIZATION, literally “the one that sounds”) has strong positive overtones of doing something in a correct way (including language use) and following the societal rules.

The language of alterity: Bad, evil, and “different”

The major term for “bad, evil, adverse” is the adjective and stative verb *mač'i-* “bad, improper” (unlike its positive counterpart *mača-*, it cannot form compounds with verbs). An evil, nasty person would be referred to with this adjective. If one feels “bad,” it means not just physical discomfort: *mač'i di-rena* (bad he feels) very often refers to mental anxiety, and also to those who have been adversely affected by the evil spirit of the jungle.

In (2), the children of a man who did not come back from the jungle went to look for him and found his gun and his feces. For them, this was good enough evidence that somebody had done something bad to him, mostly likely an evil spirit:

- | | | |
|-----------------------------|--------------------|------------|
| (2) wha-niri-nuku | [ma: č'i-pu-nihka | na-ni-nhi] |
| 1pl+parent-MASC-TOP.NON.A/S | bad-AUG-REC.P.INFR | 3pl-do-ANT |

“They have indeed done something bad to our father” (we see the obvious evidence).

A plethora of terms with the meaning of “different, another, other way” are an alternative to *mač'i-*: they all have strongly negative overtones of something dangerous. These are the indefinite modifiers *pač'i* (“another of a different kind”) and *pa-* (“one, another,” also used in counting), stative verb *puaya* (“different, unfamiliar, adverse”) and adverb *puale* (“other side, elsewhere, somewhere else”). Numerous terms for “same” have no negative overtones. The notion of “different” as adverse can be linked to a broader vision of the condition of alterity, prominent in Amazonian cultures in general and encompassing various facets of potentially dangerous other, be it in the form of other Indian groups, supernatural entities of various sorts, the dead, white people, or women (see Henley 1996, for an overview and Descola 1986 on relationships between alterity, nature, and society among the Achuar of Ecuador and Peru).

Someone who is going through difficulties and is in a bad way will be described as being *puaya* (“in a different, and a bad way”). In the story about the origin of tobacco, the Creator said the following about his son-in-law, the Trickster Creator, who had to smoke simple leaves and lack tobacco that his father-in-law had in abundance:

- | | |
|------------------------|------------|
| (3) puaya-peri-na | ihya |
| adverse-COLL-REM.P.VIS | you.plural |
- “You are in an adverse way” (I saw it long time ago).

Along similar lines, if someone is possessed (eaten) by an evil spirit, he looks different (*puaya hiku*): this is a sign of something adverse. If someone is well behaved (and is *mača*), the evil spirit will not do anything *puaya* to them, as in (1) above. Menstruating women are considered dangerous (the late Graciliano Brito explained to me that the dangerous evil spirit *Ñamu* likes menstrual blood and so menstruating women are an easy target). A menstruating woman can be referred to as *inaru puaya alia-ka* (woman different/adverse EXIST-SUB “when a woman is in a different, adverse state”). The adverb *puale* (“the other way; on a different side” cognate to *puaya*) also has overtones of something adverse.

The indefinite *pa:či* (“other, of a different kind”) often refers to something dangerous, as in (4). Here *pa:či yaphini* (“something different”) refers to some unknown adversity.

- (4) *pa:či* *yaphini wa-na* *di-nu-mha*
 other.of.different.kind thing 1pl-OBJ 3sgnf-come-PRES.NONVISUAL
 “Something else (dangerous) is coming to us” (we cannot see it but we feel it: turned out to be the evil spirit).

Along similar lines, *pa:-* (“one, another”) often has overtones of something strange, unknown, and potentially dangerous. For instance, *pa-ma inaru* (one-CL:FEM woman) may mean “one woman,” “another woman,” but also “strange, foreign, potentially dangerous woman.” Further examples are in Chapters 11 and 26 of Aikhenvald (2003a).

In the Portuguese spoken by the Tariana and by Tucanoan-speakers, the terms *outro* (“(an)other”) and *diferente* (“different”) also have overtones of something dangerous, ominous, or straightforwardly bad. Saying “*Outra coisa tá vindo para nós*” (translation of [4]) has strong overtones of impending danger. This linguistic expression of what can be called “adverse alterity” is also reflected in attitudes and in behavior. There is no doubt that the Tariana value foreign (i.e., white man’s) clothing and also food—including chips, coke, and chicken, which are status symbols, something only rich people can afford. Yet local food is what one cannot live without (hence the positive overtones of the verb *kehwa* (“be used to, be brought up to use”). People who pride themselves in having access to white people’s goods are ridiculed as “wanting to be better than us” (see below).

These clearly negative overtones of being different go together with the culturally entrenched fear of “someone who is almost like us but not quite” widespread in the Vaupés cultural area (and described in C. Hugh-Jones 1979, among others). In the patrilineal and male-focused culture of the Vaupés, this goes together with some gender stereotypes.

Straight men, wayward women, and further expressions of value

We saw in the previous section that menstruating women are dangerous and therefore referred to as *puaya* (“different, adverse”). This goes with the fact that in most Tariana traditional stories women appear to be strange and dangerous beings who spoil everything (and are referred to as *manih̄ta-kad̄ite* [NEG+think/reason-NEG+NCL:ANIM] “the one who does not think”). For instance, one traditional story relates that because of women’s misbehaving, people have to suffer and work to get food. If a man dreams of a woman before going hunting or some other important event, this is a bad sign. There are numerous taboos to do with women being prohibited (under threat of death) from catching a glimpse of the Sacred Yurupary Flutes, which used to be their property and were taken off them by men. Women are not supposed to hear any words that contain the root *p̄iri* (“Yurupary flute”): other synonyms are employed in women’s presence, as a secret language (*ina: na-p̄ia-n̄ipe* [woman:PL 3pl-hide-NOM]) “what they hide from women”). According to Jorge Muniz (personal communication April 2012), the only able-bodied elder and healer from the community of Periquitos, women suffer birth-pains as a punishment for them trying to hold on to the Sacred Flutes. However, women are

not considered to be beneath men in any way: they are different and perhaps dangerous but not at all inferior (also see Aikhenvald 2013b).

The generic noun *čiarī* (“man”) has distinctly positive overtones: of courage, determination, and reason. People say it about themselves: Ricardo Brito, an elder from Santa Rosa, tells a moving story about how he managed to escape from a jaguar, and says that he’d said to himself, at a critical moment:

- (5) nuha-misini čiarī-naka
 I-TOO man-PRES.VIS
 “I am also a man.”

Saying (5) is like a self-encouragement, confirming that one is courageous and manly enough to overcome an adverse situation. In animal tales, a positive character (such as the turtle) says the same thing to himself, before he undertakes a strenuous task of killing a tapir.

The term for “woman” may acquire negative overtones if contrasted to *čiarī* (“man”) as in (6) from a story about the otter teaching his son how to be like himself—strong and courageous.

- (6) čiarī-naka inaru-kade-naka nhua
 man-PRES.VIS woman-NEG-PRES.VIS I
 “I am a man, I am not a woman.”

That is, women are a different, strange, and potentially dangerous other. They are *puaya* by nature. In many traditional stories, women are conceptualized as a “dangerous other,” and “those who do not think.” Women are to blame for the fact that manioc has a hard skin that is difficult to peel. Human sweat has a bad smell because women misbehaved with a smelly mucura rat. Until the establishment of a Tariana indigenous school in 2004, women—wives and mothers—used to be blamed for not transmitting language to the Tariana children. An anthropologist might want to link this to the fact that women have to come from *pa:sawa*, another group of Indians (who speak a different language), and are thus representatives of the dangerous side of alterity as a pan-Amazonian concept. Note that women are important as mothers, sisters, and daughters, and represent affinal relations as a basic dimension of “the cosmic relational matrix” in the society, using Viveiros de Castro’s words (2001: 19). They are dangerous as source of transformation and change. This is not uncommon: Gillian Gillison’s (1993) work on ceremonial role and status of women among the Gimi in the Highlands of New Guinea points in a similar direction.

Incidentally, women are blamed for language loss in other cultures. Alexandra Jaffe (1999: 103–8) focuses on the “discourse of culpability” among the Corsicans who identify women as “betrayers” of the indigenous language. The rhetoric of accusation in the Vaupés area is now gradually changing. That children can hardly speak or write Tariana is considered the fault of the school and of the teachers who are not implementing it properly. This is an instance of cultural change in explicitly formulated values. This shift in values due to a societal change can be compared to value reversal in the Yukaghir society as described by Rane Willerslev (2010), whereby women acquire a new role and a new status due to recent transformations.

A really important and respectable woman can be spoken about as if she were a man (this is also the case among the Jarawara, an Arawá-speaking group in southern Amazonia. See Dixon 2004: 287). The masculine pronoun is used to refer to such a woman. Members of the Brito family often switch to masculine when they talk about their mother Maria (a Piratapuya, an unofficial authority on cultural and even linguistic matters). In the origin myth told by the late Cândido Brito, a masculine pronoun is used to refer to the woman-creator Nanayo (see below).⁹

The Vaupés society, despite its inherently hierarchical clan structure, is egalitarian. Traditionally, there was hereditary division of tasks: warriors, shamans, dance masters, and slaves or servants all had their place in life (see further details in Aikhenvald 2002). At the same time, those who wanted to surpass others appear to have always been condemned as not behaving properly. A middle-aged Tariana was showing off his knowledge of Portuguese and bragging that he was eating “chicken every day” (we recall that chicken from a supermarket is a “status food”). He was ridiculed, as wanting to “surpass people” (*di-na-tha-ka di-yena* [3sgnf-want-FRUSTRATIVE-REC.P.VIS 3sgnf-surpass]). I was warned not to trust him. The same applies to any Indian who behaves too much like a *Yalana*, that is, a non-Indian stereotyped as a dangerous go-getter. This usage points toward a covert value judgment attached to being equal to others: if you step out of line, and have more than others, you are vulnerable to envy, sorcery, and “evil breath.”¹⁰ This reflects a tension between a desire to possess consumer goods and the danger behind overdoing things.

The verb *-na* (“want”) often has negative overtones: it implies *wanting* without *thinking* (that is, wanting with no reasoning; *anihta* “to reason” is a highly positive action). Someone who does something wrong or suffers through their own fault is said to have done it by “wanting” (*di-na-li*).

A positive or a negative quality can be emphasized by an augmentative suffix *-pu* (or *-pi*, by younger speakers), or *-pasi*. So, *inaru-pasi* (woman-AUGMENTATIVE) may refer to a “big woman,” or to a really appreciable beautiful and desirable woman, or to a desirable and beautiful woman who is dangerous (e.g., an evil spirit in the shape of a woman).¹¹

A special pejorative enclitic, *yana* (“bad, naughty”), can be used for negative evaluation of animate referents—from naughty children to the Tariana forefathers who were supposedly mucking around with other peoples’ wives and got themselves a nickname of Iñemi. This name appears in the literature on Tariana (Koch-Grünberg 1911). It is used by the Kumandene Tariana of Santa Terezinha

9. Older speakers continue to follow this convention; however, younger speakers (like Jovino Brito) question it, and seem not to be familiar with it.

10. The late Ismael Brito was an able handyman, and was running a sawmill in Iauaretê until his tragic death by drowning after a night of drinking in late 2008. The explanation for this given by his younger brother José Luis was as follows: Ismael became too important, as if he'd owned the sawmill; and it was other peoples’ sorcery that killed him.

11. This is different from other languages, including Portuguese and Spanish, where the augmentative has strong negative connotations.

as a term of abuse to refer to the Wamiarikune group (when a Wamiarikune is out of hearing), and translated into Portuguese as *diabo* (“devil”). The issue of value judgments of one Tariana group with respect to another lies beyond the scope of this study.

A further frequent means of negative evaluation is through the adverb *mēda* (“good for nothing, useless”). This takes us to the next section.

The value of language, and the value of speaker

Certain grammatical categories are more communicatively important than others. All the languages in the Vaupés basin have what is known as “evidentiality.” This means that in every sentence one needs to have a special suffix that indicates how one knows what one is talking about: whether one saw something, heard it, or felt it (as one “feels” an evil spirit in [4]), or inferred it, or assumed it, or simply was told about it (see Aikhenvald 2004 for a general overview and the details). This goes together with a cultural requirement *to be precise*, characteristic of the Vaupés societies, perhaps so as to avoid potential accusations of hiding something with bad intentions or worse—with being a sorcerer.

As in many other Amazonian societies, clear and precise expression is what defines a person’s worth. Among the Mamaindê, a Northern Nambiquara group from southern Amazonia, a typical way to refer to a “good, trustworthy person” is to call them “one who speaks well.” Someone who is “untrustworthy or of a questionable moral reputation is labeled as one who does not speak well” (Eberhard 2009: 468). In this case, and in many others, the correct use of evidentials is what signals a good speaker—and henceforth, a good, reliable, and trustworthy person. The same principle has been described for Huallaga Quechua and the Tariana and the East Tucanoan peoples in the Vaupés River Basin area (see Chapter 9 of Aikhenvald 2012a).

A major token of “correct” Tariana is the ability to use evidentials in the right way.¹² Those who use the wrong evidentials are *mēda-peni* (“those good for nothing, useless”). The late José Manuel Brito was sneered upon and said (behind his back) to be useless because he was not using the correct remote past reported evidential (due to his Baniwa background). So are those who do not know traditional lore (such as the story of the Origin of Tobacco, quoted above in [3]). The late Américo Brito was the only person to have actually seen the Offering Ritual, once highly important. As he got old and sick, he started using Tucano words thus committing a crime of mixing languages. I was then told that he was then *mēdite* (“a good for nothing, useless one”).

The adjective *mēdite* (animate singular), *mēda-peni* (animate plural), and further forms with different classifiers can refer to any person who does not “deliver” and are thus “good for nothing, useless.” Someone who cannot build a house properly or could not fish or hunt could in principle be referred to as *mēdite*. But the most frequent and usual meaning of this term with reference to people is “someone (normally a man) who is not up to scratch in their father’s language proficiency” and who does not know the traditional stories. In traditional

12. See details in Aikhenvald (2002: 213–20). “White people’s” language does not have to mark information source and many Indians comment that white people are not to be trusted because they never tell you how they know things.

stories, one hears about *mēda-peni-ma-pe ina*: (useless-PL:ANIM-FEM-PL women) referring to women who “do not think” and thus do wrong things to the detriment of others (and often themselves). (The opposite of *mēdite* is *mačaitē* “proper”.)

The same term can refer to inanimate objects if they are judged not good enough. An enormous parcel containing clothing that I’d sent to the Tariana from Australian was referred to as *mēda-da* (with classifier for round objects) because it did not contain any money. A river which does not lead to any village is referred to as *mēda-pua* (classifier for waterways). An island where no one lives and there is no game is *mēda-kere* (classifier for island), “an island good for nothing.” The term for uninteresting or nontraditional stories—or for gossip—is *mēda-peri kalisi* (“useless story”). A snake whose bite is not dangerous is described as *mēda-pidana dyuku* (uselessly-REM.P.REP 3sgnf+bite “it bites [reported long time ago] for nothing [with no result]”).¹³

The value of language, and discourse of nostalgia

The major terms referring to “value” in the sense of “evaluation” in Tariana follow a rather clear pattern. Approbatory overtones go together with the notions of correct, right, and straight. “Bad” and “dangerous” are associated with being different, and with various terms for “other” or “something else.” This partly goes against Sahlins’ thesis (2011) concerning the supreme value of the other: in actual fact, there is an ongoing tension between the desire for outside goods, and the fear of unknown, and thus dangerous, outsiders.

The most significant, and ever-present *other* are women. Womanhood is often associated with potential danger. In the exogamous Vaupés society, women always come from a different group than their husbands, something that goes together with being different (but in no way inferior).

Traditionally, someone’s standing in the community and value as its member has been strongly linked to their language proficiency, and also the knowledge of traditional lore. Rampant language loss among the Tariana (and other peoples of the Vaupés in Brazil) does not result in downgrading the value of the language. On the contrary: people strongly lament the loss of the “good old days” and “good old ways” of speech, producing something similar to what Jane Hill (1998) described as “discourse of nostalgia,” in her discussion of the bilingual communities around the Malinche volcano in central Mexico.

Talking about themselves, many people produce lamentations about “us poor things,” *waha-yana-pe* (we-PEJORATIVE-PL) (note the pejorative suffix here)—going on about how the proper migrations histories are not known any more and people are forgetting their father’s language. This discourse of nostalgia and quest for the olden days when the Tariana people could live up to the expectations of their ancestors is hardly a new phenomenon. The culture of laments was strong among the Tariana and other peoples of the Vaupés before contact and soon after it. During Offering feasts and when seeing each other after a period of absence, the Tariana would produce long lamentations with nostalgic overtones about good old

13. These forms are derived from the adverb *mēda*. This has two meanings: “in vain, for nothing” (and has a few synonyms, including *ka*, *kayka*, *ka:pu* and the frustrative modality) and “against all expectations, anyway.”

days and good old people now all but gone. This is documented in early anthropological studies (Brüzzi 1977; Koch-Grünberg 1911) and supported by the speech behavior of the few remaining traditional speakers I have observed in my own work. One reason for this practice is the reluctance to overtly talk about one's being well (for fear that evil spirits or malevolent shamans who might overhear you). Along similar lines, one never says, "I am fine" in Tariana: if one is to speak properly, one needs to say "I am fine, more or less/almost" and then start complaining about things that are wrong with you (see §26.3 of Aikhenvald 2003a).

The members of the high-ranking clans of Tariana who lost their language several generations ago (Koch-Grünberg 1911) concede that they speak a "borrowed" language (Tucano and now also Portuguese) and thus are not up to scratch. However, many (especially men) find it hard to accept that they are lagging behind the lower-ranking clans—the ones who still speak the language. I have overheard statements that the Tariana spoken by the Wamiarikune is not the original Tariana (Dominique Buchillet made similar reports, personal communication June 1999). The Kumandene Tariana (inhabitants of the village of Kapinawali, or Santa Terezinha, on the Iauari river, May 2012) plainly said that the Wamiarikune speak nothing but Tucano, and that their Tariana is far from pure—therefore they are not up to scratch.

The high-ranking Tariana know their genealogies better than the lower-ranking clans. Among them, the value of knowledge of one's genealogy is overriding the importance of the lost language, not in the least so because of interest, and support, of Brazilian and foreign anthropologists. We now briefly turn to the other side of value—that of monetary worth.

The language of worth: "White people" in the origin myth

Contact with white people in the Brazilian Vaupés goes back to the late eighteenth century. It is thus not surprising that the white people have been integrated in origin myths of various indigenous groups, albeit in different ways. As Stephen Hugh-Jones (1988: 141) put it, "for the Vaupés Indians, and presumably for many other tribal societies too, myth and history are not mutually incompatible but co-exist as two separate and complementary models of representing the past." These origin myths reflect the role and the status of the white people and especially the ways in which they manage to accumulate their money and possessions (viewed as their powerful attributes).

Numerous origin myths told by the Vaupés peoples and by the Baniwa speaking groups in the neighboring Içana basin present white people as having equality with the indigenous groups. In many versions, as people were created, the Creator kept calling different groups one by one, to come out of a hole at the Ipanoré rapids (the order in which different groups were called relates to their tribal hierarchies). The white people emerged together with the rest. According to the Ipeka-tapuya (Baniwa of Içana) version (narrated in Urubucuará/Ipanoré: Brüzzi 1994: 67–68), the white people came out first, bathed in the water, and acquired their light colored skin (making the waters of the Vaupés river black), and all their advantages with it. According to another Baniwa version, the white people, as soon as they came out, bathed in a pond full of gold powder; this accounts for their light colored hair and their riches.

According to a version told by Siuci and Hohôdene (Brüzzi 1994: 68; Cornelio and Wright 1999: 92; Marcília Fontes Rodrigues, personal communication 1991), the Creator (Baniwa *Napirikuri*, lit. “the one of the bone”) offered the first Indians and the first white people a shotgun. The Indians were afraid (Brüzzi 1994: 68), or they couldn’t use it (Cornelio and Wright 1999: 92; Marcília Fontes Rodrigues, personal communication 1991); while the white men could shoot well. As a result of this knowledge, as José Cornelio and Robin Wright (1999: 92) put it, “the White man has a shotgun, and with this has everything, he knows all and everything. This is why the White people have all the things. If our ancestors could shoot, everything would have been theirs,” and “this is why Indians were left behind” (Marcília Fontes Rodrigues, personal communication 1991). The savvy with which the original white people could handle one of their most powerful attributes—the gun—accounts for their economic supremacy. Similar versions are told by various groups in the Colombian part of Vaupés (see Hugh-Jones 1988: 143-45, for a composite version, involving the acquisition of a gun by white people as opposed to the bow acquired by Indians).¹⁴

The traditional origin myths of the Tariana did not have white people in them (Brüzzi 1994: 69); the various Tariana groups emerged—following a hierarchical order—out of the blood of Thunder. The story I recorded in 1994 did have white people in it. This version is rather different from the Siuci and the Hohôdene myths. The Female Creator (whose image is widespread in the Vaupés area) makes all the people emerge from water; the white people arrive later, and it is a white man who shows everyone else a valued item, whose nature is not explicitly stated. The white man knew what the object was, while the Indians did not recognize it. The Creator approved of this. As a result, Indians stayed as they were, with their Indian languages. The white people acquired white people’s language (*yalana-ku*). No further economic advantages or riches are mentioned (also see Aikhenvald 2003c):

(7) They (our ancestors) appeared in this waterfall, the ones (who were) to become the Tariana, after the White people were there, they appeared and stayed. “Who knows this?” they asked, the White man asked, our grandparent (i.e. ancestor) did not know what he meant. The ancestor of the White man knew, “This is what it is,” he said, he recognized (what the object was). “All right,” she (the Woman Creator) said, “then you will stay as you are, she gave the White man’s language to them; as for us Indians, all the groups, all our languages became different.”¹⁵

14. This resembles the origin myth of the East Tucanoan speaking Desano (Fernandes and Fernandes 1996: 175-76): the Grandfather made all the Indians emerge from the Waterhole. He then offered them five cups and put on display a hat (symbol of technical know-how), a gun and two more cups of eternal life. The ancestor of Indians drank from the five cups. The Ancestor of White men drank from the cup of eternal life, wiped his mouth, and got white skin. He then chose the hat and the gun—which is why white people have everything.

15. This version shares some similarities to the Origin myth of the Yucuna, also from the Arawak family (like Tariana), but only distantly related. In the Yucuna version, the Father-Jaguar (the Creator) created all peoples together. They were created without a

A somewhat different story was recorded from the same speaker in 1999, five years later. He was the only one knowledgeable enough to tell the origin myth. This version, given above in (4), is much more similar to the Baniwa one, and yet still rather different. White people are opposed to Indians on the whole as two distinct groups (this is very unusual in the Vaupés context). The Creator shows the Indians a coin (note the use of the Portuguese word for money, Portuguese *dinheiro*: this word, with a classifier for round things, refers to a coin), and asks him how much the coin is worth. He did not know, and this is why “we, Indians, will never have any money.” In contrast, when the Creator makes the Original White Man count how much the coin is worth, he does it well, saying: “The coin is worth this much.” As a result, the white people have become as they are, with lots of money, unlike the miserable Indians, who “couldn’t think” (which is the Tariana way of saying stupid) and thus will have to keep suffering:

(8) There were people, at the beginning there were two groups, there were us Indians (and) white people, white people emerged downstream, we Indians emerged upstream.

. . . Then she (the Woman Creator) asked the Indian, she put down one coin (*dinheiro*) there, she put down one coin. She started asking the Indian, “How much is this worth,” she said, he didn’t know, this is how we were to be, we Indians (to be) moneyless, this is how it was. The ancestor of the white man was there too, all (the people) were there, she ordered them to count, he got it right, he said: “This coin is worth this much.” “You are to become white people,” she said, “this way you are to become White people, you are to have a lot of money,” then we turned into Indians, we did not think, we Indians had no thinking altogether. We are to suffer this way.”

The white presence and the degree of development of the market economy in Iauaretê (the mission center of the Vaupés area) grew remarkably toward the end of the 1990s. Indians—like the late Cândido Brito—who live in Iauaretê depend more and more on their purchasing capacity; consequently, money becomes the central coveted asset. The culturally significant origin myth reflects this. Once again, the white people emerge as savvy and smart—these inherent properties account for their economic supremacy in the market situation. In neither of Cândido’s narratives is there any sign of a negative attitude toward the go-getter white people—rather, there is an overtone of admiration for their inherent knowledgeability and success. In contrast, Indians are viewed as inherently miserable “have-nots.” As Stephen Hugh-Jones (1988: 146) puts it, “such myths concern the recognition, interpretation and acceptance of White domination and by placing it at the beginning of time they present it as something inevitable and beyond human influence.”

The Western concepts of monetary riches and worth are making their in-roads into the life and into the language. However, we can recall that in day-to-day dis-

mouth. The Creator gave each of them a mouth and made them speak different languages, so that they could distinguish each other. He then called all the people, and told them to choose what they wanted. The White people took the guns (which the others rejected). They started speaking first and this helped them become numerous. After that, the Creator made different Indian groups (Jacopin 1977).

course those who want to have more and to be better off than their Indian relatives and neighbors are looked upon as arrogant go-getters, not-to-be trusted or taken seriously. This also applies to people who use too much Portuguese in their Tariana (or Tucano), as if to show off their familiarity with the world of the White Man—coveted and rich, but treacherous and unfriendly. The adverse alterity of desirable foreign goods and riches is counterbalanced by negative attitudes against those who want to surpass the rest (see above).

Language, value, and worth: A Vaupés perspective

Throughout the Vaupés area, language is the major badge of identity inherited through one's father. The principle of language-based exogamy hinges on language identification and language knowledge. Language proficiency (which implies knowing a language through and through) is in many ways a defining property of a trustworthy and "proper" person.

Traditional society used to be egalitarian: there was no division of classes of people based on how much they possessed. Hereditary division of tasks was reflected in certain skills (such as dances, warrior skills, and shamanic knowledge) being restricted to relevant groups. At the same time, subclans used to be—and are still remembered to have been—hierarchically organized based on the order of their emergence from the Wapuí rapids (see above). In numerous cultures, myth is not static: it shifts to reflect history and cultural changes. As Hugh-Jones (1988: 141) puts it, "although it is the essence of timeless tradition, myth is nonetheless subject to a constant process of change which allows it to keep pace with reality." It is nowadays the case that the most important asset—the language—survives only within a low-ranking group, the Wamiarikune. In 2000, the late Cândido Brito told us a revised version of the Tariana origin myth, which stated that the Wamiarikune were among the last ones to emerge, but that they were given the guardianship of the Tariana language over and above other groups because the last ones were the ones who excelled in knowledge. Cândido repeated the same story to his son Jovino Brito just before Cândido's death in early 2011 as a legacy to keep in mind. The value of language maintenance appears to be instrumental in creating a revised clan hierarchy, thus resolving a potential tension between being a lower-ranking clan and excelling in knowledge.

In Tariana, and in many other Vaupés languages, the notions of value span other semantic fields. What is "good" is also "proper, correct, and straight." What is not so good is "other" and "different."

The two versions of the Tariana origin myth show how the non-Indians (white men) and their riches and knowledge are now part of the lore. The white man's riches and attributes are coveted, but those who try and get too much of those are not to be trusted. The other is dangerous, no matter how attractive their possessions. In addition, the quest for consumer goods, and political positions and influence, changes the balance of power between young and old, creating hitherto unknown material inequalities. A tension between a quest for consumer goods and their potential danger remains unresolved. In a certain sense, it can be seen as a constraining factor against greed and getting too much power and competence in material matters (the explanation of the death of Ismael Brito illustrates this). The Tariana origin myths have been adjusted to incorporate the presence of the white

people, thus changing the perspective on values and valuation: the dangerous “other” is gradually becoming part of “us.”

Whether language loss and partial obsolescence of traditional marriage patterns will result in a diminished sense of cultural distinctiveness (as is the case with many indigenous minority groups in Siberia including the Yukaghir, as discussed by Willerslev 2007) is a matter for further study. Many of the revived traditional dances and patterns of face painting can be categorized as belonging to “Standard Average Vaupés” cultural complex. The distinctive Tariana practices are no longer remembered. This is also the object of discourse of nostalgia for some.

The overtones of value and worth in the Tariana language are typical for the Vaupés area. At least some of its features are typical for the whole of Amazonia. For many groups, language proficiency is a defining characteristic of a trustworthy and “proper” person. The notion of “good” is often associated with a “straight line.” The goods owned by the white man are highly desirable—but the white people remain a dangerous other.¹⁶ However, impending social changes, and especially language loss typical of most Amazonian groups are bound to affect the practical issues of evaluation and value.

Abbreviations

- 1 - first person
- 2 - second person
- 3 - third person
- ANT - anterior
- AUG - augmentative
- CL - classifier
- f - feminine
- MASC - masculine
- NEG - negative
- OBJ - object
- PL - plural
- POSS - possessive
- PRES - present
- REC.P.INFR - recent past inferred
- PRES.VIS - present visual
- REC.P.VIS - recent past visual
- REM.P.REP - remote past reported
- sgnf - singular nonfeminine
- SUBORD - subordinator
- TOP.NON.A/S - topical nonsubject

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¹⁶ Also see Albert 1988, 2000, and papers in Albert and Ramos (2000).

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La valeur du langage et le langage de la valeur. Une vue d'Amazonie

Résumé : Le concept de *valeur* est multiple. A de la valeur ce qui est considéré bon, approprié et souhaitable dans la vie humaine, et avoir de la valeur peut avoir des connotations économiques qui sont fonction du degré selon lequel des objets désirables peuvent apporter des avantages matériels. Dans cet article, je me concentre sur le tariana, une langue de l'aire linguistique du bassin du Vaupés au nord-ouest de l'Amazonie brésilienne. Je mets l'accent sur la façon dont la valeur de la langue comme marque d'identité est exprimée en tariana. Je me tourne ensuite vers l'expression de significations ayant trait à l'évaluation (« bon, juste, comme il se doit » et « mauvais, négatif, autre » ou « correct » et « incorrect »), avec un accent particulier sur le danger de l'autre, représentatif d'une perspective pan-amazonienne sur la condition de l'altérité. L'ampleur de la perte de la langue contribue à susciter des tensions supplémentaires entre la valeur traditionnelle de la connaissance de la langue et la situation moderne. Le concept de valeur monétaire a pénétré la société comme la langue suite à l'introduction de l'économie de marché au cours des deux ou trois dernières décennies. Ces résultats sont replacés en conclusion dans la perspective des langues et cultures amazoniennes en général.

Alexandra Y. AIKHENVALD is Distinguished Professor, Australian Laureate Fellow, and Director of the Language and Culture Research Centre at James Cook University. She is a major authority on languages of the Arawak family from northern Amazonia, and has written grammars of Bare (1995) and Warekena (1998), and *A grammar of Tariana, from northwest Amazonia* (Cambridge University Press, 2003), in addition to essays on various typological and areal features of South American languages. Her other major publications, with OUP, include *Classifiers: A typology of noun categorization devices* (2000), *Language contact in Amazonia* (2002), *Evidentiality* (2004), *The Manambu language from East Sepik, Papua New Guinea* (2008), *Imperatives and commands* (2010), *Languages of the Amazon* (2012) and *The Art of grammar* (forthcoming).

*James Cook University Australia
Language and culture research centre
The Cairns Institute Building D3-036,
PO Box 6811, Cairns
Queensland 4870
Australia
alexandra.aikhenvald@jcu.edu.au*