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Dossier “New perspectives on kinship terminology in Tupian and Cariban languages”

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Understanding the diversity of kinship systems and their respective terminology in indigenous lowland South American societies has been hampered in the past by a lack of descriptive and comparative work by ethnographers and linguists. This has resulted in the few particularly well-described indigenous societies having had a profound influence on our conception of ‘Amazonian’ kinship systems¹. However, a recent increase in the production and availability of new data on kinship systems in indigenous societies has opened new potential for advancing our understanding of the cultural diversity of Amazonia.

This dossier brings together linguistic experts in Tupian and Cariban languages with ethnographers working to carefully describe the social relations of individual indigenous societies in South America. The articles range from detailed ethnographic accounts of previously undescribed kinship systems, to linguistic reconstructions of kin terms and their systems in subgroups of the Tupian and Cariban language families. We argue that it is necessary to explore these systems from both an ethnological and linguistic perspective since much of the ethnographic subtleties of how kinship works is often lost on researchers primarily concerned with language data; while at the same time, much of the linguistic nuance present in these systems is often outside the purview of ethnographers. This tension has characterised kinship studies since Kroeber (1909) and Rivers (1914), and while some recent volumes (e.g. McConvell et al., 2013) have worked to bring these perspectives together, none have focused intensively on the kinship diversity of a single region. In order to fully understand the composition and development of kinship systems as both linguistic and social systems, a multidisciplinary and integrative approach is required.

This project has its genesis in a British Academy International Partnership Mobility Award (PM160281) awarded to Joshua Birchall and Fiona Jordan in 2016. Amongst knowledge-sharing activities, this funding allowed the editors to organise a workshop at the Museu Paraense Emílio Goeldi in Belém, Brazil, that brought together the authors of this volume’s chapters in February of 2017. The stimulating combination of linguistic and anthropological expertise across a defined cultural area allowed for fruitful development of contributor’s ideas. We are grateful to the Boletim do Museu Paraense Emílio Goeldi. Ciências Humanas for providing a publication venue for these papers, many of which present novel findings and unpublished data for the first time.

¹ See Viveiros de Castro and Fausto (1993).



We took a language-family approach and invited contributors working on Tupian (36) and Cariban (5) languages/communities; some contributors provided comparative perspectives spanning multiple languages. The map below provides approximate geographic centroids of the area where a language is spoken (Figure 1).

A number of articles in the dossier present reconstructions of kin terms for proto-languages using members of a branch of a linguistic family tree. These intermediate reconstructions are essential to inform later proposals for proto-languages that gave rise to the whole family, such as Proto-Tupí and Proto-Carib. The contribution by Felzke and Moore draws on ethnographic and linguistic data to discuss the kinship systems of speakers of the Tupian languages from the Mondé branch. After presenting a basic description of kin terms in Gavião based on their personal fieldwork, the authors compare these forms with those from Suruí (Paiter) and Cinta Larga to propose a tentative reconstruction of multiple kin terms in Proto-Mondé based on regular sound correspondences. Their study also helps to enrich our knowledge on certain social practices of Mondé peoples such as copaternity and also provides insights into the reconstruction of kin terms in Proto-Tupí.

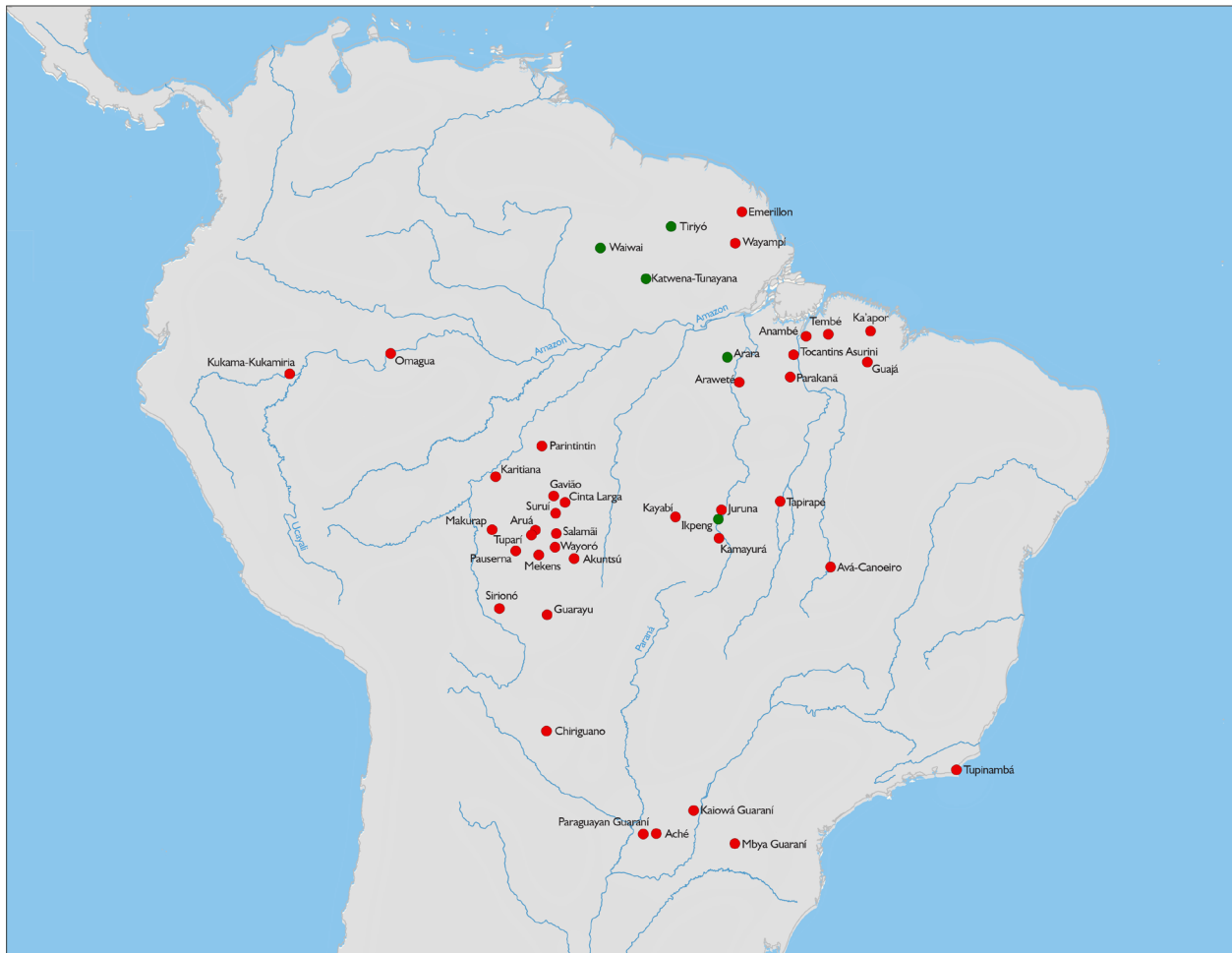


Figure 1. Tupian (red) and Cariban (green) languages covered in this dossier. The coordinates were obtained from Glottolog 3.3, with the addition of the Katwena-Tunayana centroid provided by Leonor Valentino. Map: Joshua Birchall (2019).

Nogueira, Galucio, Soares and Singerman compare first-hand and published data from five languages of the Tuparic branch of the Tupian family and identify cognate forms across the languages. They then propose a reconstruction of Proto-Tuparí forms for a number of consanguine and affine terms based on the traditional comparative method applied to systematic sound correspondences. The kinship systems described for these languages are then discussed in the context of modern Amazonian ethnology.

In the Tupian family, Proto-Omagua-Kukama's closest relative is Tupinambá, and O'Hagan uses a reconstruction of POK kin terms to suggest aspects of the cultural and linguistic changes in this wide-ranging and divergent branch of the family. He uses his fieldwork data on Omagua, and published sources on Kukama-Kukamiria and Tupinambá, to present the consanguineal and affinal terms in these languages and to provide POK reconstructions. In particular, O'Hagan demonstrates extensive structural levelling in POK of e.g. age and parallel/cross distinctions, identifies changes in form due to borrowing, and notes that the affinal domain undergoes more change than consanguineal. These careful comparisons provide examples of the kinds of shifts in meaning through structural change, innovation, and borrowing that inform our ideas of how kinship systems change.

Also working with the Tupí-Guaraní languages, Birchall, Oliveira and Jordan present a comparative analysis of the consanguine terms for the sibling and parent generations from a sample of 24 languages from this branch. Their typological comparison of the kinship systems across the languages highlights the incredible diversity in their respective structures, combating the notion that Amazonian societies, even within the same branch of a language family, show considerable homogeneity in their social organization. They apply a parsimony-based ancestral state reconstruction model to the collected data over a phylogeny of the languages to infer that Proto-Tupí-Guaraní had classificatory parent terms (MZ and FB) derived from the terms for mother and father, as well as relative age and sex distinctions in the sibling terms, which were also used for parallel cousins. By comparing the reconstructed system with the current state of linguistic reconstruction of the forms themselves, the authors are able to strengthen the claims made using typological evidence and demonstrate the feasibility of using this computational method to make inferences about the development of kinship systems over time.

Among the Cariban languages, Alves and Chagas provide a comparative study of the kin terms in Arara and Ikpeng, two closely-related languages from the Pekodian branch of the family spoken along the Xingú River. They draw on personal fieldwork data to describe and compare the referential terms in these two languages for both female and male referents. While often considered to be co-dialects of the same languages, the authors are able to describe a number of differences in the kin terms of Arara and Ikpeng, both in terms of their forms and their functions. Through comparison with a more distantly related Cariban language Tiriyó, they are able to infer which components of the kinship system are likely innovations and which are retentions from an earlier state of the language, allowing them to propose a first tentative reconstruction of the kin terms in Proto-Ikpeng-Arara.

Storto presents an expanded analysis of the kin terms of Karitiana, a Tupian language of the small and potentially early-branching Arikem subgroup. Previous work by Araújo and Storto (2002) examined 11 terms of this language in conjunction with terms from another top-branching language, Juruna. In that study, cognate reconstruction to a putative Proto-Tupí or Arikem-Juruna group was suggestive of a Dravidian system in the equation of parents with their same-sex siblings, and correspondingly, siblings with parallel cousins. In this note, Storto presents 19 further Karitiana kin terms. Her linguistic analysis supports the inference of a Dravidian system, and gives intriguing insights into embedded systems of namesaking and reciprocity across generations, as well as suggestions of avunculate marriage. These newly-reported

terms provide potential cognates to identify in other Tupian languages and this future work could help to verify the proposals regarding social organisation in early Tupian kinship.

Thompson's contribution is an exploration of the kinship terminology of the Aché (Guayaki), a Tupi-Guaranian group of eastern Paraguay. The Aché are well-known ethnographically, and their kinship practices have been of interest to both social and evolutionary anthropologists. Thompson's study intersects with a remarkable number of issues in Amazonian kinship and the field in general: he describes the 'Hawaiianization' of ego-generation terms as not merely a 'degeneration' from earlier (usually Dravidian) systems, but as indicative of changes in marriage norms. Using historical and ethnographic evidence, Thompson argues that these changes allowed for the expansion of allowable marriage partners outside the community, and not, as earlier theorists argued, the development of endogamy.

The study by Valentino presents a first description of kinship terminology and practices of the Katwena and Tunayana, two ethnic groups from northern Amazonia that speak closely-related varieties of the Cariban language also spoken by the Waiwai. The referential and vocative terms in Katwena-Tunayana are presented alongside the corresponding forms in Waiwai, and also discussed with regard to their place within the typology of Amazonian kinship, especially within the Dravidian prototype. Additional important information is also provided related to their social organization, such as post-marital residence, spousal preferences and teknonymy, which help to better understand the system of kinship within Katwena and Tunayana society.

As editors, we are delighted to bring together a set of contributions that represent deep study of particular cultural contexts – often with kinship terms and their analysis presented for the first time – alongside comparative work that builds on existing scholarship in new ways. We thank all our contributors for their hard work and generosity, and acknowledge the speakers of these languages, past and present. Taken together we hope these papers provide insights for anthropologists and linguists into each other's approach, as well as introduce newcomers to the diversity of social and linguistic processes that are at play in the kinship systems of South America.

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