EXPLORATIONS IN THE ETHNOGRAPHY OF SPEAKING

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LANGUAGE IDENTITY OF THE COLOMBIAN VAUPÉS INDIANS

JEAN JACKSON

In the Vaupés territory of southeastern Colombia[1] are over twenty exogamous patrilineal descent units, each of which is identified with a distinct language. In the literature on the Vaupés, these units have always been called 'tribes.' Although no single generally accepted definition of tribe exists,[2] those most frequently offered in the literature are concerned with the presence of factors such as (1) tribal territory; (2) political, ceremonial, or warrior roles as tribesmen; (3) more intra-tribal as opposed to intertribal interaction; (4) some proportion of marriages occurring within the tribal unit; and (5) some cultural differences between neighboring tribes. None of the definitions utilizing these factors permits calling the Vaupés units tribes; at present these units mainly function as marriage classes, even though they are each identified with different languages. Hence, thinking of them as tribes is misleading and in this paper they are called 'language-aggregates.'

This paper is concerned with the role language plays in the Vaupés as a symbol of membership in a language-aggregate, and with the relationship between language and Vaupés social structure. The first section gives a brief ethnographic introduction and description of Vaupés multilingualism. The second section analyzes Vaupés languages as emblems of the language-aggregates and as badges of identity for individual Indians. Finally, some ways in which the Vaupés data apply to some of the current issues on sociolinguistics and the ethnography of speaking are suggested.

Vaupés multilingualism: ethnographic background

The Vaupés is in tropical rainforest and is known for its treacherous, rapids-filled rivers. Travel and transportation are by dugout canoe or jungle trail. All Indian settlements are on or near rivers, and all Indians except the nomadic Makú (who are not considered in this paper) are excellent rivermen. Indians are semi-sedentary swidden horticulturalists, the women growing bitter manioc and other crops, and the men hunting and fishing. Multifamily longhouses are the traditional units of settle-

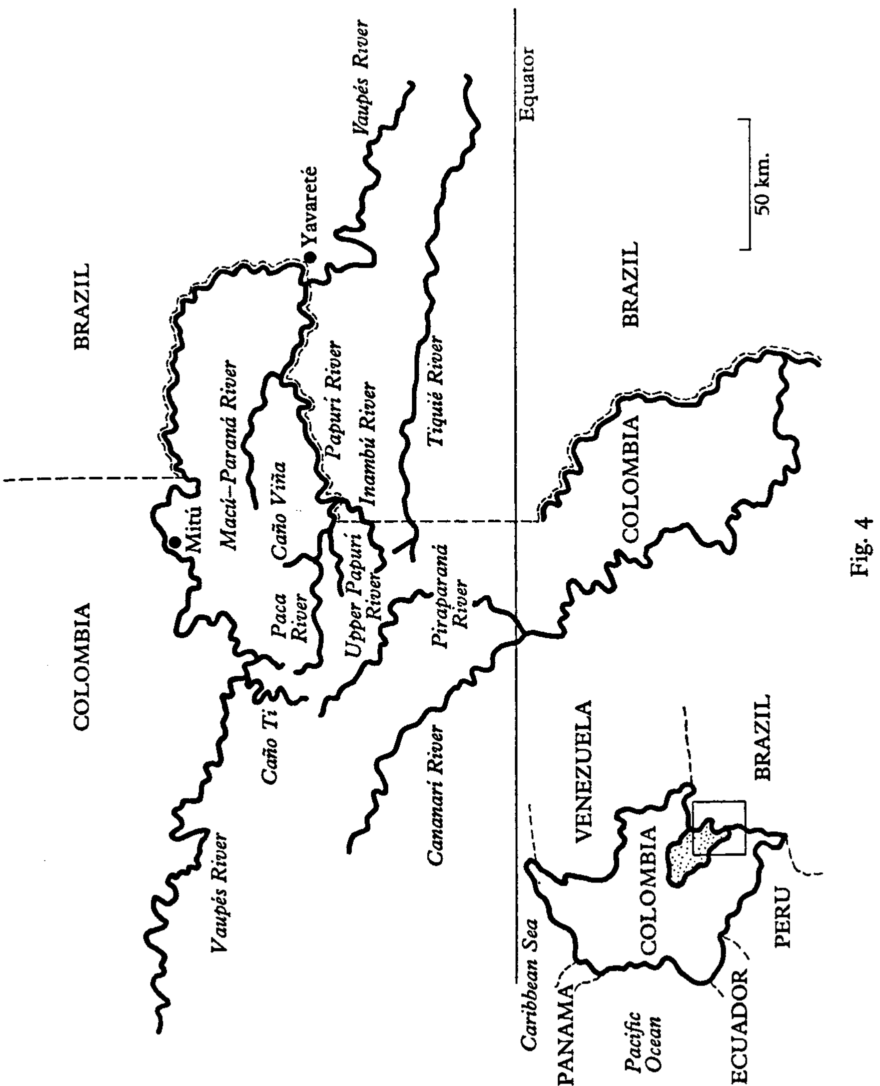


Fig. 4

I	1														2		3
II	Bará											Tukano	Yurutí	etc.	Tuyuka	etc.	etc.
III	*wai maha*				*waiñakõroa*			*wamutañara*			etc.	(approximately 30 sibs)	etc.		etc.		etc.
IV	A (*bará yóara*)	B	C	etc.	M	N	O	P	Q	R	Z						

Explanation of levels

I. Phratry — An unnamed unit composed of various language-aggregates. Members of a phratry do not intermarry and state that a sibling relationship exists between co-members.

II. Language-aggregate — What is commonly referred to as 'tribe.' Membership is determined by a rule of patrilineal descent, and members share a 'father-language.'

III. Sib — Named groups occupying one or more longhouses along a stretch of river. Sibs are ranked, and membership is determined by patrilineal descent.

IV. Local descent group — Co-agnates who are one another's closest agnatic kin who share the same settlement (usually a longhouse). Can be coterminous with the sib.

Explanation of capital letters in level IV

These represent current locations of local descent groups who are known by their settlement name. The sib name is permanent, but the settlement name changes when the local descent group moves its longhouse site.

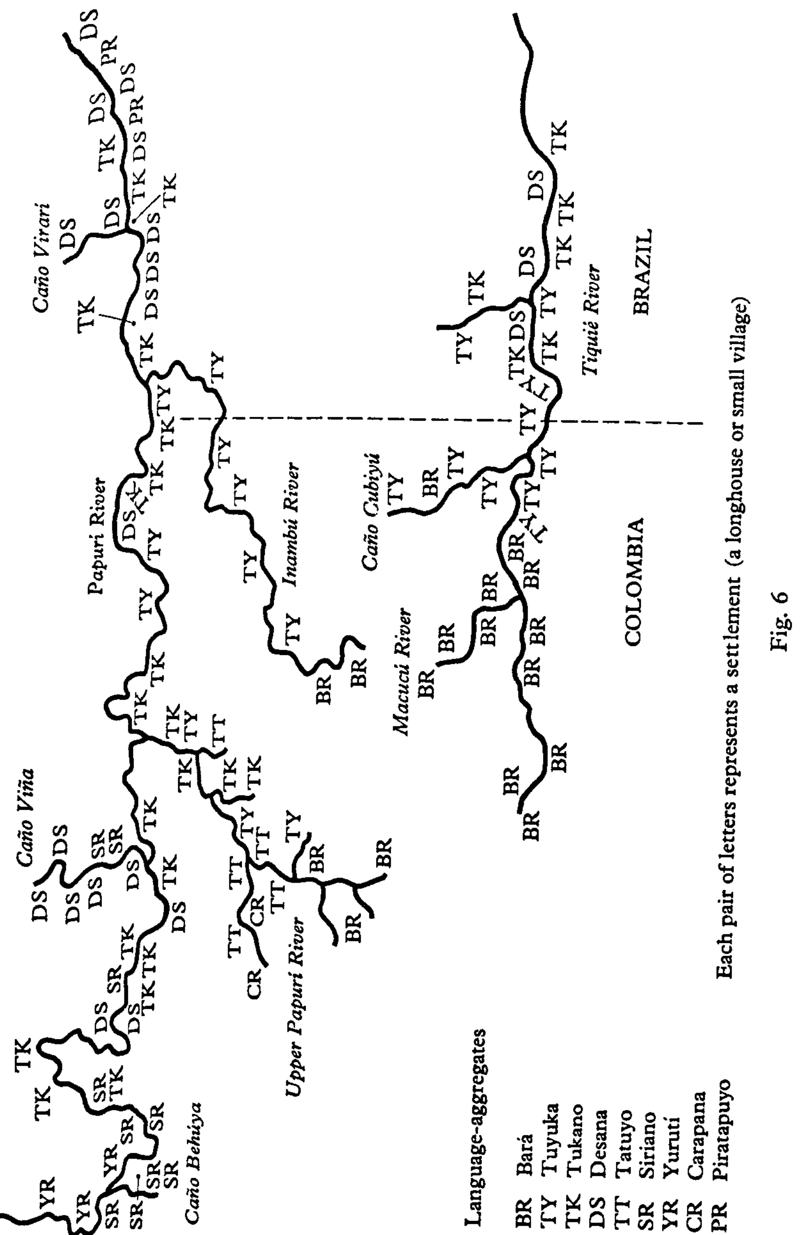
Fig. 5

ment, and are from two hours to a day's travel apart. Residence is patrilocal, with from four to eight nuclear families inhabiting a longhouse.[3]

Vaupés social structure is segmentary, and follows a rule of patrilineal descent (see Fig. 5). Its units, in ascending order of inclusion, are the local descent group, the sib, the language-aggregate, and the phratry. The unit we are concerned with, the language-aggregate, is a named patrilineal descent unit identified with a specific language (henceforth its 'father-language'), the members of which: (1) observe a rule of exogamy, (2) terminologically distinguish agnates from other kinsmen, and (3) identify with co-members as 'brother-people.' Membership is permanent and public; the one fact which will be known about an Indian before anything else will be his language-aggregate membership. If he marries a woman from far away, this is often the only information some of his relatives will have about her.

It should be stressed that Vaupés language-aggregates do not occupy discrete territories (see Fig. 6). Nor are language-aggregates corporate groups in any sense. The vast majority of interaction situations occur between Indians of more than one language-aggregate. Furthermore, all Vaupés Indians, regardless of their language-aggregate membership, share a strikingly homogeneous culture. The few differences which coincide with language-aggregate boundaries besides the possession of a distinct name and language are separate semi-mythical founding ancestors and rights to manufacture certain ceremonial objects and use certain intangible property, such as chants and names.

Indigenous languages spoken in the Vaupés include those of the Eastern Tukanoan, Arawak, and Carib families (Greenberg 1960; Sorensen 1967). Information on Vaupés languages is sparse. Some publications by early travellers and missionaries are available (Koch-Grünberg 1909–10; Brüzzi 1962; Giacone 1965; Kök 1921–2) which consist of word lists and Tukano grammars. Linguists of the Summer Institute of Linguistics, which has for some time maintained a group of fieldworkers in the Vaupés region, consider all languages of the Vaupés to be mutually unintelligible (personal communication from Betty West). The only other linguist who has published his results, as well as the only one to carry out systematic comparative research, is Sorensen (1967, 1969, 1970), who also affirms the mutual unintelligibility of Vaupés languages. The most closely related pair is 'considerably more distant . . . than Jutish is from Standard Danish' (1967:674). He states that Tukanoan languages seem to be less closely related than Central Algonquian or Romance languages. Areas of differentiation include grammar and lexicon and, to a lesser extent, phonology. However, Sorensen did not construct formal tests to explore degrees of mutual intelligibility,



Each pair of letters represents a settlement (a longhouse or small village)

Fig. 6

relying on direct interrogation of informants with respect to mutual unintelligibility and on listening for comments from Indians when they weren't understanding a language being spoken. The problem of intelligibility is further complicated by the presence of multilingualism in all Indians. With the exception of some Cubeo (many Cubeo are bilingual or multilingual according to Goldman 1963), all semi-sedentary Indians in the Vaupés are multilingual. All speak fluently at least three languages, many speak four or five, and some understand as many as ten.

Since there is much communication between Indians with different father-languages, a question arises with regard to defining and delimiting Vaupés speech communities. According to Gumperz, a speech community is '... any human aggregate characterized by regular and frequent interaction by means of a shared body of verbal signs and set off from similar aggregates by significant differences in language usage' (1968, quoted from 1971:126). It should be stressed that a speech community is a socially derived concept and is not defined by the characteristics of the referential structure of the particular linguistic code or codes used in communication. Hymes (1962) also points out that the homogeneity or boundaries of a linguistic code do not necessarily delimit a speech community. Overall frequency of interaction is not the only defining feature of a speech community; since all of the speech varieties employed within the community are related to a shared set of social norms, they necessarily compose a system of verbal behavior (see Gumperz 1968).

Using this definition, the entire central Northwest Amazon, including Brazilian territory, can be thought of as a multilingual speech community. The specific verbal repertoires of Indians and the code matrices of the settlements are results of the operation of cultural rules and patterns which are shared by all Indians, regardless of the languages involved. The most important of these relate to marriage exchange, rubber camp experiences, personal friendships, and trade relationships. For example, some marriages occur between individuals whose natal settlements are ninety linear miles apart. Thus the Vaupés can be seen as a single network of intervisiting and intermarrying settlements (see Goodenough, 1971:1).

Another way to describe the Vaupés is to consider the territory characterized by lanuage exogamy as a speech *area* (Hymes 1967:18 and Sorensen 1967:677, following Neustupny's *sprechbund*). All Indians share rules for speech, even though some Indians' verbal repertoires do not overlap (lack of overlap is rare, however, because of the use of Tukano as a lingua franca). If the Vaupés, or the entire central Northwest Amazon, is a speech area, then the individual settlements – longhouses or villages – are its speech communities (see Sorensen 1967:682). Although longhouses can have as few as two nuclear families, they are nonetheless multilingual speech communities.

The Indians who reside there are always affiliated to more than one father-language, and more than one language is used in many speech acts. Furthermore, no rules create rigid boundaries, geographical or otherwise, which result in predictable combinations of languages; hypothetically, all combinations are possible in either the repertoires of individual Indians or longhouses. This is almost the case if the possible combinations of father-languages represented by the inhabitants are being considered. Because of the operation of patrilocal residence rules and phratric principles, some languages will not co-occur as father-languages at the same settlement. For example, Bará Indians cannot marry Tukanos and thus no longhouses can be found where both Bará and Tukano are present as father-languages. Because of demographic factors and marriage patterns, there is an effective limit of five father-languages represented at a single longhouse at present. Unless the rule of patrilocal residence has been broken, this means that as many as four different father-languages can be represented by the in-married women at the longhouse.

Vaupés multilingualism contrasts in several ways with multilingual situations thus far reported. However, it should be noted that much more research is needed, particularly in areas where total bilingualism or multilingualism is the rule rather than the exception. Therefore, it is difficult to speculate on how atypical the Vaupés situation will seem after more knowledge about multilingual communities has been acquired and generalizations have emerged. While we know of situations where the majority of people are bilingual, such as South India (Gumperz 1964; Gumperz & Wilson 1971), Norway (Blom & Gumperz 1972), and Paraguay (Rubin 1968), and about style-switching within a single language, such as New York English (Labov 1966), much more research should be carried out in regions similar to the Vaupés such as interior South America, Australia, and New Guinea,[4] where the linguistic situation might resemble the Vaupés more than can be ascertained from the literature available. For example, no longer can we conclude that multilingualism is lacking in tribal societies unless they maintain trade relationships with outsiders or have specialized languages for ritual (Gumperz 1962). However, whether or not the Vaupés is unique in all, some, or none of the atypical characteristics exhibited by its multilingualism cannot be concluded at present.

To begin with, the degree of multilingualism in the Vaupés, in terms of number of languages, verbal repertoires, and speech itself, is unusually extensive. Estimates of population are approximate, ranging from 5280 for the Colombian Vaupés (Rodríguez 1962) to 10 000 for the entire central Northwest Amazon (Sorensen 1967:670). That within this number of people are more than twenty language-aggregates, each representing a language, is without doubt quite unusual, especially considering the dispersed settlement pattern and the low population density, which is estimated at 0.2 inhabitant per square kilometer, including non-Indians (*Atlas de Colombia*, p. xiii). It is apparently unnecessary to have either a high population density or a large number of speakers per language as preconditions for multilingual speech communities.

Even considering only the father-languages of Vaupés settlements, both the Vaupés as a whole and any region within it (regardless of how internal boundaries are drawn) are multilingual. All settlements are multilingual, as well as all semi-sedentary Indians (with the exception of some Cubeo). Fig. 6 illustrates the father-language affiliation of settlements in a region of the Vaupés. A map showing language distribution which illustrated the father-languages of all inhabitants of each settlement would be far more complicated, and still more complicated would be a map of language distribution which considered the total code matrix of each settlement.

Another point is that in the Vaupés, language is by far the most important marker distinguishing the language-aggregates and their members. It is primarily the Bará language which all Bará Indians share and which separates them as a category from Indians affiliated to other languages. In most other multilingual situations which have been reported on, language is but one of several such markers, others such as physical characteristics, dress, differences in technology, eating patterns, etc., being of equal or greater importance, at least in the eyes of the natives. As stated above, formal language affiliation in the Vaupés is determined by membership in a named patrilineal descent group, which also confers the right to manufacture certain ceremonial artifacts (this is limited to adult men) and to use various chants and names associated with the language in its role of father-language. No other differences exist which coincide with language-aggregate membership, regardless of whether one is looking for markers used by the Indians themselves to classify one another or looking for more subtle differences the Indians may not be aware of or choose not to acknowledge. For instance, ranking, whether of an overt or partially concealed nature, of the social groups which are associated with distinct codes is common (see Ferguson 1959; Lambert 1967; Labov 1966), but is lacking in the Vaupés. Ranked social groups do occur in the Vaupés, but stratification is not a component of the language-aggregate system. Indians not only deny, but are antagonistic to suggestions that language-aggregates are differentially valued or that members of a given language-aggregate are superior or inferior in any way by virtue of their membership. (For a discussion of the mild prestige claimed by Tukano Indians, as well as evidence of ranking within exogamous phratries, see Jackson 1972). As would be expected in such a situation, Vaupés languages are not differentially esteemed or stigmatized, and there is resistance on the part of Indians

to suggestions that such invidious comparisons might be made. The Vaupés supports Gumperz' assertion that 'The common view that multilingualism... also reflects deep social cleavages is clearly in need of revision' (1969:447). Given that the language-aggregates are the exchange units in a prescriptive bilateral marriage system, a lack of hierarchical differentiation is to be expected.

Another way in which the Vaupés differs from many multilingual situations that have been reported on is in the nature of the sociolinguistic rules prescribing selection of language in speech. In many other multilingual situations a single code is used for encounters between people who are identified with more than one language or dialect, regardless of whichever others they may have in common. Sometimes the language (or dialect) used is the first language of neither and yet one of the speakers understands the first language of the other. In situations involving dialect differences, speakers of separate dialects will use a more standard form with each other yet slip back into regional or class dialects with members of their own group. In situations involving languages, French or Mandarin Chinese, for example, will be used in situations where both speakers want validation of their membership in the educated elite, even though one of the speakers understands the first language of the other. In other cases, situational constraints rather than speaker identity determine the choice of code. These are such factors as setting, activity, topic, or role of participant (see Ervin-Tripp 1972). An example is the use of Latin or Hebrew in religious ceremonies. In the Vaupés, the rules which determine the selection of language do take into consideration situational constraints such as location, etc., but these rules always operate in conjunction with the particular father-language identities of the participants (as well as, of course, with other components of their individual identities, such as sex and age). Intelligibility for all participants is not always the paramount consideration; thus situations arise where the father-language of the host longhouse is used even though it isn't understood by all those present. For example, the rule governing which language to use to a shaman would be stated, 'Use a shaman's father-language, when known, out of deference to him' and not something like, 'Use Siriano when conversing with shamans' (implying that Siriano is the language of shamans or something to this effect). The one exception to the generalization that Vaupés languages lack role specificity is that Tukano is a lingua franca; all Indians will use Tukano in certain types of situations, regardless of their own father-languages or whichever languages besides Tukano the participants in a given speech event share. However, when Tukano is not being used as a lingua franca but as the father-language of some of the participants, it too lacks role specificity.

Code-switching in Vaupés speech is undoubtedly meaningful – the switch

itself conveying information – just as is initial selection of code. However, to determine the meaning intended by switching we must know the rules governing such switches, how flexible their implementation is, and the language identity of the participants. I have been with women who said, 'Let's speak Tukano' and did so for a period of time, even though none of them had Tukano as a father-language and all spoke both Bará and Tuyuka as well as Tukano. In order to know the meaning behind such a switch, we must know that no woman present was Tukano as well as knowing the rules governing such conscious and arbitrary (and playful) switches to other languages. Depending on the identities of the participants, such a switch may be made out of politeness in one instance and in another out of a wish to vary the conversation through code-switching.

In conclusion, the aspects of Vaupés multilingualism most germane to the topic of this paper are the following: (1) the extent of multilingualism – in individuals, in speech situations, and in almost all social groups or categories (e.g., the longhouse, a group of neighboring or inter-visiting longhouses, a region in the Vaupés); (2) the problem of defining and delimiting the units of communication – what is the nature of the speech community in the Vaupés? – since to a certain extent the entire central Northwest Amazon is a single network of interacting individuals and groups; (3) the absence of specific roles and differential native evaluations of the various Vaupés languages; and (4) the lack of correlation between linguistic diversity and non-linguistic cultural diversity.

Language as a badge of identity in the Vaupés

BADGES AND EMBLEMS

Barth (1964, 1969) discusses badges of identity, which he refers to as 'diacritica.' In a system characterized by a high degree of interaction among different categories of people, the differences between the interacting social units are standardized, and, consequently, highly stereotyped. The more such units interact and the longer the period of interaction, the more these units become structurally similar and differentiated only by a few clear diacritica. The total inventory of cultural differences is reduced, but the differences which remain, because of their new role as badges or emblems of identification with distinct social groups, become more important. Badges and emblems of identity can be seen as a kind of message, the successful transmission, reception, and decoding of which is necessary to the interaction taking place. The particular differences which are assigned the role of information-bearing message often change in directions which increase their visibility, unambiguity, and discreteness – the characteristics that can be seen to facilitate the successful transmission of the message

that badges and emblems are intended to send. Another obvious requirement for successful communication of information is that the sender and receiver of a message see it as important enough to warrant their time and energy. When specific cultural differences assume the role of badges, their form and content become quite significant to the people using them to classify themselves and others around them yet frequently are judged by outsiders as trivial, superficial, and overemphasized. The *features* which render each badge distinct from others in the set can become highly charged with meaning, both for the individuals who belong to the category the badge represents and for members of other categories. Such meaning may have a negative or positive value. Similarly, the *dimension* within which all of these distinctive features are contained can also become highly significant; it is this significance which often appears exaggerated to the outsider. In the Vaupés, the dimension is the one of language or linguistics, and the features are those linguistic elements which are seen by the Indians as making Vaupés languages mutually unintelligible. Vaupés Indians assign great importance to all aspects of language and see much of their social structure as modelled after and explicable by the linguistic varieties present in the Vaupés and the criteria used to distinguish them.

Much of the sociolinguistic literature deals with the ways in which individuals send and receive information about social identity through the use of language. Most of this work is concerned with speech behavior itself; some studies have concentrated on the way in which speakers themselves are aware that speech can indicate social status (Labov 1966). Many anthropologists have noted in passing that speech provides clues to distinct social and ethnic identities,[4] and Blom notes that

> differences in speech between various kinds of groups that are in frequent contact are not in themselves responsible for the establishment and maintenance of social boundaries. These differences rather *reflect* features of social organization through a process of social codification (1969:83).

Multilingualism studies have pointed out two ways in which social identity is signalled by the use of distinct languages, both of which are important to understanding the Vaupés case. First, an individual's speech can be an indicator of social class, ethnic or regional background, economic mobility, etc. Much of the literature on this topic is concerned with how the speaker will consciously or unconsciously send signals about his social identity, and how the receiver, also consciously or unconciously, will interpret these signals. Second, an individual's formal affiliation to a language is a component of his social identity. To the degree to which this is public knowledge, it will be a factor in his interactions with others, regardless of the

way he speaks. Obviously this second way in which a language signals social identity requires that the interacting parties be aware of the language each formally represents. However, how one individual evaluates his own linguistic affiliation may differ from how others evaluate it: most Germans probably differ from most Frenchmen regarding the privilege of identifying with German as opposed to French as one's mother-tongue.

VAUPÉS LANGUAGES AS BADGES OR EMBLEMS

Any anthropological research carried out in the Vaupés must eventually concern itself with questions such as the following: Why are over twenty languages spoken, given (1) the small numbers of Indians identified with each language, (2) the low population density, (3) the homogeneous culture throughout the region, (4) the lack of stratification along language boundaries, and (5) the lack of role specificity for the various languages? Why do Indians learn at least three languages, and some as many as ten, when they could all communicate in Tukano? Why do some places have separate names in all the languages? Why do Indians so strongly emphasize the mutual unintelligibility of the languages? It is very unlikely that such questions can be answered without postulating that Vaupés languages are emblems of the language-aggregates and badges of membership in them for individual Indians. The possession of a distinctive father-language is important because the language-aggregates function as discrete units in the distribution of women.

In some situations in the Vaupés, the public display of language-aggregate identity through actual speech occurs. Sorensen gives an example: 'Each individual initially speaks in his own father-language during such a conversation in order to assert his tribal affiliation and identification.' (1967:678). An Indian who is publicly acknowledging his language-aggregate membership is reaffirming this aspect of his social identity the vast majority of the time, rather than announcing a hitherto unknown fact about himself. Indians normally interact with other Indians whom they have known for a long time, and language-aggregate membership is permanent and unambiguous (i.e., there are no 'marginal members,' boundary crossings, or dual memberships). Furthermore, this membership is the one fact which will be known about an Indian before any other, and therefore the speech behavior exemplified in the above speech act rarely informs other Indians of something they don't already know. Thus, the fact that very few speech events allow an Indian to signal his language-aggregate identity in the manner of the above example does not indicate that language-aggregate identity is not an extremely important aspect of Vaupés life. There is no need to continually remind one another of this particular aspect of social identity, and thus in most situations and in

all informal speech events various other sociolinguistic rules determine which languages are to be used.

Linguistic data show the close association between statements about language and statements about language-aggregate membership, which is evidence that languages serve as badges of such membership. For example, the question *ñe wadegű niti mü*, which glosses roughly as 'What (male) language-speaker are you?' invariably elicits a response about the interlocutor's language-aggregate membership. There is no ambiguity about the intention of the question as it stands in Bará. A Bará male will answer: *yü ni baráyü* 'I am Bará,' or *(yü-)ye waderá ni bará* 'My father-language is Bará.' These inquiries about language-aggregate membership are grammatically quite distinct from inquiries and response about speech itself, such as *ñe wadegáti mü* 'What do you say?' or *nohkõro waderá mahiti mü*? 'How many languages do you know (how to speak)?'

Verbal evidence from informants indicates that Indians are aware of the emblematic nature of Vaupés languages with respect to language-aggregate identity. An example of this is from a conversation which I had with a Bará Indian about the relationship between sibling terminology and marriage rules. I was hoping to get an explicit genealogical explanation of the rule of exogamy as it applies to all Bará Indians, such as 'We are all brothers because we descended from a common ancestor and therefore don't marry our sisters.' However, after preliminary comments relating marriage rules and kin terms (such as 'We don't marry our sisters'), the fact of language affiliation immediately entered the picture. What emerged was something like: 'My brothers are those who share a language with me. Those who speak other languages are not my brothers, and I can marry their sisters.' Another time, when I directly asked an Indian why they spoke so many languages rather than relying on Tukano exclusively, he answered, 'If we all were Tukano speakers, where would we get our women?'

That Indians consciously try to maintain linguistic boundaries when speaking is further indication that language is the main badge of language-aggregate membership. Sorensen states that languages appear to be kept fastidiously apart, and that when two languages are closely related an Indian will 'carefully and even consciously keep them apart' (1967:675). Sorensen also states that an Indian will not attempt to speak a language he is learning until he feels quite competent to speak it correctly. This suggests that interference in speech from a father-language or another language in an individual's repertoire is socially disapproved of. I observed instances where women were scolded for allowing words from other languages to creep into conversations which were being held in Bará. Other Indians would comment that such women were not setting a good example

for their children, who should learn to speak their father's and mother's languages correctly. Occasionally such language mixing would be overtly criticized because of my presence, with remarks to the effect that I would shame the longhouse if I learned to speak Bará with Tuyuka words. I did not collect data which measured the amount of interference taking place and the frequency with which interference was criticized by other Indians. It seemed clear that when a word from another language entered a person's speech and was seen by those present as a mistake, i.e., was defined by the Indians as interference, such speech was not approved of. It was my impression that it would be hard to obtain objective measures of what Indians considered to be mistakes, however. I was surprised several times to find that a word which was frequently used in Bará was considered by the Indians to be a Tuyuka word, and definitely not Bará. When asked, Indians would always know the Bará word, and they would have a reason for preferring the Tuyuka word. More importantly, I would be reassured that 'everyone *knows* it's a Tuyuka word.' This suggests that Indians are aware of intrusive words in their language's lexicon, but that this is accepted as long as the co-occurrence rules which separate one language from another are not seen as breaking down. Undoubtedly the emphasis on speaking a language 'purely' varies with the situation; it is my impression that women can get away with more unintentional switching in relaxed discourses than is allowed in settings which involve men and are more formal.

It is probably the case that while the lexicons of languages in the Vaupés are changing because of contact with other languages, there are nevertheless strict co-occurrence rules which are operating at any given time which maintain the languages as separate categories in a specific individual's or group's repertoire. The presence of these rules is evidence for the emblematic nature of Vaupés languages. That Indians are aware of speech 'mistakes,' that they place a high value on correct speech, and that they see Vaupés languages as mutually unintelligible also support this hypothesis.

Current Sociolinguistic Issues

The Vaupés suggests some possibilities for rethinking in the following areas: (1) the criteria used to determine whether two or more varieties are languages or dialects; (2) linguistic change and the study of linguistic convergence, particularly with respect to the effects of speaker attitudes about linguistic variation on language change; (3) the assumption that linguistic diversity is invariably related to barriers in communication and hence, to some degree, cultural diversity; and (4) the generalizations concerning multilingualism as a general phenomenon which can be made from studying bilinguals in predominantly monolingual communities.

The Vaupés also contributes to studies concerned with the ways in

which languages can serve purposes other than communicating referential information. Labov and others have pointed out that language can communicate social information about the speaker. This can be done through speech itself or by common knowledge of individual identification with distinct codes and a certain amount of agreement regarding the implications of such identification. In this manner language can become a codification of many aspects of an individual's social identity, serving as a badge or emblem of that identity. Furthermore, language and linguistic varieties can serve as native models which are seen as explaining and justifying other areas of the social order. It is interesting to note that in the Vaupés the native view of genetic linguistic history meshes nicely with the function of language in the region – as an emblem of the language-aggregate and in the regulation of marriage.

The relationship between grammar and individual linguistic competence raises some interesting questions in the Vaupés, for if a grammar is supposed to reflect in some way native speaker linguistic competence, grammars of individual Vaupés languages will not be adequate. Any 'ideally fluent speaker – hearer' or even the most 'homogeneous speech community' in the sense of Chomsky (1965:3) will be multilingual (see Sorensen 1967:682). Moreover, the multilingualism involves over twenty languages and the rules which give rise to individual repertoires do not result in a small number of predictable combinations of languages. The rules concerning correct usage are not specific to particular languages (with the exception of Tukano as a lingua franca), and cannot be stated by expressions such as 'Use X language in contexts A and B' (as are, for example, rules governing switching in South India). The rules for usage in the Vaupés are always dependent on the father-language identity of at least some of the participants and whether or not the language to be used is in the speaker's and at least some of the hearers' repertoires.[5]