

Franz Caspar and the Amazonian languages

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Introduction

Dr. Franz Caspar (1916-1977) was a Swiss anthropologist, who conducted field research among indigenous groups in the Bolivian lowlands and in the Brazilian state of Rondônia. Between 1942 and 1948, Franz Caspar resided in Bolivia in the Mosestén indigenous community of Covendo (province of Sud Yungas, department of La Paz), where he conducted anthropological research and collected language data. Subsequently, during two periods of field research in 1948 and 1955, he spent a substantial amount of time in Rondônia among the Tuparí, who then lived a semi-isolated life in the area of the Rio Branco river. He stayed with the Tuparí on his own, without the assistance or company of family or fellow researchers, a situation which at the time was not free of risk. During his second visit to the Tuparí, Caspar was confronted with one of the devastating epidemics that decimated the Tuparí.

Franz Caspar is known above all for his anthropological and ethnographic studies. His most important and best known publications result from his fieldwork with the Tuparí people in Rondônia, such as his Hamburg doctoral dissertation of 1953, the book *Tuparí* (1952), and an extensive monograph *Die Tuparí, ein Indianerstamm in Westbrasilien* (1975).

Although especially known for his anthropological and ethnographic publications, Caspar also collected extensive language materials, containing lists of words and phrases of Covendo Mosestén and several languages of Rondônia, including the languages *Arikapú*, *Aruá*, *Aume*, *Jabutí*, *Makurap*, *Massacá*¹, *Salamãe*, *Tuparí* and *Wayoró*. All these languages are spoken north

¹ The Massacá data were provided by dr. Ary Figueiro.

of the Guaporé river in the area of the Branco, Colorado, Corumbiara, Mequens and Pimenta Bueno rivers. Except for Arikapú and Jabutí, which together form the small *Jabutían* language family, a branch of *Macro-Jê* (cf. Ribeiro and van der Voort 2010), and Massacá, a linguistic isolate, all these languages belong to the rather divergent *Tuparí* and *Mondé* branches of the *Tupí* language stock.

Due to radical social and demographic events that have affected the indigenous population of the area since the 1950s, most of the languages documented by Caspar have lost their vitality. Some of them are now either moribund or extinct, whereas during his visits they were still generally spoken. When still spoken today, they also have suffered changes. An example is the development of [p] to [ɸ] before rounded vowels in *Tuparí* (Seki 2002: 300).

In his recording of language data, Caspar gave considerable attention to a phonetically accurate notation of the language samples based on the phonetic practice of the epoch, using profuse diacritics, and provided them with translations and notes in either German or Portuguese. Not being a trained linguist, however, he refrained from publishing the language data, except for a number of *Tuparí* expressions contained in his monograph. Nevertheless, Caspar's records of Rondônian native languages have been praised for their exceptional accuracy (Rodrigues 2002: 288).

As can be understood, Caspar's data of the *Tuparí* language are much more extensive than those of the other languages mentioned above. Apart from a set of numbered words and phrases ("*Sätze*"), they also include German-*Tuparí* and *Tuparí*-German dictionaries on system cards. In 1957, after his return to Europe, Caspar wrote a grammatical overview of the *Tuparí* language together with the renowned Brazilian linguist and expert in the *Tupí* languages prof. dr. Aryon Dall'Igna Rodrigues, which has remained unpublished.²

In a later stage of his life, Franz Caspar became engaged in writing children's literature. His children's book *Fridolin* (Caspar 1977) became very well known in the German-speaking world.

² This work was facilitated by the financial support of the Swiss National Foundation (*Schweizerischer Nationalfonds*).

After Caspar's unexpected death in 1977, the language data that he had so carefully collected remained in the possession of his widow, Frauke Caspar, in Zürich. In 2001, Mrs. Caspar handed them over to the authors of this article with the explicit recommendation to make them available to the community of researchers worldwide. As a consequence, the language data collected by Franz Caspar have been made available for online dissemination. They can be consulted at the website <https://digihum.leidenuniv.nl/amazonianlanguages>, hosted by the University Library of Leiden, and contain the original material in PDF-format, accompanied by photographic illustrations from Franz Caspar and later sources. Transcriptions of almost all the Tuparí material, part of the Mequens material, as well as that on Arikapú and Aume, are included.³ A different version of the online language data can be found on the IMDI server of the Max-Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics at Nimegue, Netherlands (corpus1.mpi.nl/ds/imdi_browser). The originals of Caspar's language data are now in the custody of the University Library of the University of Basle in Switzerland.

The data that are available online comprise, *inter alia*, Caspar's dissertation, his field diaries (not freely accessible), a grammatical sketch of the Tuparí language (written with Aryon Rodrigues, see above), an alphabetic German-Tuparí and Tuparí-German dictionary, a thematic Tuparí-German dictionary, 1,883 Tuparí sentences with German translation, extensive data on Mosestén and the eight Rondônia languages (other than Tuparí) covered by Caspar's fieldwork, as well as ethnographic data on different tribes of the area. Some language data recorded by other explorers of the area (Sekelj, Snethlage) have also been included in the data collection.

³ The digitization and transcription of Caspar's language data (by the second author of this article) was achieved with the financial support of the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO).

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Sample

In what follows we present a sample of Caspar's language materials as they are available online. It includes two pages of Caspar's data of the Mequens language, both in transcription and in their original form.

Mequens
(Riberão⁴)

para cima	käärätsä tsontá ! vota ⁵ en cima (anyámo kátá aonde ele foi ?) kääroin koáb ! esta en cima
maduro	tsákóba katá tsákóba kátá ápara banana está madura
pô	nyōm áimpä nyōm pō de angico
vivo	tsäbatsī wäbatsíräm ōn eu estou vivo
corda	ãniám
ano	(não tem) părăgãriám tă! faz tempo!
Stock, “Stecken”	kōm kón
virar, turn	kwánänka
secar frotando	(ts)öpögāga
mato	kōbtíd
enxugar prato ↔	kabapā öpögāga

⁴ Information collected at the Posto Indígena Riberão of the ‘Serviço de Proteção ao Índio’ (SPI), on 07-06-1955; cf. F. Caspar ‘Notizen über die Nachbarstämme der Tupari’ (Neighbours of the Tupari).

⁵ vo[l]ta ? / bota ?

contar	máin̄ tsógä purätsöá kwă mányă conta historia
brigar, pelear	tsänōm pang koatá esta brigando onōm paukōb estou brigando tsāno mīantā ele matou com flecha
flotar	tsäkwōōRām tá está flotando, boyando ökōbo oāpirig ōn não foi oōkwōōRām on para fundo \ kăad pógäd pób kö ōn estou boyando
caçar	kíkoara okoáraokōb estou caçando akoád pään̄ kãRă ? tú vai caçar ?