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A Carib grammar and dictionary

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Summary

This dissertation describes the Carib language, which is spoken in Venezuela, Guyana, Suriname, French Guiana and Brazil. It consists of three parts: an introduction, a grammar and a dictionary.

The introduction points out that the Carib language is spoken by 6 to 9 thousand Caribs, who call themselves *Karîna* or (in plural) *Karînakon*. An estimated 15 thousand Caribs don't speak their own language anymore. The Carib language belongs to the Cariban language family, which includes 20 living languages besides Carib. At least 4 Carib dialects may be distinguished: Venezuelan Carib, Guyanese Carib, western Surinamese Carib and eastern Surinamese Carib. French Guianese and Brazilian Carib are considered to be part of the eastern Surinamese Carib dialect. The Carib language has been written about since the mid-seventeenth century, but the first professional linguist who studied the Carib language was the Dutch scholar Berend Hoff. In 1968, his dissertation on the western Surinamese Carib dialect was published. After that, Carib dialects were studied by a French linguist and several Venezuelan linguists. And now, in this dissertation, the knowledge contained in previous publications is built upon, expanded and enriched with new insights.

The grammar consists of five parts dealing with sounds, parts of speech, transpositions, sentences and texts.

The first part points out that there are 6 vowels and 9 consonants in the Carib language: *a, e, i, o, u, y* (representing a high central vowel), *p, t, k, s, m, n, r, w, and j*. In syllable final position, the difference between *m* and *n* is neutralized. The resulting sound is written *n*, except preceding *p*, where it is written *m*, in accordance with its sound. Other syllable final consonants are reduced to an aspiration preceding a voiceless consonant, and to a glottal stop preceding a voiced consonant; both the aspiration and the glottal stop are indicated by a grave accent on the preceding vowel. In a single syllable, there are no consonants without a vowel or a diphthong in between. Initial syllables are stressed in monosyllabic and disyllabic words, and in words consisting of more than two syllables every second syllable is stressed, unless the first syllable is heavy; a syllable is heavy if it ends in a consonant or if it originates in two syllables.

The second part of the grammar discusses the eight parts of speech.

(1) Pronouns do not only occur for first, second and third person (*awu, amoro, mòko*), but also for a combination of first and second person (*kyko*) and a combination of first and third person (*nàna*). The same persons may also be indicated by prefixes occurring on nouns and verbs (*v-*, *a-*, *i-*, *ky-*, *ty-*; the prefix *ty-* differs from

the other prefixes in that it is always anaphoric, referring back to either a third person or a combination of first and third person explicitly indicated by the pronoun *nàna*).

(2) Nouns have a possessive form which is commonly marked by the suffix *-ry*; the possessor is indicated by a pronominal prefix or a word or phrase preceding the possessive form of the noun. A small group of words, called ‘adjectival nouns’, might be characterized as adjectives on the basis of some semantic characteristics, but on the basis of formal properties they are considered nouns.

(3) Adjectives in their basic form may be used adverbially. A derived form (usually formed by suffixing the basic form with *-no*) is used adnominally. Both the basic and the derived form may receive a plural suffix. The plural suffix for the basic form is *-ine*, and *-kon* for the derived form.

(4) Verbs may be divided into three categories: transitive, intransitive and middle verbs. The pronominal prefixes that may be combined with a verb, determine to which category that verb belongs. Transitive verbs may combine with nine pronominal prefixes: three active prefixes (*si-* ‘I’, *mi-* ‘you’ and *kysi-* ‘you and I’), three passive prefixes (*y-* ‘I’, *a-* ‘you’, *ky-* ‘you and I’) and three reflexive or middle prefixes (*w-* ‘I’, *m-* ‘you’, *kyt-* ‘you and I’). Intransitive verbs may only combine with the pronominal prefixes that are called ‘passive’ when combined with a transitive verb (which fact is the basis for stating that Carib pronominal prefixes belong to an *ergative* system). The small group of middle verbs, that have an intransitive meaning just like the intransitive verbs, may only combine with the pronominal prefixes that are called ‘middle’ when combined with a transitive verb. Intransitive verbs may be made transitive by adding a transitivizing suffix (*-nopy* or *-ka*). Transitive verbs may receive a causative meaning by adding a causative suffix (*-po*). Furthermore, there are four aspectual suffixes (*-tamy* ‘begin’, *-poty* ‘repeat’, *-ma* ‘finish’, *-kepy* ‘stop’) and eleven temporal suffixes, which have separate forms for singular and plural (*-ja/-jaton* ‘present’, *-jakon/-jatokon* ‘past’, *-take/-taton* ‘future’, *-jaine/-jatoine* ‘present habitual’, *-to/-toine* ‘past habitual’, *-i/-ton* ‘near’, *-n/-sen* ‘far’, *-se/-tòse* ‘desiring’, *-ry/-tory* ‘present unreal’, *-ryine/-toryine* ‘past unreal’, *-ko/-toko* ‘commanding’).

(5) Postpositions may occur, just like adjectives, in an adverbial basic form, and an adnominal form, which is derived from the basic form (usually by adding the suffix *-no*). Plural suffixes, too, are the same for both adjectives and postpositions: *-ine* occurs with the basic form and *-kon* with the derived form.

(6) Particles are indeclinable adverbs which in principle don’t occur sentence initially, but following a sentence initial word or phrase. Particles whose meaning bears on a preceding word or phrase may occur later in a sentence.

(7) Numerals may occur, just like adjectives and postpositions, in an adverbial basic form, an adnominal form, which is derived from the basic form (usually by adding the suffix *-no*). The adverbial form does not combine with a plural suffix, but the adnominal form of a numeral may occur with the same plural suffix as the adnominal forms of adjectives and postpositions: *-kon*. A possessive form (which is

formed by adding the suffix *-ry* to the adnominal form) is used where the English language uses an ordinal number ('number three *of them*', i.e. 'the third one').

(8) Interjections may be divided into three categories: vocatives, onomatopoeic words, and other interjections. The vocatives include a group of words designating kinship relations, which remain very much in use, as Caribs usually address each other not by mentioning a proper name, but a term that expresses the (kinship) relation between speaker and hearer.

The third part of the grammar points out that there are three kinds of transpositions: nominalizations, adjectivations and verbalizations. Nominalizations may be transpositions of a verb (formed by suffixation), or an adjective (by using the adnominal form as a noun). Adjectivations may be transpositions of a noun, a verb or a numeral, formed by suffixation. Verbalizations are transpositions of a noun, formed by suffixation.

The fourth part of the grammar discusses how a sentence is made up of one or more word units (a word unit being either a word or a combination of words that may be interpreted as a single part of speech), and how each word unit represents one of five parts of speech: a noun, a verb, an adjective, an interjection or a particle. Noun units, verb units, adjective units and interjection units are free word units, i.e. they may occur independently and alone in a sentence. Particle units are bound word units, i.e. they may only occur if the sentence contains a free word unit.

The fifth part of the grammar presents three texts which illustrate how native speakers join together words and sentences. The texts are presented in four lines: a line of text, a line of morphemes, a line of morpheme meanings and a line of sentence meanings.

The dictionary contains information on more than 6500 Carib words. The introduction explains how headwords are formed and what information components may be listed under a headword. Regular information components are part of speech and meaning. Other information components may be: irregular stress patterns, dialect variants, component morphemes, related words in other languages, irregular affixation, scientific names (for flora and fauna), or idiomatic expressions. For the words in the dictionary that also occur in Ahlbrinck's *Encyclopaedia*, a reference has been included.

There are two appendices. In the first appendix, all Carib affixes, including its meaning and its abbreviation, are presented in two sections. In the first section, the affixes are listed alphabetically, and in the second, they are listed in (more or less semantic) categories.

In the second appendix, Carib nature terms, i.e. flora and fauna words, are listed in a biological classification.

