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Wayuunaiki: A Grammar of Guajiro

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1972

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, in the Faculty
of Political Science, Columbia University.

ABSTRACT

WAYUUNAIKI: A GRAMMAR OF GUAJIRO

Susan Barbara Ehrman

The Guajiro language, of the Arawakan family, is spoken by the Guajiro Indians of Venezuela and Colombia. This thesis presents an analysis of the grammatical structure of that language, the data base of which was collected during field research in the Venezuelan Guajira.

The organizing descriptive principle employed in this study is based on a substantially modified tagmemic model, using the central notion of slot and filler (tagmeme). This model allows each significant unit to be described in terms of its level in the grammatical hierarchy. While the word and clause levels are given the most attention in this analysis, the total structure of the grammar indicates the recognition of five levels: theme, word, phrase, clause and sentence levels. A level or levels beyond the sentence, e.g., a paragraph or discourse level, is hinted at.

The presentation of chapters is based largely on the principle of grammatical levels. Only in the case of the verb does the complexity of the theme (thematic level) warrant a separate treatment (Chapter Three). Otherwise, discussion of thematic material is incorporated in word-level chapters. Four word-classes are recognized: nominal, verb, adjective, and relator (Chapters One, Four, Five, and Six respectively). The phrase level is evoked only in relation to word groupings centered on the nominal, i.e., the noun phrase (Chapter Two). Normal fillers of clause-level slots, then, are either the noun phrase, the verb, adjective, or relator word, or a particle.

In Chapter One, the nominal word is discussed, displaying theme and stem as well as affixes. Noun stems occur in three subclasses and approximately eight inflectional affixes are identified. Nominal derivation is discussed. In Chapter Two the noun phrase is analyzed into four types. Modifying (Identifier, Attribute, Appositive) tagmemes center around the Head tagmeme; each of the four noun phrase types contrast as to tagmemic composition. Readings (possible tagmeme manifestations) of each noun phrase are provided. In Chapter Three the verb theme is presented, displaying the categories of Causative and various Passives. Verb stems, internal to the theme, are either active or stative. In Chapter Four the verb word is treat-

ed: the verb theme may be prefixed by person-indicator or suffixed by auxiliaries, gender-number indicator, or either Modal, Contingency, or Transitivity inflections. Three verb word types are presented: Plain-Actives, Statives, and Transitive-Actives. Readings of each type are given along with the concept of verb sets. Verb word idioms are then presented in terms of readings and sets.

The adjective word is described in Chapter Five. Four stem subclasses are recognized: descriptive, quantitative, demonstrative, and person-categorizing stems. Adjective derivers are also treated. In Chapter Six the relator word is defined and analyzed into six types, with readings for each type. The thirty-nine relator themes are locational, situational, etc. A modified 'relator-axis' structure pertains to this word class. Nuclear tagmemes of the clause are given in Chapter Seven; these are the predicate-like tagmemes, subject-like tagmemes, object-like tagmemes, and post-object-like tagmemes. There are seven clause types based essentially on nuclear tagmeme contrasts; examples: the Intransitive Clause, the Plain-Transitive Clause, etc. Chapter Eight deals with the non-nuclear, or adjunctive, tagmemes on the clause level; examples: Instrumental, Cause, Manner, Time, etc. Finally, a brief analysis of Guajiro sentences and a portion of text is presented in Chapter Nine. Multi-clausal sentences are treated as either: Compound Sentence, Complex Sentence, Coordinate Sentence, or others. The Appendix includes clitics and particles.

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CONTENTS OF CHAPTERS

Introduction

Guajiro, classed as an Arawakan language, is spoken by the Guajiro Indians[1] living in La Guajira Peninsula of northern Venezuela and western Colombia. The Peninsula, (called LaGuajira) perched on the northwestern tip of South America, is semi-desert, ranging from savanna land to true desert. The area, encompassing some 5,000 square miles, is inhabited almost exclusively by Guajiros and mestizos living in isolated family-group encampments. The lower region of La Guajira (Baja Guajira) is closer to towns and cities of Venezuela and Colombia than the Upper Guajira (Alta Guajira); it is in Baja Guajira that acculturation is most rapid at present.

The Guajiros have a windy, hot and sandy land into which they were driven some centuries ago. The lower region of the peninsula is located about 100 kilometers from the Venezuelan city of Maracaibo, the edges of which Barrio Ziruma is found, the urban ghetto of Guajiros.[2] The Maracaibo area was once a very lively center of contact of mostly Carib tribes. In the same period that the Quechuas and Chibchans were expanding northeasterly, the high civilizations of Mexico and Guatemala were moving south. At the points of contact, around Colombia and Panama, the expansion was re-routed toward Venezuela, only to be met with the Carib expan-

[1]Due to the Guajiro habit of constantly moving around, population is difficult to estimate; Jahn(1927) reported 15-20,000; Aschmann(1951) reported 50,000 on the Colombian side and 40,000 in Venezuela. Aschmann also indicates that population is on the increase.

[2]Barrio Ziruma was struck during the time of my fieldwork by the Maracaibo air disaster that took many Guajiro lives on the ground below.

sion from the south and west.

The Maracaibo Lago basin was settled and colonized by primitive Arawakans coming north out of Brazil and the Guianas, when their agricultural life[1] was interrupted by the invading Caribs, some five centuries ago. At this period the peninsula began to be settled by the Guajiros, pushed out by Carib groups who were probably of the Arihuna tribe. At the time of the later Spanish incursion, the Guajiros extended the term alihuna to refer to the invading Spanish. Today alihuna is the generic term for all non-Guajiros.

The Guajiros call themselves wayuu "person", while the word "Guajiro" probably originates from the Caribbean Spanish word meaning "peasant." The pastoral life of the Guajiros started in the 16th century (Aschmann (1951); Alba (1936)) by robbing cattle from the Spanish. Underlying the pastoral character of this society are numerous tropical forest features: weaving, pottery; shamanism and preoccupation with the dead; polygyny and nephew inheritance patterns. Pre-colombian contacts are also evident in a few specific items, such as the quara idol.

Since the settlement of La Guajira, water supply has been the ever-present concern and diligence of the Guajiro. Aridity prohibits any but the most meager gardens, as a rule. However, the relative importance of agriculture varies with land-type, which is most hospitable in the south-

[1] While Jahn(1927) and HSAI stress the earlier importance of agriculture, Hernandez de Alba(1936) argues for the absence of agriculture, and instead, a hunting and gathering pattern.

west part of the peninsula. A recent survey (Taetzsch, 1970) reveals that areas with a dearth of livestock compensate by applying greater diligence in the care of gardens, explaining the earlier observation that only the poorer Guajiros pursue agriculture. The typical field, however, is abandoned after a very few years; with a short rainy season from October to December, the harvest provides enough vegetables (corn, melon, squash, beans, millet) for only a few months.

Herding is the principal source of Guajiro subsistence as well as a major determinant of social organization. Interest in and importance of animals pervade Guajiro life. Clan organization, bride price, status, ceremonials, beliefs and taboos, as well as methods and problems of residence and water supply are all heavily influenced by pastoralism. Livestock, and cattle in particular, are the prime indicators of wealth and status; all well-to-do Guajiros own several ranches. Bride price for the wealthy is in horses and cattle; for the poor it is in sheep and goats. Each clan has its own cattle brand. Cattle is individually owned, as are most materials in Guajiro life. Since cows are a measure of wealth, they are seldom slaughtered.

The stratification of Guajiro society has puzzled some of its students. It is likely that this pattern, about 200 years old, parallels developments in the Old World. (Aschmann, 1951). With good pasture lands, but poor water supply, some of the original Guajiro herders may have developed a relation of dependency on more successful herders; desperate to maintain his herds, the man who ran out of water and luck may have attached himself

to a necessarily larger and stronger water-getting team.

The water problem, coupled with polarizations in strength and status, has also affected clanship among the Guajiros. Minor clans have been incorporated in or destroyed by larger ones in a variety of ways. Smaller or weaker clans may be controlled or displaced from their territories by larger ones or stronger clans may find a pretext (Gutierrez de Pineda, 1950) to enslave, abuse, or obtain women from a weaker clan too powerless to take revenge. Decaying groups may even sell members into servitude.

Clan localization and territoriality in view of centuries of migrations for water, are no longer viable; only vestiges of clan land-holdings remain today. While intermarriage between differentially ranked clans is a potential balancing mechanism, the demand of bride-price is a conservative mechanism.[1] Only prosperous Guajiros are polygynous. In light of a generally matri local pattern, sororal polygyny is preferred. Wilbert (1958) reports kinship terminology as typically Crow.[2] The importance of maternal relatives is everywhere seen in this society, in the daily round as well as in the life cycle.

Whereas the pastoral complex has been the core of subsistence, currency and status up to recent times, at present the Guajiros, especially those of Baja Guajira, eke out a bare subsistence through keeping flocks,

[1] The literature indicates a tendency for marriage alliances to take place between certain wealthier clans, eg. The Uriana and Pushaina.

[2] Fuchs, on the other hand (personal communication) claims that at least two and maybe three kinship systems can be distilled from the terminological data.

minor agriculture, migrant work in the towns, contraband, fishing, etc. Most commonly, struggling families send their men to hacienda work in the area of Perija, Venezuela. Men also find odd jobs in the nearby towns, while their women knit and weave bags and hammocks to sell to tourists. For some families, small roadside stores bring in a few pennies. Others find housework or prostitution in Maracaibo.

Inevitably, and gradually, the process of acculturation has reshaped the society. The mestizo marriage pattern militates against matrilocality, inheritance rules, and basic rights and obligations among kin. Catholic influence in the area has also begun to modify the practice of clan exogamy as well as ideology.

Naturally, these changes can be observed most readily in the areas where contact influence and mestizo life are most dominant. From 1968 to 1970 I spent a total of eight months in such an area, the town and environs of Paraguaipoa (palawaipou"on the shore") and Los Filuos. Paraguiapoa and Los Filuos are situated in the Venezuelan portion of La Guajira near the southern curve of the Gulf of Venezuela. In this Guajiro-mestizo town, Spanish is easily used as a second language by almost all Indians, although a short walk into the country-side quickly brings one into a monolingual situation. Living near Los Filuos I was able to contact families and individuals who were fully bilingual in Guajiro and Spanish and also individuals who were monolingual in Guajiro. In this area, children tend to learn Spanish between the ages of four and eight. But Hispanicization, both linguistically and culturally, is likely to occur in the Upper Guajira as well due to the presence of missions, schools and commerce.

The degree to which an individual, family or community has been influenced by Venezuelan culture can generally be inferred from their relative use of the Guajiro or Spanish language. In the Paraguipoa area, most Guajiros above the age of thirty appear to communicate in Spanish only when conversing with criollos: visitors, merchants in the Los Filuos market, school-teachers, tourists,anthropologists and Peace Corps volunteers. Otherwise, use of Spanish is sporadic, generally cropping up in brief phrases or loan words. Younger Guajiros, and in particular those who have spent a lot of time in the criollo world, whether in Maracaibo, Perijo or San Cristobal, tend to "identify" more personally with the Spanish language, have more complex syntax, and can be heard on occasion to be conversing among themselves in Spanish. During my expedition in 1968 to Alta Guajira, on the other hand, most persons whom I encountered, youths and adults alike, spoke little or no Spanish

Most of my informants represent the Venezuelan dialect of Guajiro, several of them having been born in the area of my fieldwork. My chief "grammatical" informants were young men of about twenty who were bilingual. My own language of fieldwork was Spanish. Stories, anecdotes, etc. were mostly delivered by middle-aged persons, some almost monolingual. With monolingual "story-telling" informants, I was able to record and transcribe materials, first recording text, followed up with a sentence-by-sentence replay which I was able to transcribe on the spot with the aid of the monolingual informant. If the latter knew no Spanish at all I deferred translation to a session with my "grammatical"informants. Enzo Palmar, of the Epieyuu clan, served as my chief informant. Victor Hugo Crespo, a

mestizo, also assisted me for several months. The data on which this study is based represents a variety of collection techniques: text recording and subsequent translation; recording fragments overheard from conversations; eliciting from hypothetical Guajiro forms, eliciting for placement of already-collected Guajiro forms in a larger context; and so on. With Enzo I was able, furthermore, to communicate some of the fundamentals of descriptive linguistic work, so that he was able to perceive and answer to the underlying analytical stance of some of my questions and elicitations.

The concept of <u>levels</u> of analysis has been informally adapted from orthodox tagmemics; this study focuses on the clause and word levels in the Guajiro language. The phrase level has significance only with respect to the noun phrase (ch. 2). Levels higher than the clause are considered briefly in chapter nine, while special classes, the particles and clitics, are discussed in the Appendix.

In general, the present analysis of Guajiro reflects a modified tagmemic approach. This framework developed only after two years of preliminary analysis which stressed morphology primarily and syntax secondarily. With the aim of describing Guajiro and in particular with the hope of discovering its "grammatical meanings"[1] the present analyst found (a) the hierarchical approach of discerning levels, and (b) the uniform concept of the tagmeme, pragmatically useful as a methodology for a relatively unknown language.

[1] My initial interest in language was semantic and my first study of Guajiro concerned the meanings in the verb roots. Being dissatisfied, however, with the study of only <u>lexical</u> meaning, I was inspired by the work of linguists such as Roman Jakobson and others who demonstrated the importance of "grammatical meaning."

The perspective which dominated my earlier descriptions of the language was essentially one drawn from Boasian linguistics, in which the firm dichotomization of morphology and syntax usually implies the primacy of words, often relegating the study of word groupings (syntax) to a status of lesser importance. With morphology, Boasian emphasis is on the correct identification of morphemes and their position class membership; the tagmemic approach emphasizes patterns and points in the pattern (Pike, 1949). Coming to tagmemic ideas from a Boasian tradition, I had morphemes well identified without an overview of pattern and pattern points.

While this study uses the tagmeme concept as its overview for the discovery and display of pattern, tagmemic ideas are borrowed rather than imbibed, in no way reflecting orthodox tagmemic theory. This presentation, in fact, claims to be an adequate description, rather than a theory of Guajiro. The identification of basic units of the grammar hinge on a single concept, the tagmeme; this concept has proven useful for the descriptive goal and on this basis has been adopted for the analysis of Guajiro. The tagmeme concept, in addition, has proven to be a heuristic methodological tool.

The tagmeme, as a composite, consisting of slot, function, or grammatical meaning, on the one hand, and filler, class, or grammatical form, on the other hand, provides a uniform device for the treatment of grammatical material, and allows the present study:

1. to build "grammatical meaning into the structure of the description, an exercise more significant than ad-hoc "labeling" of meaning.

2. to place the slot, or functional aspect of the tagmeme in the pattern shedding light on the obligatory and optional categories utilized in the language.

3. to establish a separation of function and manifestation of function, not only avoiding linguo-centric errors, but also enforcing the essential distinction between "Language" and "speech." While slot or function brings to focus the skeletal aspect of language structure ("competence", Language"), manifesting class or filler focus upon actual forms ("speech", "performance", etc.). Incorporating slot or function in its central concept, tagmemic analyses are generative to the extent that they have discovered the "skeleton" (slot) on which the "meat" (filler) may rest. As an essentially "emic" concept, the tagmeme "should therefore commend itself as both taxonomic and generative." (Longacre, 1964, page 32).

The tagmemic stance adopted in this study implies a necessary link between function and form, slot and filler, "skeleton" and "meat." In this sense, tagmemes are viewed as emic, and, therefore, a reflection of the generative apparatus of the speaker. It is, nonetheless, entirely open to further study whether deeper structures underly the tagmemic composite itself. Once the taxonomic work of tagmemic discovery has been achieved, the analyst can switch methodological gears in pursuit of a deeper understanding of the language.

While the "level" and "string constituent" concepts (Longacre, 1960

and 1968) are intrinsic to this presentation, matrix theory is not employed. In this work, manifestations of formulae are presented in readings, a concept also suggested by Longacre. Analysis of the hierarchial structuring in language results in emic levels with constituent tagmemes particular to that level. In Guajiro, the clause level is the most complex and is the most significant part of the hierarchy for the understanding of utterances. The verb word is discussed at length (ch. three and four) in view of its inner complexity. The most rigorous application of tagmemic formulation is found on the clause level (ch. seven) and in the noun phrase (ch. two). Tagmemic formulae were not found to be essential, however, for description on the word level (ch. one, three, four, five and six) and are therefore not strictly applied.

--Acknowledgements--

I wish, first of all, to acknowledge indebtedness to Professor Helmuth Fuchs, of the Royal Ontario Museum, a long-standing friend and student of the Guajiro Indians, who first introduced me to the people in May of 1968. With the help of Dr. Fuchs I not only was provided with a smooth and warm reception in La Guajira, but also, during the weeks of our expedition to Alta Guajira, gained much insight into the ethnography of the area.

The early stages of the present analysis was greatly benefited by the excellent Diccionario Guajiro-Español by Martha Hildebrandt (1963). The dictionary has some 7,800 entries and is prefaced by a ten page thumbnail sketch of Guajiro phonology and morphology. Verbs, which were central to my earlier studies of Guajiro, are entered in the dictionary in infinitive form as well as in -s̈i...(cf:330) and in -in (cf:340). Some verbs are also entered in the Passive and Causative. Though fewer than the verbs, a considerable number of nominals are entered. Dialect variants are also sometimes indicated. The dictionary, as a whole, is a reliable lexical source for grammatical study.

I might also mention that Hildebrandt's follow-up article on verb suffixes and auxiliaries (1966) aided by initial morphological studies, at a time when even brief modern descriptions were exceedingly welcome. Finally, Hildebrandt's pre-dictionary study (1961) of what I have termed "relator" words was of particular value to me, especially with regard to the possibilities of compounding in this word class.