

Nominal classification in Karirí¹

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Karirí (Cariri) is a small South-American linguistic family in northeastern Brazil whose languages are no more spoken. For two of these languages, *Kipeá* and *Dzubukuá*, there are fairly good documents published at the end of the 17th (Mamiani 1698 and 1699) and beginning of the 18th century (Nantes 1709) and for two others, *Sabuyá* and *Pedra Branca Karirí (Kamurú)*, there are only short word lists published in the 19th century (Martius 1867). Probably other languages of the same family died out without having been documented, for several Indian peoples referred to in documents of the 17th century and since then disappeared, such as the *Morití* and *Payayá*, were described as having the same usages and beliefs as the *Karirí* (Leite 1945:273, 277). There are about 1,000 remnants of the *Karirí* in the municipality of Mirandela, in the State of Bahia, but they speak now only Portuguese, although among them some people can recall isolated words of their former language (Bandeira 1972; Meader 1978).

The Karirí family is a remarkable example of the kind of linguistic knowledge that is lost when entire linguistic families die out in South America. It is the only non Tupí-Guaraní linguistic group having languages recorded in colonial times in eastern Brazil, and now none of its languages is spoken, having shared the fate of all but one (*Yatê*) in eastern Brazil, a region where there was in the 16th century a very large number of different languages (Cardim [1584] 1978; Rodrigues 1993a). Although there is some lexical indication that the Karirí family may have been a branch of the large Macro-Jê linguistic complex (Rodrigues 1986), the structure of the Karirí languages is strongly idiosyncratic in comparison with the best known Macro-Jê languages (e.g. those of the Je family and *Yatê*) as well as with the other major linguistic groups in Brazil, such as Karib and Arawak. The Karirí languages have a strict verb-initial word order, their active transitive clauses show a purely ergative

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construction, and nouns are related by prepositions.² The existence of these important typological features in eastern Brazil could not be suspected from the other languages known in that region or around it. This is also the case of nominal classification, that will be described here.

The Kipeá language is known to us from two books published by the Italian Jesuit missionary Luiz Vincencio Mamiani (della Rovere), a grammar (1699), indeed a very fine one for the 17th century, and a catechism (1698), bilingual with Portuguese. For the Dzubukuá language there is only a catechism, equally bilingual with Portuguese, composed and published by the French Capuchin missionary Bernardo de Nantes (1709). Mamiani's catechism is predominantly dialogical, with a few exhortative or admonitory texts, whereas the Nantes' one includes eight long sermons. Both catechetical works include a few songs composed by missionaries in European style. In the following the basis for the present description will be Mamiani's grammar of Kipeá, but examples will be drawn also from his catechism. A few examples from Nantes' catechism will be used in section 4. below for showing that some classificatory features of Kipeá occur also in Dzubukuá.

Kipeá has three devices of noun classification: (1) a set of classifying prefixes joined to quantifying words as well as to descriptive adjectives of dimension, consistency, and color; (2) a set of possessive classifiers used mainly with names of acquired goods; and (3) a distinction between animate and inanimate manifested in the interrogatives and demonstratives.

1. *Classifying prefixes.* There are twelve prefixes that occur with quantifying words and with adjectives of dimension, consistency, and color. This is apparently a closed set of lexical items that take the classifying prefixes and that has been presented in full by Mamiani (1877:53)³: *bihé* 'one', *wacháni* 'two', *wachanidikié* 'three', *yó* 'many'; *pi* and *pineté* 'small', *ye* 'big', *mú* and *muneté* 'short', *chi* 'long', *kempé* 'thin', *tú* 'thick', *tó* and *totó* 'round'; *crá* 'dry', *tçã* 'hard'; *cú* 'white', *cotçó* 'black', *hé* 'dark red', *cutçú* 'red', *erã* 'green, yellow', *cracú* 'blue', *kenké* 'very white, clean', *dzodzó* 'bright', *né* and *nú* 'clear'. The prefixes are the following twelve with the meanings given by Mamiani: *be-* for agreement with nouns for "hills, dishes, stools, foreheads, etc."; *cro-* for "birds, stones, stars, and round objects (such as beads, fruits, eyes, etc.)"; *cru-* for 'liquids and rivers'; *epru-* for "clusters and bunches"; *he-* for "sticks, legs, and wooden objects"; *ho-*, *hoi-* for "ropes, vines, threads, snakes"; *ya-* for "iron

2 For a structuralist reanalysis of the data of Kipeá see Azevedo (1965) and for a functional approach of case marking and subject hood in this language see Larsen (1984).

3 In this paper Mamiani's orthography for Kipeá is maintained with only two changes: *η* has been substituted for *ng* and *ngh* as well as for some instances of *g* and *gh*, and *en* has been substituted for *e* with tilde. This orthography is very neat and only some symbols need to be explained: *c* stands for [k] before *a*, *o*, *u*, and *r*; *ch* represents [š] and [tš], which are variants of one phoneme; *tc* and *tç* represent [ts]; *nh* represents [ñ]. A phonemic interpretation of Mamiani's writing is to be found in Azevedo (1965).

objects, bones, and pointed things”; *mu-*, *mui-* for “eatable roots”; *nu-* for “holes, wells, mouths, fields, valleys, fenced spaces”; *ro-* for “clothes, fabric, and furs”; *woro-* for “ways, conversations, speeches, stories”; *bu-* for “houses, arrows, containers, corn-cobs, and living beings but birds”, as well as for any other nouns not specified for the other prefixes (Mamiani 1877:53-54).

Although the knowledge of the Karirí lexicon that we can have is limited to the examples given in Mamiani’s grammar and to the words occurring in the texts of both catechisms, it is immediately apparent that the classifying prefixes have a lexical origin, since most of them are identifiable either with monosyllabic nouns or with the first syllable(s) of longer nouns that fall into their meaning areas: for *be-*, *bé* ‘edge’, *bendó* ‘hill’; for *cro-*, *cró* ‘stone’; for *he-*, *hebarú* ‘tree stem’; for *ho-*, *hó* ‘thread’; for *ya-*, *yawó* ‘hook’, *yacroró* ‘fish hook’, *yaridzí* ‘spur’; for *mu-/mui-*, *mú* ‘root’, *muicú* ‘manioc’; for *nu-*, *nucrá* ‘cave’; for *ro-*, *ró* ‘clothes’; for *woro-*, *wo ~ woro* ‘way’, *worobÿ* ‘news’; for *bu-*, *bú* ‘corn-cob’, *buicú* ‘arrow’, *buibú* ‘calabash’. It is also likely that longer nouns, such as *yawó*, *yacroró*, and *yaridzí*, are compounds, whose first component coincides with the classificatory prefix in the same way as *cró* ‘stone’ coincides with the prefix *cro-*; a somewhat transparent case would be *muicú* ‘manioc’, which can be analyzed as *mui-cú* ‘white root’.

Even though examples such as *yawó*, *yacroró*, and *yaridzí* could suggest that also the nouns take the classifying prefix, this is not the case. Most nouns with which the classified numerals and adjectives occur have nothing that could be identified with the agreeing prefix, as may be seen in the following examples:

- (1) *cro-yó uché* ‘many suns/days’ (Mamiani 1698:64)
- (2) *bu-yó cradzó* ‘many cows’ (Mamiani 1877:5)
- (3) *bu-bihé erumú* ‘one squash’ (Mamiani 1698:145)
- (4) *vinuá bu-pí* ‘the small children’ (Mamiani 1698:54)
- (5) *ibuâneté bu-yeⁿ* ‘a big sin’ (Mamiani 1698:139)
- (6) *udza ya-chi* ‘a long knife’ (Mamiani 1877:99)

Quantifying words systematically precede the noun, as in (1), (2), and (3), whereas descriptive adjectives follow it, as in (4), (5), and (6). Descriptive adjectives may be predicates (without a copula) and as such they precede their subjects in the same way as verbal predicates do, and in this function they are also marked by the classifying prefixes in agreement with their subjects as in (7) and (8) and may take inflectional prefixes (for instance *i-*) as in (9):

(7) *ya-né udzá* ‘the knife is sharp’ (Mamiani 1877:99)

(8) *he-chí erá* ‘the house is high(= long)’ (Mamiani 1877:57)

(9) *no i-bu-yeⁿ crubÿ, no i-bu-yó crubÿ deheⁿ ebuâñeté* ‘because (no) your sins (ebuâñeté) are too (crubÿ) big and also (deheⁿ) too many’ (Mamiani 1698:222)

Although the meanings of the nouns called for by some prefixes fall clearly in well defined semantic fields, such as ‘liquids’ (*cru-*) or ‘long and flexible objects’ (*ho-/hoi-*), the meanings of those called for by other prefixes are very heterogeneous: what could link ‘stools’ and ‘foreheads’, ‘ways’ and ‘stories’? A tentative systematization of prototypic meanings that could be definitive for each group of nouns associated with each prefix could be the following, where geometric forms are distinguished for static and dynamic entities:

	Static	Dynamic
Lines (one dimension)		
Straight	<i>he-</i>	
Sinuous	<i>ho-</i>	<i>woro-</i>
Surfaces (two dimensions)		
Convex	<i>be-</i>	
Concave	<i>nu-</i>	<i>ro-</i>
Solids (three dimensions)		
Spherical	<i>cro-</i>	
Conical	<i>ya-</i>	<i>bu-</i>
Amorphous	<i>epru-</i>	<i>cru-</i>
Edible roots		<i>mu-</i>

There are some obvious difficulties with certain entities in certain classes, more specifically with ‘corn-cob’ and ‘house’ among dynamic solids (*bu-*). The presence of ‘corn-cob’ in this class is probably due to the form of this word, which is simply *bú*, homophonous with the prefix. As for ‘house’ there is perhaps a mistake of Mamiani, since in the only example in his grammar where *era* ‘house’ occurs with a descriptive adjective, this is marked by *he-* and not by *bu-* (see example (8) above). It may also be that *bu-*, besides

referring to dynamic solids, was the general classifier for 'everything else', as was indeed stated by Mamiani, and as such could be used eventually with members of other classes. 'Containers', which should have been particularly baskets, may be seen as movable objects, used for carrying from one place to another. 'Birds' in the class of spherical objects (*cro-*) is probably due to the fact that they are somewhat roundish, but note also that their class is that of the entities in the sky, as sun, moon, and stars. 'Edible roots' (*mu-*) is of course an aberrant class that cannot be defined with the same parameters of form and dynamicity. However, the fact that this unique case applies just to manioc and other tubers may be an indication of the fundamental importance these roots had for the Karirí people. Note that manioc is singled out also with a specific possessive classifier, as will be seen in the next section.

2. *Possessive classifiers.* It is not uncommon for South American languages to have generic nouns used for expressing the possession of certain classes of items. The northern Jê languages, such as Timbira (Canela, Krahô), Kayapó, and Panará, have only one generic noun for all alienable possessed items; Boróro, another Macro-Jê language has two, one for pets and the other for all other alienable possessions; the Tupí-Guaraní languages have also two, one equally for pets, but the other for preys, and none for other alienable possessions, which are handled in the same way as inalienable possession. Kipeá has twelve such generic possessed nouns, which mediate the expression of possession for as many classes of items. They were presented and described by Mamiani (1877:59-61) as follows: 1. *enki* for domestic animals, 2. *uaprú* for preys, fruits picked up in the woods, and anything brought home for eating; 3. *udé* for cooked food, 4. *upodó* for roasted food, 5. *udjé* for vegetables gathered in the garden with the exception of manioc; 6. *uanhi* for products of the manioc garden; 7. *ubó* for fruits picked up green in order to ripe in the house; 8. *uitó* for things that have been found; 9. *boronunú* for war booty, 10. *ukisí* for things received in share; 11. *ubá* for gifts from outsiders; 12. *e* for things one has carried to/on.

According to Mamiani items falling in classes 1 through 7 cannot be expressed as possessions without the intermediation of the classifier; this is done by having the possessed classifier related by means of the preposition *do* to the unpossessable noun: *dz-upodó do buké* 'my roasted deer', *dz-udé do ghinhé* 'my beans from my garden'. Items that fit classes 8 through 12 may be possessables, but when used without classifiers the meanings of the classifiers are excluded: *hiró* 'my clothes' (acquired in a way other than by finding, sharing, taking as a booty, etc.) (Mamiani 1877:61). If we look for a difference between classes 1-7 and 8-12, we see that the first group refers essentially to food and has to do with the ways of getting or preparing it, whereas the second group refers to the ways of acquisition of any goods. The following is a possible classification of possession in Kipeá:

A. Food

a. Acquisition

1. Gathering of wild beings: *uaprí*
2. Raising of animals: *enki*
3. Cultivation of manioc: *uanhi*
4. Cultivation of other plants: *udjé*

b. Preparation

1. Cooking: *udé*
2. Roasting: *upodó*
3. Maturation at home: *ubó*

B. Any items

a. Acquisition

1. Finding: *uitó*
2. Share: *ukisi*
3. Gift from outsiders: *ubá*
4. Booty: *boronunú*

b. Transportation

1. Carried goods: *e*

The twelve classes above probably cover all the institutionalized ways of acquiring goods among the Karirí. Possessed nouns outside of them would likely be only those of own elaboration, such as artifacts (hammocks, stools, ornaments, weapons, tools, etc.) and elaborated food and drink (flours, cakes, porridges, wines, etc.), besides, of course, so-called inalienably possessed nouns such as the names of parts of a whole and kinship terms.

It is remarkable that nine out of the twelve generic nouns above begin with *u-*. It is likely that this *u-* was itself formerly a generic noun for alienably possessed items, just as in the northern Jê languages referred to at the beginning of this section, to which more specific elements were added, giving rise to the different classes. For a possible common etymology of this *u-* and the markers of alienable possession in Jê and other Macro-Jê languages, see Rodrigues 1993b:386.

3. *Animate and inanimate*. In the interrogatives and demonstratives Kipeá distinguishes animate from inanimate beings with the prefix *u-* for inanimate opposed to *a-*, *æ-*, *e-* for animate. *udjé* ‘what?’ and *adjé* ‘who?’ (Mamiani 1877:56), *uró* ‘that thing’ and *eró* ‘that person’ (Mamiani 1877:9), *utçi* ‘the thing whose name a I have forgotten’ and *ætçi* ‘the person whose name I have forgotten’ (Mamiani 1877:57). According to the translations given by Mamiani the opposition manifested by the change of prefixes would be between ‘human’ and ‘non human’. However, *adjé* is also the generic name for ‘animal’ and ‘game’ (Mamiani 1698:85, 173; 1877:83, 100), and *udjé* is the

generic name for '(cultivated) vegetables' (Mamiani 1877:60). From this fact (and in the absence of any examples of 'what animal?' or 'that animal') we infer that the opposition was rather between 'animate' and 'inanimate'.

4. The Dzubukuá catechism offers some examples of classifying prefixes as well as of interrogatives and demonstratives, but none of possessive classifiers. Examples (10)-(13) below are of classifying prefixes:⁴

(10) *clo-witanidique uquie* 'three suns/days' (Nantes 1709:33) (Kipeá *cro-wachanidikié uchê*)

(11) *dzo crô-ye* 'big rain' (Nantes 1709:201) (Kipeá *dzó cru-yeⁿ*)

(12) *boeddo bû-ye* 'big mounts' (Nantes 1709:201) (Kipeá *bendó be-yeⁿ*)

(13) *ibuiehoho bû-ppi* 'a small body' (Nantes 1709:205) (Kipeá *ibuyeⁿ wohó bu-pi*)

Example (12) is a case of discordance between Dzubukuá and Kipeá, since the first has the prefix *bu-* instead of *be-* of the second for 'mount, hill'. But here we have possibly again *bu-* as a generic classifier.

As for the interrogatives Dzubukuá has *ãdé* (written *andè*) 'who', corresponding to Kipeá *adjé*, and *widé* (written *widde*) alternating with *odé* (written *odde*) 'what?', corresponding to Kipeá *udjé*. As for the demonstratives, *ãró* (written *anro*) 'that person, he', corresponding to Kipeá *eró*, and *uró* (written *uro* and *wro*) 'that thing, it', corresponding to Kipeá *uró*. See some examples below:

(14) *andè cunne ipadzu vplète?* 'Who is the father of lies?' (Nantes 1709:8)

(15) *widde aboho wro?* 'What (did God) after that?' (Nantes 1709:5)

(16) *widde idze?* 'What is his name?' (Nantes 1709:25)

(17) *odde wo ninho uro no Padzwarè?* (In) what way does the priest do that?' (Nantes 1709:83)

(18) *anro quedde nanhe aseno hemwj?* 'Is he the chief of the people of the heaven?' (Nantes 1709:9)

(19) *andè uquie, idommo inhia* 'In which day did he die?' (litt. 'which sun, he died in it?') (Nantes 1709:29)

(20) *andè wanadzi do kubuangatea?* 'Which are the medicines against the sins?' (Nantes 1709:70)

⁴ Dzubukuá examples are given in Nantes' writing, which is a very irregular one; only the few words discussed here are retranscribed, but with Nantes' spelling given in brackets.

The last two examples show *ãdé* (and not *widé* nor *odê*) preceding names of inanimate things (*ukjé* ‘sun’, *wanadzi* ‘medicine’). No comparable case was found in Kipeá; in this language apparently neither *adjé* nor *udjé* were employed before nouns, but another kind of interrogation with the preposition *so* and the interrogative morpheme *dé* was used instead: *worobÿ so dé?* ‘what news?’ (Mamiani 1877:56).

5. Conclusion. It was seen that Karirí, as exemplified by Kipeá, had three grammaticalized ways of classifying nouns: (a) a numeral classification extending to dimension, consistency, and color, and based on shape and dynamicity, manifested by prefixes added not to the nouns, but to the numerals and descriptive adjectives referring to the nouns; (b) a possessive classification of acquired goods, distinguishing in an elaborated way food and non-food by means of generic possessed nouns; and (c) a distinction between animate and inanimate marked by prefixes on the interrogatives and demonstratives. Among the languages known Karirí is probably unique in both the simultaneous presence of these three independent classifying systems and some features of its numeral system. In his study on classifiers for nouns, Allan (1977:286) states that ‘in all numeral classifier languages, the classifiers occur in anaphoric or deictic expressions as well as in expressions of quantity’. Not so in Karirí, where the classifying prefixes do not occur in deictics or other anaphoric expressions, but in descriptive adjectives as well in expressions of quantity. In their survey of Amazonian noun classification systems Derbyshire and Payne (1990:243ss.), summarizing recent specific literature, state that ‘numeral classifiers are lexico-syntactic forms, as distinct from closed grammatical systems’. In Karirí numeral classifiers are prefixes in morphological construction with numerals and descriptive adjectives. Neither Allan nor Derbyshire and Payne consider possessive classification. Dixon, in his lengthy study of noun classes (1982:159-233), reports on possessive classification only for some Micronesian languages and sees this kind of classification as an “unusual case”.

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