Exploring the ideological underpinnings of Amazonian multilingualism

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Workshop on Small-Scale Multilingualism

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Drawing by Sabino Monteiro

1. Introduction

- Dynamics of small-scale multilingualism: anchored in linguistic ideologies, aligned with broader cultural perceptions relating to the connections between behavior, group membership, and social identities and alignments

  (Sorensen 1967, François 2012, Kroskrity 2018, Di Carlo forthcoming, Lüpke 2016, etc.)

- Cultural variability in these perspectives relates to different constellations of multilingualism and linguistic diversity around the world

Multilingualism in the Vaupés / Upper Rio Negro region, northwest Amazonia
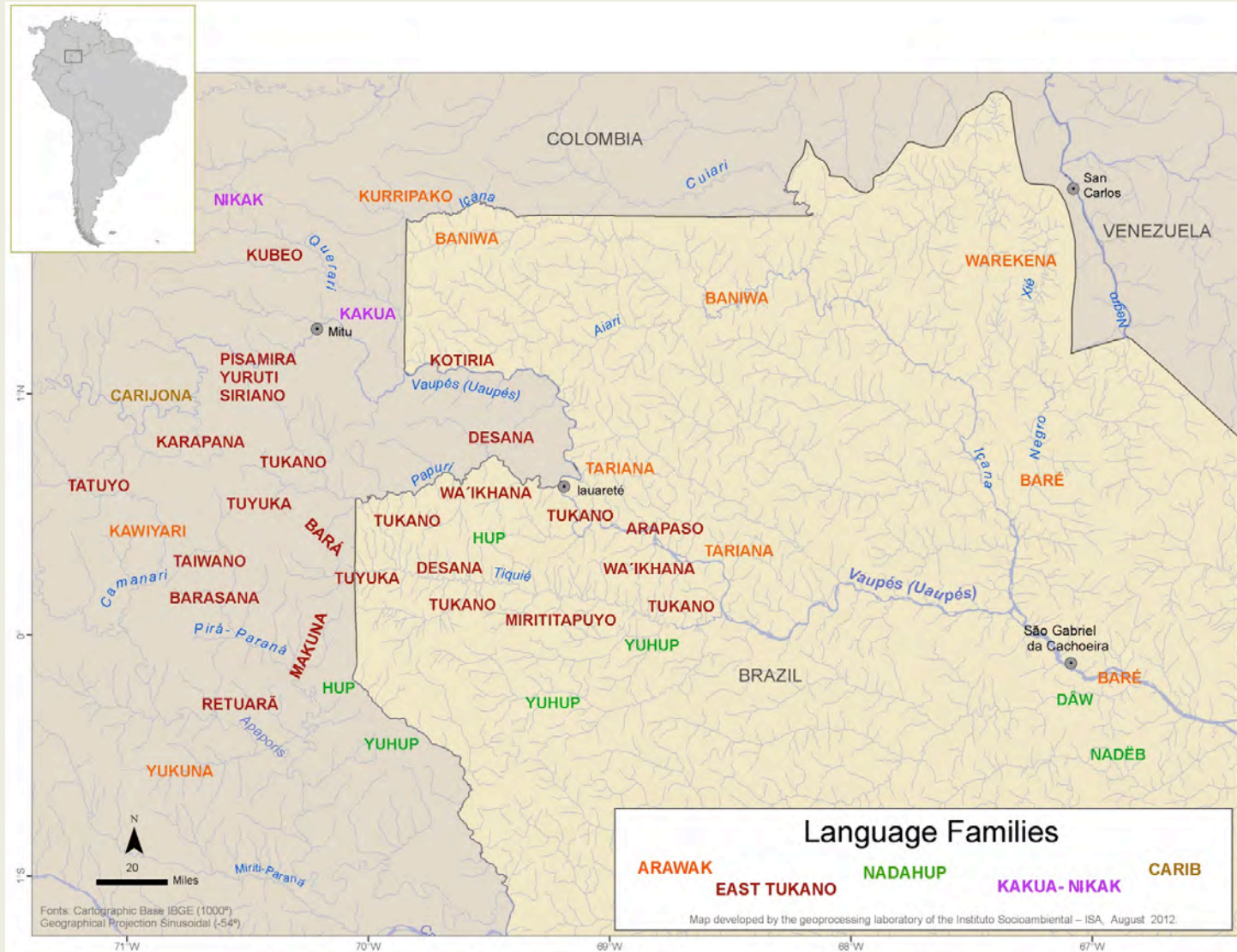
(Gomez-Imbert 1996, Epps & Stenzel 2013, Aikhenvald 2002, etc.)

Multilingualism in other lowland South American regional systems

- Upper Rio Negro
- Southern Guianas
- Middle Putumayo ('People of the Center')
- Guaporé-Mamoré
- Upper Xingu
- Gran Chaco

Epps, P. forthcoming. Amazonian linguistic diversity and its sociocultural correlates.' In *Language Dispersal, Diversification, and Contact: A Global Perspective*, ed. by Mily Crevels & Pieter Muysken. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press.
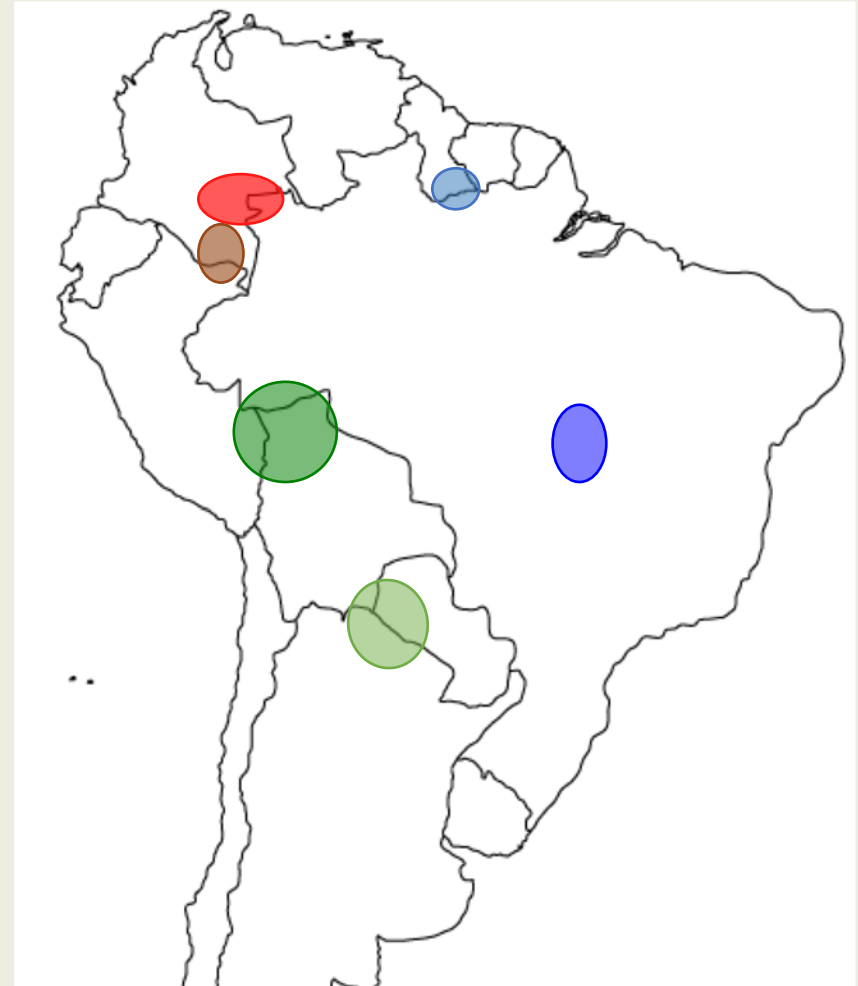
Goals:

- Explore some widespread (?) Amazonian cultural perspectives relating to social identity and language

- Consider relevance for multilingual practice on multiple levels: inter-community and intra-community (including diverse sociolects/registers)

- Consider relevance for processes of contact and convergence – Amazonian 'areal features'?

2. Mechanics of multilingualism: Ideologies of language and difference

A cultural/ideological "Amazonian package"

(Londoño Sulkin 2012:10)

"The overall reproduction of society is symbolically dependent on **relations with the outside and otherness**" (Fausto 2000:934; see also Overing 1981, Viveiros de Castro 1998, Ball 2011, etc.).

The world of potentially relatable others includes animals, spirits, etc. – all of which have comparable but crucially distinct points of view:

"**Animals and spirits see themselves as humans... they see their food as human food** (jaguars see blood as manioc beer, vultures see the maggots in rotting meat as grilled fish, etc.)... **they see their social system as organized in the same way as human institutions are** (with chiefs, shamans, ceremonies, exogamous moieties, etc.)." (Viveiros de Castro 1998:470; see also Santos-Granero 2006, Londoño Sulkin 2005, Uzendowski 2005, Vilaça 2000, etc.)

"Just as the jaguar-shaman may see blood as beer, the Wari' know that **manioc meal is the whites' maize paste**, or **forró is their *tamara***." (Vilaça 2007:186)

From 'The Spirit Who Fished for Traira'

Hup story told by Isabel (Kŏk) Salustiano, Tát Deh, October 2001

Saying "Let's go fish for traira together!" he (the spirit relative) took his brother-in-law along, that man... Out there in a forest clearing, he fished for traira fish. **He (the spirit) searched out rats (for bait)** with his hands... in clumps of roots.

Those (the spirit's traira fish) were jaguars for us (humans)! At the same time, it's said, for the spirit, they were traira fish.

So after that, it's said, he (the spirit) finished killing all (the fish), (while) that person was trembling right up against his (the spirit's) back, against his brother-in-law's back, afraid of the jaguars. For him (the spirit) they were traira, big ones, it's said. "The big ones have already arrived to eat (the bait)," (the spirit) was saying; they came jaguar-roaring, *we* would say.

Having said this, he killed (the big fish); it was just before dawn arrived that they finished. "That's all we'll kill. Come string up the traira! String the small ones and the big ones separately!" he (the spirit) said. Upon his saying this, he (the man) just stood around without knowing how to string them, (did) the person... "This is how I always do it, when I string traira," (the spirit) said, it's said, and he strung them all up....

Grades of animacy

Conceptions of animacy as *scalar*:

inanimates > plants > lower animals > higher animals > humans > spirits

(e.g. Descola 1994, Nuckolls 2010, Chaumeil 1993)

The same scalar quality can also apply to *human* groups, e.g.:

foreigners/enemies/non-indigenous > groups nearby/within social sphere > own group

(e.g. Silverwood-Cope 1972, Kiefenheim 1992, Chaumeil 1993, Vilaça 2010, Ball 2011)

Animacy and language

Yagua (Chaumeil 1993):

Language-- No language

Yagua - neighbors - enemies - higher animals - lower animals - plants - inanimates

See also Nuckolls (1996, 2010) for the Runa of Ecuador;

Basso (1985) for the Kalapalo of the Xingu

Spirits: song
Own group: speech
Neighbors: semi-intelligible/familiar speech
Enemies/foreigners: unintelligible speech (may be assessed as 'animal-like')
Higher animals: calls
Lower animals: cries
Plants: high-pitched sounds only shamans can hear/imitate
Inanimates: noises and/or no language

Animacy and language

Each social unit has its own language, which is fully comprehensible to group members, but not (necessarily) across groups – entails **difference of form but not of content** (or, presumably, structure!)

In discourse, entities are commonly 'quoted':

- Own group: directly quoted speech
- Other people, spirits: quoted speech in another language
- Animals, etc.: ideophones

(Nuckolls 1996, 2010; Basso 1985; Chaumeil 1993)

For the Runa, "the **syllabic weight of sound-symbolic words**, including the numbers of syllables, the diversity of sound segments, and the types of sound segments, may be enlisted by speakers to **performatively foreground the diverse kinds of 'aliveness-es' exhibited by varieties of nonhuman life**." (Nuckolls 2010:356)

Animacy and language

"Eastern Tukanoan speakers **link language to descent or "species"** and, correspondingly, to the processes of phylogeny or speciation. Ancestors who emerged from a single, segmented anaconda body are said to speak different, but related languages.

Linguistic proximity between these groups is seen as a measure of ancestral (and thus consanguineal) relationship. The **languages of animal species, likewise indicate difference** (Jackson 1983:177) as well as degree of relationship between related animal species…. [and the] Maku, considered transitional between animal and human, are correspondingly thought to produce utterances **intermediate between human and animal speech**."

(Chernela 1989: 37; see also Jackson 1983, etc.)

Speaking as being – and *becoming*

- Engagement is inherently perilous, risking loss of one's own socially based subjectivity:
    - with humans – associated with marriage and warfare
    - with non-humans – largely negotiated by shamans

- Engagement across groups as primarily discursive – involves blurring *linguistic* boundaries

(See e.g. Viveiros de Castro 1998, Santos-Granero 2006, Londoño Sulkin 2005, Uzendowski 2005, Vilaça 2000, etc. for other Amazonian peoples)

"One creates one's self in the act of speaking…. to speak a language not your own is to 'become' another."
(Chernela 2013)

Speaking as *becoming...*

Hup, 'The Deer Story', as told by Isabela Salustiano:

Yɨnɨhɨy mah yup hɨd ham yɨ'ayah. Yup mah yup hɨd-ín b'ay ot d'ak k'ö'öp b'ayah… bëbë ɨn notëgëh…

Thus, it's said, they (the children) went away. Then, it's said, their mother went crying and following after them… to become what we call a *bebe* bird…

Tɨh-tẽhn'an tɨh ot ë' yɨ', "nɨ põ'ra, nɨ põ'ra!" tɨh no ë' yɨ' mah, yɨt tɨh ɨd döhö yɨ'ayah.

speak-transform

Crying for her children, saying, "My children, my children! [Tukano]" so saying, it's said, thus she transformed while/through speaking (like a *bebe* bird).

3. Social categories and linguistic difference

Linguistic differentiation maps to salient social divisions – both **across *and within* communities**

- **Affines/Cognates:** e.g. linguistic exogamy and 'passive multilingualism'

  Upper Rio Negro: East Tukanoan (and Tariana).

  Upper Xingu: General preference for linguistic endogamy, but where regular intermarriage occurs (e.g. Trumai-Kamayurá) each spouse speaks own language (Seki 2011:69)

  Gran Chaco: Linguistic exogamy; passive multilingualism with active monolingualism (Campbell & Grondona 2010)

- **Clans or 'sibs':** Evidence for clanlects

Upper Rio Negro – Tukanoan, see e.g. Jackson (1983:176), Gomez-Imbert (1993:253), Wilson Silva p.c.

Caquetá-Putumayo - Andoke

"Dans le passé, chaque lignage se différenciait des autres par des particularités dialectales. Ces particularités sont encore vivantes dans les lignages qui ont subsisté. Elles sont reconnues et appréciées." (Landuburu 1979:19)

- Men/Women: Gender indexicality

South America (Amazonia/Chaco):
41 languages (14 families) out of 400+ –> **10%**
Elsewhere in world: 57 out of 6,000+ languages –> **1%**
(Rose 2015; Rose and Bakker 2014)

Karajá (Jê, central Brazil; Borges 1990):
Phonological:

Female speech	Male speech	Meaning
anõna	*aõna*	'thing'
hɛlɨkõrɛ	*hɛlõrɛ*	'duck'
wekɨrɨ	*werɨrɨ*	'boy'

Lexical – kin terms:

-nẽbɨθɔ	*-ra*	'nephew'

- ## Humans/spirits: Shamanic language

Common across Amazonia – typically involves partial lexical substitution with distinct words and/or metaphorical phrases.

e.g. Awá-Guajá (Tupi-Guarani, eastern Brazil)

Karawara spirit beings (Magalhães & Garcia 2018, Garcia 2011)

- Inhabit sky/land of dead, but appear frequently on earth; interaction via ritual specialists;

- Have their own language: *iwama'iha* 'speech of heaven'; prosodically song (*janaha*) – can be channeled by any Awá person.

ira r-opy	tawamỹ	Ø-me-hara	jaha	(Karawara speech)
tree LKR-canopy	guariba	LKR-~~eat~~–NMZR	I	

'I am a forest guariba eater'

ka'a	wari	Ø-'u-hara	jaha	(Awa speech)
forest	guariba	LKR-~~eat~~–NMZR	I	

'I am a forest guariba eater'

4. Mechanics of contact: Circulation and homogenization within and across languages

High family-level diversity; low rates of diversification

- High number of isolates:

Macro-Area	# lgs	# isolates	# fam	% isolates
South America	574	65	44	60%
North America	618	31	40	44%
Eurasia	1654	12	23	34%
Africa	2207	17	33	34%
New Guinea Area	2139	55	72	43%
Australia	342	9	23	28%

Hammarström et al. 2015, Seifart & Hammarström 2017

- Many very small families: Most have only 2-5 member languages

- Non-contiguous distributions of the largest families: Tupian/Tupi-Guaranian, Arawakan, Cariban, (Macro)Jêan

  Exceptions: East Tukanoan, Panoan

- Instances of low geographically defined dialectal variation

van Gijn 2006:ix

e.g. Yurakare (isolate) – relatively large traditional territory; no clear dialectal subdivisions (van Gijn 2006:11, Hirtzel 2010)

Reluctance to construe innovations as shibboleths within a given social unit (e.g. Hill 1995 on NW Amazonian Arawakan groups)
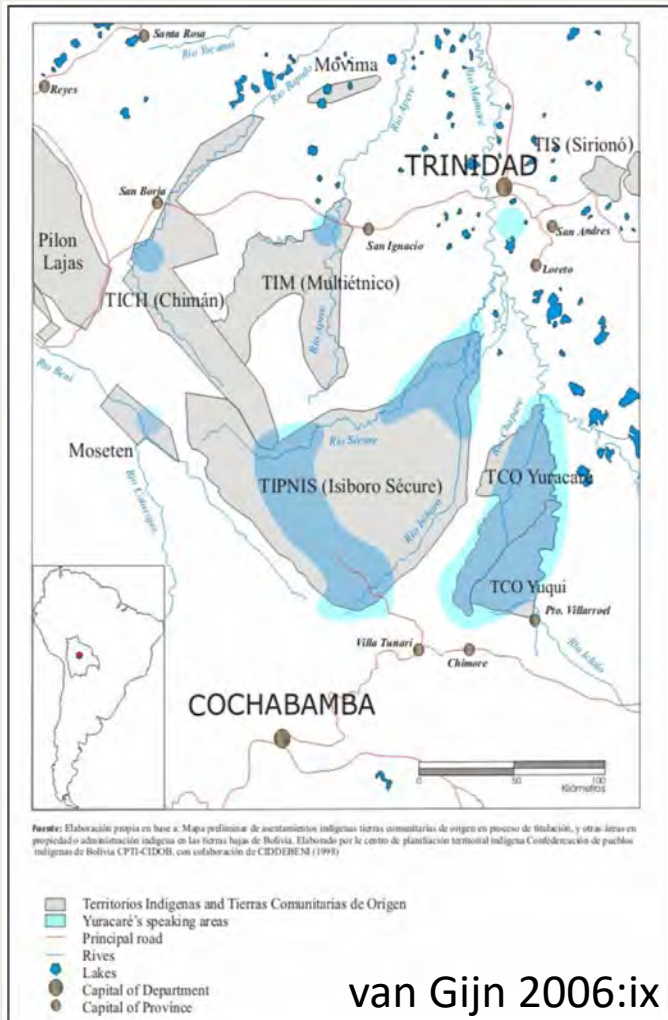
Mechanisms of homogeneization and convergence

- Frequent circulation and interaction among residence/language groups – visiting, festivals, ritual activity

- Social incorporation of captives (e.g. Fausto 1999, Michael 2017)

- Discursive norms emphasizing structured dialogic interactions & extensive repetition (e.g. Beier et al. 2002, Urban 1986)

Hup conversation, Tat Deh community

J: ʔin-ăn   tɨh   wæd-yɨʔ-ɨ́y!
   1pl-OBJ   3SG   eat-TEL-DYNM
   He'd eat us up!

P: ʔin-ăn   tɨh   wæd-yɨ́ʔ-ɨ́y!
   1pl-OBJ   3SG   eat-TEL-DYNM
   He'd eat us up!

M: ʔám-ăn=hin   wæd-yɨʔ-tǽʔ-ǽy,   nɔ-kăm!
   2sg-OBJ=ALSO   eat-TEL-CNTRFCT-DYNM   say-IMP2
   He'd eat you up too, say!

P: ʔám-ăn=hin   wæd-yɨʔ-tǽʔ-ǽy   tɨ́h-ɨp!
   2sg-OBJ=ALSO   eat-TEL-CNTRFCT-DYNM   3sg-DEP
   He'd eat you up too!

Xavante conversation, Graham (1995:185)

Eduardo:	tare õhã tete ĩ-petse mono
Etẽpa:	ĩhɛ tete ĩ-petse mono
Eduardo:	ĩ-tsi-petse mono
Etẽpa:	ĩ-tsi-petse mono
Eduardo:	te ĩ-rowahutu mono
Etẽpa:	te ĩ-rowahutu mono
Eduardo:	he just perfected what he saw in the dream
Etẽpa:	yes he perfected what he saw in the dream
Eduardo:	they [the ancestors] perfected themselves
Etẽpa:	they [the ancestors] perfected themselves
Eduardo:	he is remembering the story
Etẽpa:	he is remembering the story

Whiffen (*The North-West Amazons,* 1915: 253-254)

"Not only is the Indian voice monotonous, but the conversation is rendered yet duller by the **invariable repetition of the last words of a sentence**. This is particularly the case with the Tuyuka, where **conversation has a definitely ceremonial form**. For instance, if a man leaves a party to bathe, he says, "I go to take a bath," and the company present reply in chorus, "You go to take a bath." On his return the formula runs "I have taken a bath," and **the confirmative echo follows**, "Yes, you have taken a bath." **This endless repetition, as was noticed with regard to songs, is characteristic of all Indians**."

Discourse-driven calquing and grammatical convergence

Maintenance of existing distinctions focusing on phonological *form* – but convergence in structure;

e.g. relatively unconstrained calquing:

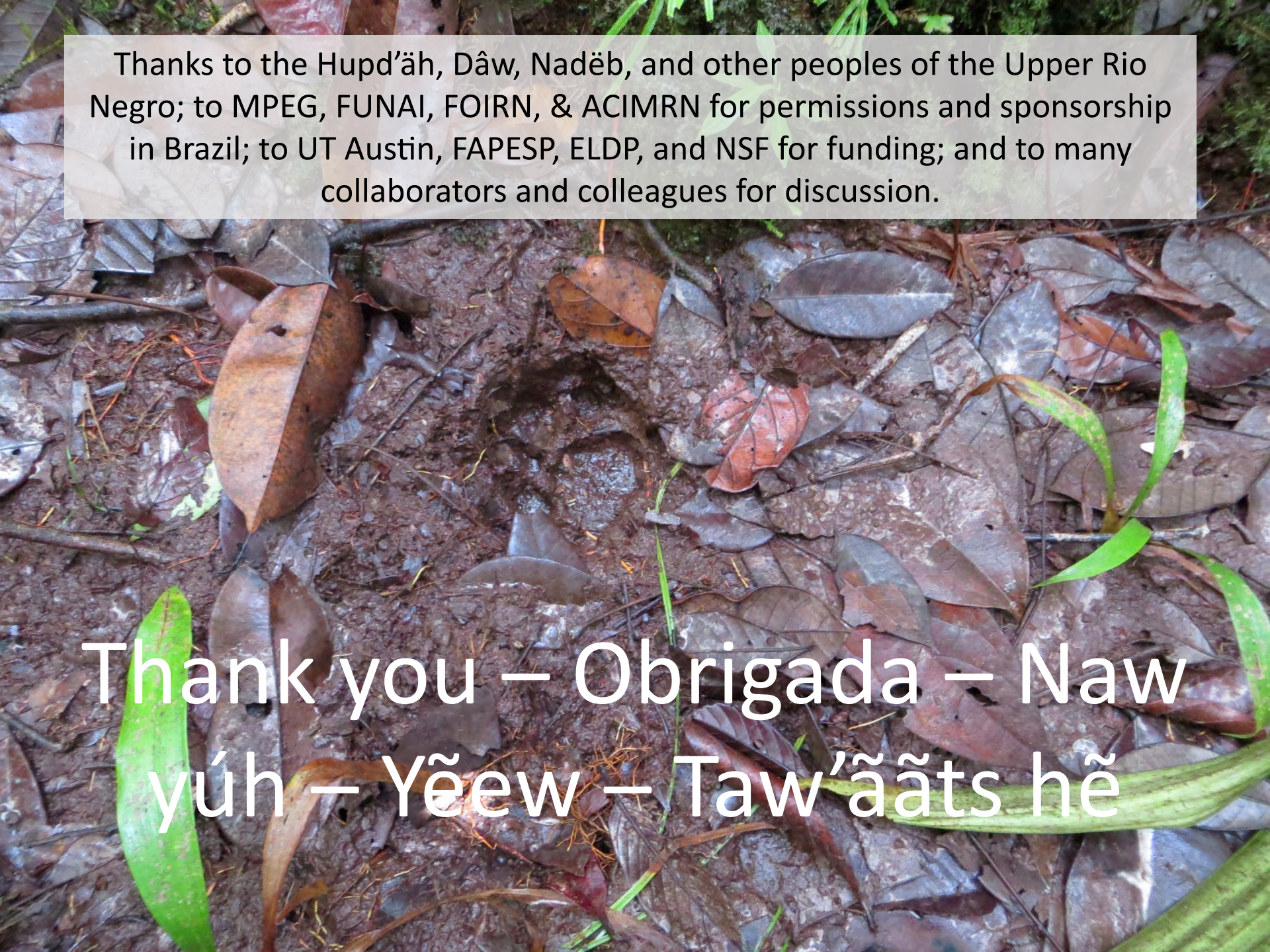| Hup	Gloss	Tukano	Gloss
mĭn	INGÁ (GENERIC) (*Inga* sp.)	merê	INGÁ (GENERIC) (*Inga sp.*)
b'ĭj min	squirrel-monkey ingá	mere i'si	ingá squirrel-monkey
m'ăh min	snake ingá	pĩrô mere	snake ingá
pɔhɔt min	aracu (fish) ingá	bo'teâ mere	aracu (fish) ingá
bĭʔ min	rat ingá	bi'î mere	rat ingá
tŭg min	howler-monkey ingá	emô mere	howler-monkey ingá

→ Consistent with 'perspectivist' view that groups experience congruent realities within their own distinct social systems

Conclusions

- Widely attested Amazonian ideologies map linguistic difference onto social difference – and vice versa – in particular ways

- Linguistic distinctions are most likely to be maintained/magnified where the social category is viewed as meaningful, according to culturally grounded perspectives:

    - male/female
    - affine/cognate
    - clan/clan
    - human/spirit

    - human/animal
    - friend/foe
    - 'proper'/'improper' human
    - etc.

- **Multilingualism** may involve various lects associated with various social groups, but which do *not* necessarily correspond to different geographically based (or even human!) communities

Conclusions

- Social distinctions must be actively maintained through particular behaviors

- Changes of code may be associated with assimilation to the 'other' – potentially perilous

- Ample context for association with other speakers/languages – mechanisms and ideologies fostering convergence of content/structure even while formal distinctions may be maintained

Thank you – Obrigada – Naw yúh – Yẽew – Taw'ããts hẽ