Chayma Language Revitalization: A Preliminary Analysis of Pronominal Inflection

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Introduction

Pronouns are an essential component of a language's grammatical structure and play a crucial role in conveying information about the participants' roles, relationships, and other linguistic features. Pronoun systems can vary widely across languages, and linguists often analyze them based on various linguistic properties; pronouns are categorized into different persons based on their relationship to the speaker (or agent), the listener (or patient), and other participants in a conversation; pronouns indicate whether they refer to a single entity (singular) or multiple entities (plural); languages with case systems often exhibit different pronoun forms for different grammatical cases, such as nominative (subject), accusative (direct object), and genitive (possessive); some languages distinguish between inclusive and exclusive pronouns, where inclusive pronouns include the speaker and the listener in the reference, while exclusive pronouns exclude the listener; in some languages, pronouns may be reduplicated (repeated with slight modifications) for emphasis or to convey different shades of meaning. Understanding the pronoun system of a language helps linguists analyze its grammatical structure, and how it encodes social relationships and discourse strategies.

The current project focuses on Carib, a Venezuelan language family, which contains 3 closely related dormant Indigenous languages: Chayma, Cumangatoto, and Paria. Though sharing many grammatical similarities, especially when considering pronominal inflection, these languages are still regarded and treated as 3 separate languages, due to a preliminary comparison of basic vocabulary that has revealed substantial differences.

Keywords: pronouns, case, person marking, ergative-absolutive, language revitalization, indigenous languages

Methodology

This project draws from 2 main data sources: Manuscripts from the 1600's and a comprehensive grammar dictionary. The first source consists of a collection of 3 manuscripts, and subsequently reprinted in 1868. These volumes were later digitized by Dr. Granadillo comprises over 400 pages of linguistic material, including extensive syntactic rules, verbal paradigms, and dictionaries. Most of the data collected throughout this research project originates from those 3 manuscripts. The second source used is a grammar dictionary by José Alvarez (2018), providing phonological, morphological, and syntactic analysis on many aspects of the languages, as well as many lexical entries.

We began this project by transcribing and translating the manuscripts. Once a majority of the texts were transcribed, we analyzed and interlinearized verb paradigms in order to produce a morphemic glossing of each of the collected data entries. The data was collected and transcribed using textEdit, Excel and Word.

Table 1: Pronoun abbreviations

Term	Meaning
1s	First person singular
2s	Second person singular
3s	Third person singular
1p	First person plural
2p	Second person plural
3p	Third person plural

Results

     In Carib, we find evidence that suggests pronominal affixes do not carry number in their morphemic glossing, instead dividing person and number into two separate morphemes. We also find evidence that certain subject-object relationships are represented by a portmanteau morpheme representing both agent and patient in a single form. The following is a discussion of some preliminary findings extracted from the data.

     A reanalysis could be needed when considering Carib ergative-absolutive. An ergative-absolutive language is a grammatical typology where the alignment of verbs and their arguments varies between the subject of a transitive verb and the subject of an intransitive verb. In these languages, the absolutive case marks the subject of an intransitive verb and the direct object of a transitive verb, while the ergative case marks the subject of a transitive verb. This contrasts with English and other nominative-accusative languages, where the subject of both transitive and intransitive verbs is marked in a similar way (nominative case), and the direct object of a transitive verb is marked differently (accusative case).

Table 2: Intransitive subject

Person	Marker	Example: akipü 'morir' "die"
1s	w-root	W-akipü-a-che 1.SBJ-die-PRS-IND-Ø 'I die'
2s	ay-root	Ay-akipü-a-che 2.SBJ-die-PRS-IND-Ø 'You (sg) die'
3s	m-root	Man-akipü-a-che 3.SBJ-die-PRS-IND-Ø 'He/she dies'
1p	Amna (pluralizer)-man-root	Amna-man-akipü-a-che 1.PL.SBJ-??-die-PRS-IND 'We die'
2p	ay-root-te (pluralizer)	Ay-akipü-a-te-che 2.SBJ-die-PRS-PL-IND 'You (pl) die'
3p	m-root-teu (pluralizer)	Man-akipü-a-teu 3.SBJ-die-PRS-PL `They die'

Table 3: Transitive object

Person	Marker	Example
1s	k-	K-ay-ara-te-che 1.OBJ-2.SUBJ-bring.PRS-PL-IND 'you (pl) bring me'
2s	ay-	Ay-ara-n 2.OBJ-bring.PRS-3.SG.SBJ 'He brings you'

3s	m-	M-ara-te-che 3.OBJ-bring.PRS-2.PL.SBJ-IND 'You (pl) bring him'
1p	Amna (pluralizer)-	Amna-y-ara-n PL.OBJ-1-bring.PRS-3.SG.SBJ 'He brings us'
2p	ay-root-pluralizer	ay-ara-teu-com 2.OBJ-bring.PRS-3.PL.SBJ-PL 'they brings you (pl)'
3p	m-root-com (pluralizer)	m-ara-te-che-com 3.OBJ-2.PL.SBJ-IND-PL 'you (pl) bring them'

By comparing Table 2 and Table 3, we confirm this language's ergative-absolutive identity. However, we note that conjugations, and thus the pronominal affix used, varies with 1st person plural objects. The second morpheme found in intransitive subjects "man" is <u>not</u> consistent amongst all transitive objects for 1st person plurals. We have begun the process of identifying why this distinction exists, and believe that the effects of possible portmanteau morphemes might be at play. We also consider the possibility of a type of split-ergativity, where some intransitives act according to one set of rules, while others act differently. This is motivated by the presence of derived intransitives in Carib, which are verbs that act as intransitives but originate from transitive words. We see an example of this with the verb *charer* "to bring," which shows somewhat varied derivation.

Future research potential

Though these languages are classified as extinct, the descendants of these groups are currently undergoing an important revitalization process as these languages hold immense cultural value, and remain a symbol of ethnic identity to the groups they represent. Those participating in revitalization efforts have requested access to these materials and the outputs of any subsequent research outputs as resources to aid in language teaching and reconstruction. Further steps will involve a more thorough grammar analysis in order to create books and manuals that can be used as teaching material for these languages. Moreover, an in depth analysis will further clarify the distinctions between the languages and allow for the separation of various similarities and differences in the grammars of these languages. Other steps include standardizing the orthography as the orthographic system previously used to transcribe the languages is inconsistent and can be considered confusing to most language learners.

References

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