

# Toward an interactional approach to multilingualism: insights from the Vaupés

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Panel: **Unsettling Multilingualism**

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# Today's talk

- **The region in focus**

- The Vaupés as a “small scale” multilingual system
- Ideolog(ies) and assumptions
- Our questions

- **Our project & corpus**

- Typology of data
- Methodologies: sociolinguistic, language documentation, collaborative

- **Findings**

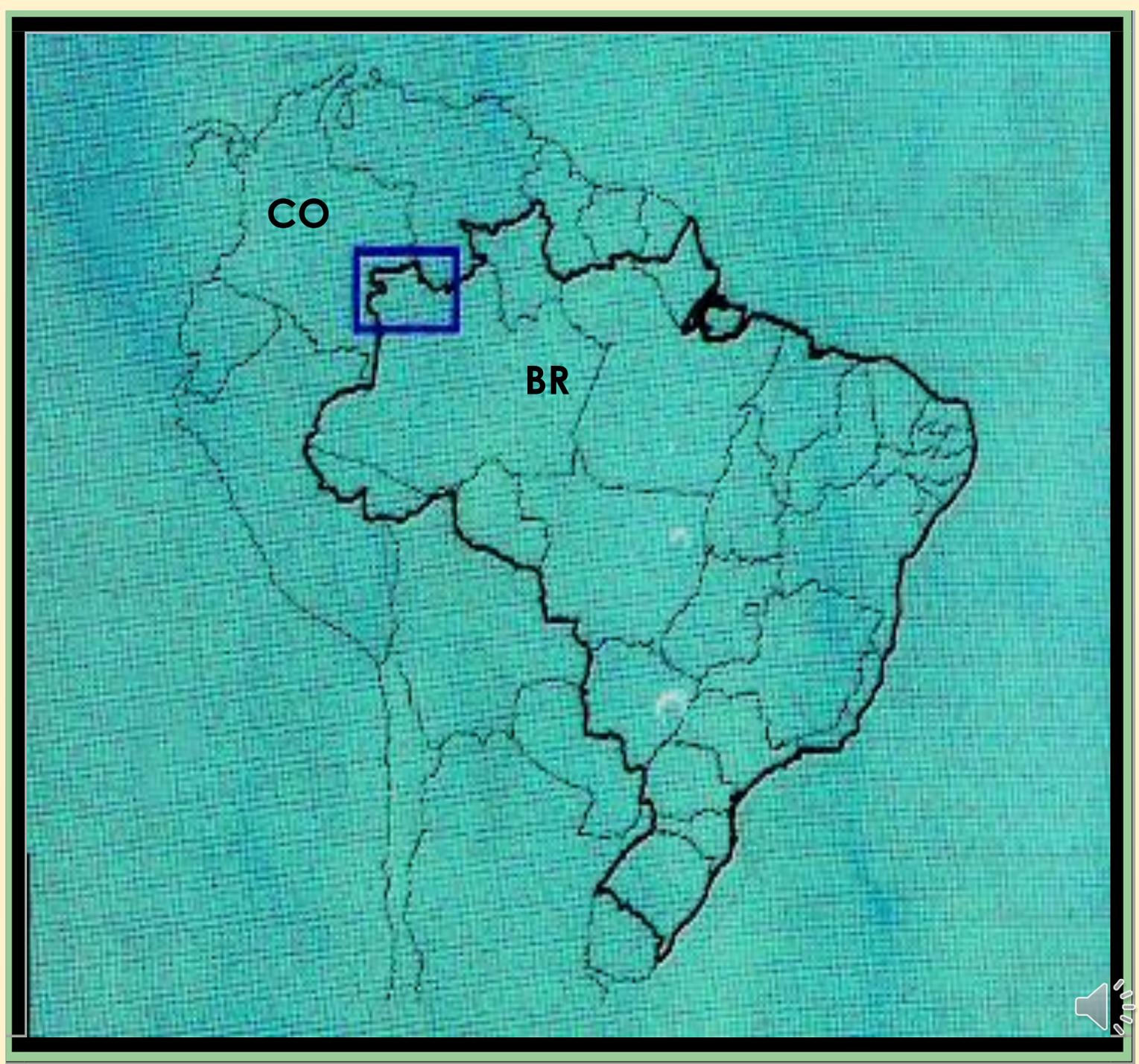
- *Explicit* ideology at work: excerpts from sociolinguistic interviews
- *Implicit* ideology at work: practices in everyday interaction

Not exactly what we expected . . .

- **Implications, questions for further research**

# The Upper Rio Negro

200,000 km<sup>2</sup>  
pop. 67,000



Contact:

Marriage

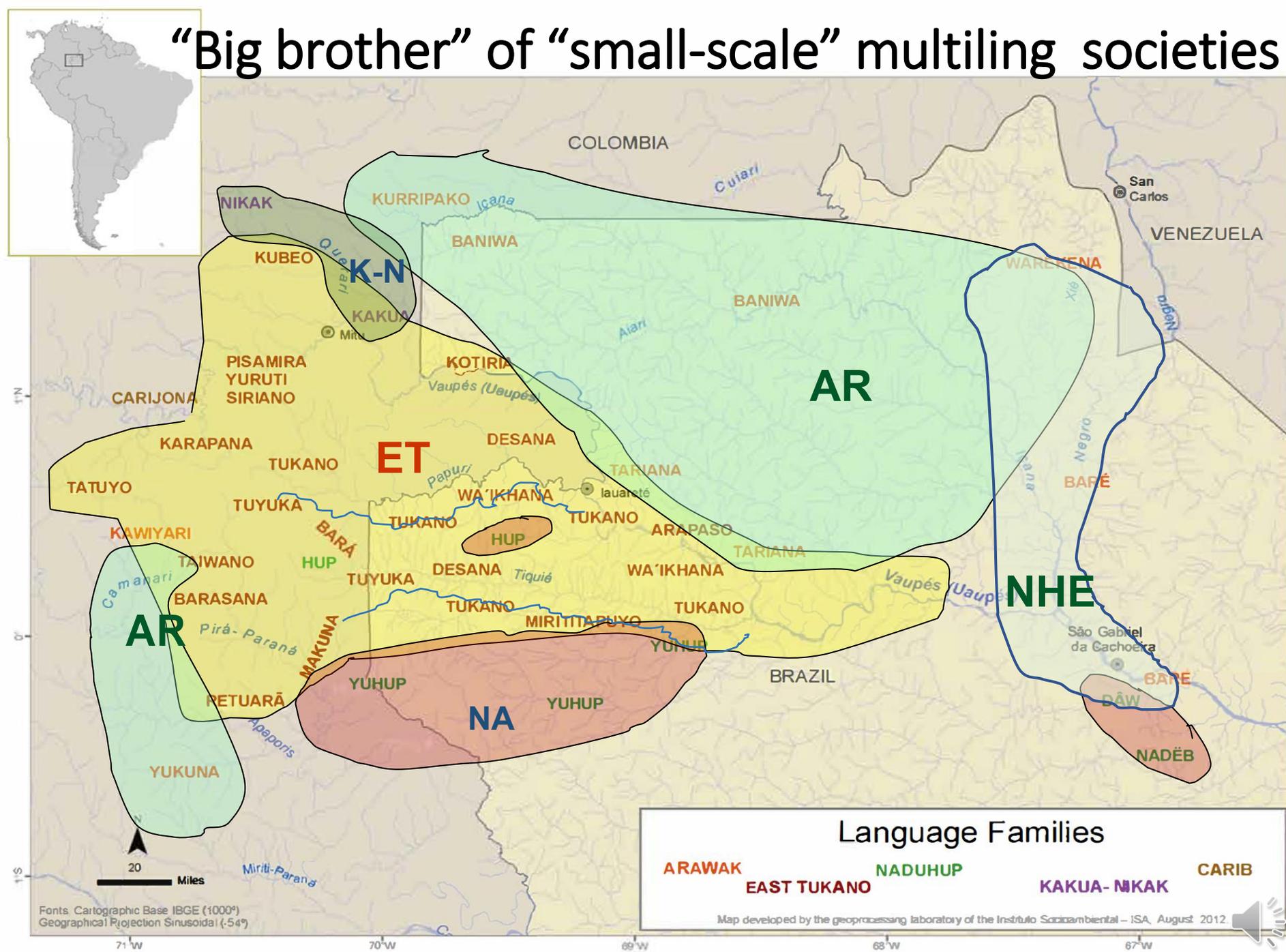
(Ling Exogamy – ET/AR groups, egalitarian)

Economic/  
service Exchange  
riverine/forest,  
non-egalitarian

Culturally  
homogenous,  
Linguistically  
diverse

Sorensen 1967; Jackson  
1983; Gomez-Imbert 1999;  
Epps & Stenzel 2013, others

“Big brother” of “small-scale” multiling societies



# Vaupés language ideology

- **Essentialist, overt** (Aikhenvald 2002; Chernela 2013)
  - Patrilect = social identity
  - Principle of “language loyalty”
  - Hierarchy: patrilect > matrilect & other lects
  - Language “etiquette” and practices:
    - Highly constrained code-switching, little lexical borrowing (excludes national languages)
    - Denial/downplaying of repertoires
    - Restrained accommodation to languages of others
    - “Receptive” multilingualism as expected practice



But . . .

[In the] Desano community of this study [...] neither codeswitching nor code-mixing seem to be highly constrained or rigorously avoided [...] in contexts of everyday interaction [in which] speakers feel no need to police their speech to conform rigidly to expected norms of language use ... (Silva 2020: 152)



# Our research questions

- What does it mean to “be multilingual” in the Vaupés?
  - What *more* can we learn about language use in this particular small-scale multilingual setting?
  - How do *ideologies* relate to actual multilingual *practices*?
    - What do people *say* about how they use languages?
    - How do speakers *use* their linguistic repertoires (in daily life)?
      - documentation and analysis of everyday interaction
- What methodologies can help us investigate *whether* and *how* communicative practices vary across various multilingual situations.

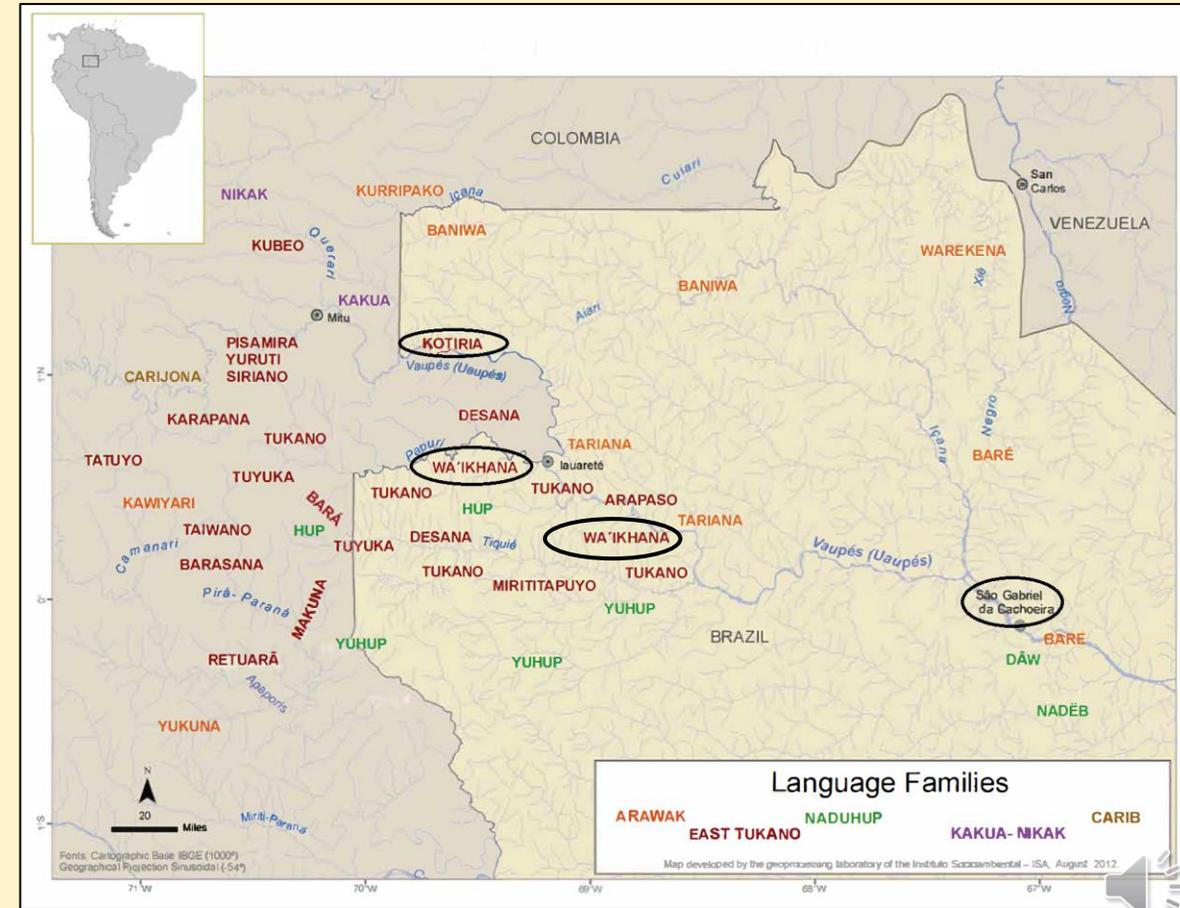


# Our project

- *Grammar and multilingual practices through the lens of everyday interaction in two endangered languages in the East Tukano family*

NSF-DEL BCS-1664348 2017-2020  
(Stenzel, Williams, & Barbara Fox)

- Documentation of everyday language use in **Kotiria** and **Wa'ikhana** communities  
(+speakers of other languages, primarily Tukano)



# Corpus (ELAR)

**Recordings:  
Kris, Nick, Indigenous teams (5-12)  
250 h raw data**

20h

46

**Sociolinguistic  
interviews**

**TRANSCRIBED /  
TRANSLATED**

60 h



# Types of interactional data

**Conversation** – spontaneous, informal “talk” in contexts of everyday life



# Types of interactional data

- **Interactive tasks** –  
semi-structured,  
using stimuli, e.g.  
games, props, films



# Types of interactional data

- **Sociolinguistic interviews** –with pairs or groups, conducted by indigenous team members in Kotiria or Wa'ikhana, providing extensive commentary on:
  - Multilingual acquisition
  - Personal experiences
  - Language use practices
  - Perspectives on change, etc.



# Findings

- *Explicit* ideology at work: language=identity

*Tipehepele tina: “Y#̣#̣ dahsei ihieday#̣. Y#̣#̣ wai’khũ ihiaha y#̣.” Nii, tii ya’uduhku d#̣hka, ya’uhkukali ihiri ni ya’uduhku m#̣h#̣at#̣. [...] Y#̣#̣ to wai’khũ mahkũ ihia. Y#̣#̣ wai’khana tii ya’uduhkuere. Koedaboali [...] y#̣#̣na yee ihika nimahato malĩye ihika nimahato [W AI]*

When I was young, everyone in my village would say: “I’m not Tukano. I’m Wa’ikhana.” So, I grew up speaking my language.’ [...] **I’m the son of a Wa’ikhana; I speak the language.** I wouldn’t want a different language [...] for me, **our language is who I am.** [JV, WAI man in his 60’s]



- *Explicit* ideology at work: language loss

*Bʰonidi malĩ dahseye yaʼuduhkugʰ peʼna, bʰonidi, bʰoŋi, bʰoŋi . . . malĩ aã “piri” niali naha. “Piri, mʰʰ aʼtali mʰʰ?”*

*Malĩ dahseye yaʼuduhkugʰ saaniali.’ [W AI]*

**We’re ashamed when we speak Tukano, ashamed, ashamed, ashamed . . .**

other Wa’ikhana call us **“brother-in-law!” “Brother-in-law, you’ve**

**arrived!”** That’s what they say when we speak Tukano. [JN, WAI man 44]



- *Explicit* ideology at work: norm of receptive multilingualism

*Pateretha tikorohũ, to ya me'ne, dahsea ya me'ne, o yu'uhũ, yu'ure to dahsea ya me'ne yu'ure to nichũna, dahsea ya me'ne yu'tii. Yo tikorose yu'ure yu'tiera tire. Ōse kotiria ya me'ne yu nichũre hi'na, dahsea ya me'ne tikoro yu'tia. Thusụtha yu pho'nakãtha. Tinakã phini duruhku phañohare tinakã hini. [KOT]*

Sometimes (my wife) uses her language, speaks Tukano and I do too, (but) when she speaks Tukano with me and I respond in Tukano, then she won't answer me! **When I speak in Kotiria with her, she answers in Tukano. It's the same with the children. (That's why) they can speak both languages so well.'** [JM, Kotiria man, 40]



# Why ‘interaction’?

While the nature of the system in the Vaupes lends itself to receptive practices and speakers understanding each others’ languages, ...

“(sometimes) speakers may have no choice but to speak one another’s languages or a neutral, third language. The difference in representation and practice illustrates the contrast between the preferences and norms of linguistic loyalty and the realities of practice. **The latter are far more complex.**” (Chernela: 2013:225)

(cf. also Stenzel & Khoo 2016, Silva 2020)

# What have we found?

- *Implicit* ideology at work: wider range of practices than explicit ideology would predict
  - Lots of monolingualism
  - Less receptive multilingual conversation than expected
  - More accommodation than expected
  - Code-switching of various types

.

# Monolingual talk

Interestingly, although Vaupés society is characterized as highly multilingual, a great deal of interaction in our corpus is actually conducted **entirely in one language**.



# Receptive multilingualism

When participants each speak their 'own' language (patrilect), even in the rapid turn-taking of ordinary conversation

An expected norm, which does occur, but not nearly to the extent predicted, and attested more in couples where wife is Tukano speaker



MC

AP

DD



1 AP:

TUK

a'to ma- maha ñeno me'ra ohati

a'to ma- maha ñemeno me'na oha-ti  
IMP.IND now language COM/INST write-INT

'Now what language are we supposed to write here?'

2

(0.2)

3 MC:

WAI

yu'u ya'uduhkue [ihidi tia

yu'u ya'uduhku-ye ihi-di ti-a  
1SG language-PL COP.VIS.PFV.2/3 ANPH-PL

'These are my languages.'

4 AP:

TUK

[wa'ikhana yee yu tu'o

wa'ikhana yee yu'u tu'o-o

wa'ikhana POSS 1SG hear/understand-VIS.PRS.

'I understand Wa'ikhana.'

5 DD:

WAI

=tu'o mahsia mu'ua

tu'o masi-a mu'u-a  
hear/understand know-PL 2SG-EMPH

'You understand everything'

6 AP:

Aa

7 DD:

WAI

so'o [mehe ya'ure

so'o mehe ya'u-de

DEIC.DIST also speak-VIS.IPFV.2.3

'and speak too.'

8 AP:

TUK

[tu'otha yu'u pahko ko yee

tu'o-tha yu'u pahko ko yee  
hear/understand-ADD 1SG mother 3SGF POSS

'I also understand my mother's language'

9 MC:

WAI

Mm, mu'u ya'uduhkuye

Mm mu'u ya'uduhku-ye

2SG language-PL

'Mm, your languages'

# Accommodation

Speaking one's patriline is normatively expected and, due to marriage patterns, would result in 'receptive' interactions

However, we found many cases of accommodation in family settings

For example, a Kubeo mother speaking Kotiria with her Kotiria husband and family





[tcpk\_094 00:25-38]

1 ET: *di'i maniarī hira,*  
*di'i mania-ri hi-ra*  
 meat/fiber not.exist-NMLZ COP-VIS.IPFV.2/3

KOT

'(These stalks) have no fiber.'

2 ET: *naeraro kha'maka*  
*na-era-ro kha'ma-ka*  
 get-NEG-SG need/want-IRR

KOT

'(you/we) don't want to get (them, next time)'

3 AX: *āha mama*  
 'Here mom'

4 (4.1)

5 JS: *chiu! Hoo*  
 INTJ:Ah!

6 CS: *a'riño ōse*

KOT

*a'ri-ño ō-se'e*  
 DEM.PROX-CLF:palm DEIC.PROX-CONTR  
 'This stalk here'

7 CS: *wuho maniakureri hiratha*

KOT

*wuho mania-kure-ri hi-ra-tha*  
 fiber not.exist-almost.not-NMLZ COP-VIS.IPFV-ADD  
 'doesn't have hardly any fiber either'

8 ET: *maniakure[re*  
*mania-kure-re*  
 not.exist-almost.not-VIS.PFV.2/3  
 'Almost nothing at all.'

KOT

9 SU: [*maniakure[re*  
*mania-kure-re*  
 not.exist-almost.not-VIS.PFV.2/3  
 'Almost nothing at all.'

KOT

10 JS: [*yu'ure kuño*  
*yu'u-re ku-ño*  
 1SG-OBJ one-CLF:palm  
 '(Give) me one (a stalk)'

KOT

# 'Code-switching'

In some cases, a mix of receptive and accommodating practices occur

Might be even more pervasive than otherwise expected



[iauk\_002 01:29-1:53]

01 EG:

*no'pe centímetro ( ) noahari vinte será?*

KOT

*no'ope centímetro **noa**-hari vinte será*  
INT:QUANT centimeters **good**-INT.IPFV twenty maybe

'How many centimeters (long) will it be, maybe 20?'

02

(1.5)

03 ES:

⊕ *ūbani be'ro keo dehkeoti=*

TUK

*ūbani be'ro keo dehke-o-ti=*

don't.know later measure initiate-FEM-INTENT

'I don't know, I'll measure it later, I'm getting started'

04 EG:

*=tothika khī'ono centímetro*

KOT

*to-thi-ka khī'o-no centímetro*

DEF-true-ASSERT.IPFV correct-SG centimeters

'that really is the right centimeter (length, the right size)'

05

(1.0)

06 EG:

*no'puru mūano yoakoharita?*

KOT

*no'opuru mūa-ro yoa-koha-ri=ta*

how.much high-SG make-build-INT=EMPH

'how high will you make it?'

07

(1.6)

08 ES:

*a'tiro p-pa'takā doaro wekā['a:::=*

TUK

*a'tiro pa'ta-akā **noa**-ro wee-kā-'a*

like.this shape-DIM **good**-SG.INAN make-ASSERT-VIS.PRS.1/2

'I'm making it (the base) just this size (wide)'

09 EG:

[mhm

- 11 ES: =be'ro:: we[muhaoti (.) ]  
 TUK be'ro wee-muha-o-ti  
 after make-MOV.up-FEM-INTENT  
 'Then I will build up (the sides)'
- 12 EG: [wemahami kemoro-(kaña hã)]  
 TUK wee-maha-mi kemorokaña hã  
 make-MOV.around-FRUS build.up-NEG.IMP PT.INT  
 'then won't you go building up the sides, huh?'
- 13 ES: mo'ano  
 TUK mō'a-ro  
 cover-SG.INAN  
 '(and) lid'
- 14 (0.4)
- 15 ES: āaa
- 16 (.)
- 17 EG: be'ropu weyata mo'anopere  
 TUK be'ro-pu wee-ya-ta mō'a-ro-pe'e-re  
 after-LOC make-IMP-EMPH cover-SG.INAN-CONTR-OBJ  
 'make the lid later'
- 18 EG: [to ti kharo] di'akhũ=  
 TUK to ti-aka-ro di'akhũ  
 DEF ANPH-box-SG.INAN only  
 'now only make the box'
- 19 ES: [be'ro wa'rosa]  
 TUK be'ro wa'a-ro-sa  
 after go-SG.INAN-FUT  
 '(the lid) will go (be made) later'
- 20 ES: mMm=
- 21 EG: =ōse pha'ta yoaka( )::: thũamaharemuo:::  
 KOT ō-se pha'ta yoa-ka thũa-mahare-mua-o  
 DEIC.PROX-CONTR CLF:flat make-ASSERT.IPFV wrap-MOV.around-high-CAUS  
 'make the base (and then) wrapping around and around building up  
 the sides)'
- 22 EG: wa'a muawaga hã  
 KOT wa'a mua-wa'a-ga hã  
 go high-go-IMP PT.INT  
 '(and) keep increasing, right?'
- 23 ES: °mMm°

# Conclusions

- Beginning to document the ‘greater complexity’ of the ‘realities of practice’ in a small-scale multilingual society
- Ideologies of ‘linguistic loyalty’ *are* reflected in normative interactional and communicative practice
- But departures from this norm *do* occur, including language alternation (by individual speakers)
- Language choice is a resource for speakers and must be implicated in constructing social action in interaction

# Further questions and implications

- Do speakers of East Tukano languages orient to the multiple languages as distinct ‘codes’ in everyday interaction? (cf. Gafaranga and Torras 2002 on Kinyarwanda and French)
- How does what we have documented here compare to interaction in other ‘small-scale’ systems? How about ‘polyglossic’ systems?

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