

Katherine Bolaños

A Grammar of Kakua

This book is a linguistic description of Kakua, a language spoken in the linguistic area of the Vaupés, in Northwest Amazonia, eastern Colombia. The language is a member of the small Kakua-Nikak language family. Its speakers live in inland forest settlements. Two main settlements are home to most of Kakua's approximately 250 speakers.

Kakua (-kak--wa, person-PL 'people') is the self-denomination used by the Kakua people to refer to themselves when speaking with other non-Kakua people. Their native autonym is Bára /bâda/ [bâra].

The Kakua people are located in a well-known multilingual area: the Vaupés. Kakua shares many fascinating linguistic features with other Vapués languages. These include a complex evidentiality system, an abundance of TAME marking, a system for noun classification, verb serialization, and differential object marking, among others. Kakua people also share many cultural traits with their areal neighbors, such as mythological and folk stories and cosmological deities. However, other linguistic features and cultural traits are unlike those found in many of Kakua's neighboring languages; for example, only a handful of languages in the area, Kakua being one of these, are reported to have closed syllables and phonetic postnasalization of voiced obstruents in coda position. The mythological origin of the Kakua people, unlike their Eastern Tukanoan neighbors, situates them in the depths of a sacred waterfall somewhere in the Aiarí River in the Alto Rio Negro Region of Northwest Amazonia.

This grammar not only consists of a synchronic description of the language, but it also explores possible diachronic and contact-induced change. In particular, it offers scenarios that might explain the reasons why Kakua is in many aspects similar to genetically unrelated neighboring languages, while divergent in others.

This grammar is based on data collected by the author during many visits to Kakua villages starting in 2009.

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