



# The diachrony of person-number marking in the Lokono-Wayuunaiki subgroup of the Arawak family: reconstruction, sound change and analogy



Fernando O. de Carvalho

Museu Nacional, Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ), Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

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## ABSTRACT

The present study advances reconstructions of the cross-referencing prefixes and independent pronouns of Proto-Lokono-Wayuunaiki (PLW), the ancestral language of the Lokono-Wayuunaiki subgroup of the Arawak language family. I arrive first at pre-Wayuunaiki and pre-Lokono forms by means of language-internal reconstruction and then proceed to a comparative investigation of the relevant patterns. I propose a number of developments that are consistent with synchronically attested morphophonemic alternations and regular sound changes. Analogical, non-phonetically-based developments are invoked to account for some Lokono and Añun forms. Finally, broader implications for Arawak historical linguistics are considered. These include the hypothesis that personal pronouns originate in the prefixation of deictic formatives by the person-number cross-referencing prefixes and a proposed modification in the form of one reconstructed cross-referencing prefix of the Proto-Arawak language.

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## 1. Introduction

After Payne's (1991) historical-comparative investigation of the Arawak language family, a study based on the evaluation of comparative data from 24 languages in a single stroke, the next natural step in the historical linguistics of the largest South American language family consists in applying comparative reconstruction at the lowest levels of phylogenetic inclusiveness. That is, the time seems ripe for reconstruction to proceed in a bottom-up manner, starting with groups of closely related languages, in order to complete, improve or modify the picture of this family's diachronic development yielded by Payne's (1991) large-scale attempt (see Michael [2009] for a similar appraisal and Danielsen [2011] and Lawrence [2012] for efforts on this direction). The goal of this paper is to contribute modestly to this objective. I present here a diachronic account of the morphophonological patterns involved in the realization of person-number cross-referencing prefixes and independent personal pronouns in one particular branch of the Arawak family, the subgroup usually known as Lokono-Wayuunaiki.

It seems fit to start from a consideration of the cross-referencing prefixes and personal pronouns derived from them since these constitute a relatively blank spot in our knowledge of Arawak history. Although the problems involving the status of these morphemes in Arawak historical linguistics will be assessed in greater detail in Section 5.1.2, I note that Payne's (1991) treatment of these elements is much less explicit and elaborate than his treatment of open class lexical items. Thus, though he makes passing reference to the existence of a set of Proto-Arawak (PA) person-number prefixes, and claims that these are reconstructed in accordance to the regular correspondences inferred by his comparative investigation (Payne, 1991: 376), this is nowhere demonstrated; in particular, no sets of cognate prefixes from the languages under comparison are presented or discussed.

E-mail address: [fernaoorphao@gmail.com](mailto:fernaoorphao@gmail.com).

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I propose here a number of internally reconstructed forms for Wayuunaiki and Lokono, as well as devoting some attention to the more complicated and seemingly unsystematic pattern of Añun. Afterwards, I will tackle the problem from a comparative standpoint, employing the pre-Wayuunaiki and pre-Lokono reconstructions to arrive at a set of Proto-Lokono-Wayuunaiki (PLW) forms. As commented in the next section, a certain amount of high quality comparative work has been devoted to this branch of the Arawak family. Nevertheless, both my approach and my claims will turn out to differ from these studies in many respects. I will devote a whole Section (5.1.1) to a discussion of the ways in which the reconstructions proposed here offer a more coherent and empirically justified view of some particular aspects of the lexical and morphological properties of the PLW language, as compared to these pioneering works.

Moving beyond the confines of Arawak historical linguistics, other issues of more general interest will be broached as a consequence of the proposed analyses. The first of these concerns the interaction of sound change and analogy. A fairly traditional conception of analogy and its effects, diagnosed by the interference with the expected results of applying phonetically-based sound change, will be invoked in accounting for one of the independent personal pronouns of Lokono (and, in lesser detail, to Añun as well). In this case then, a traditional conception of analogical (or morphological, as opposed to phonetic) change will suffice to explain certain otherwise hard to explain diachronic correspondences. A second topic of broader interest concerns the diachronic origins of personal pronouns and their relation to deictic/demonstrative elements. I will speculate on the ultimate origin of the independent personal pronouns in both Lokono and Wayuunaiki, tracing their origins to the prefixation of person-number prefixes to deictic elements. This hypothesis is consistent with the attested use of person-number prefixes in other Arawak languages, and converges with historical inferences arrived at independently by researchers dedicated to these other subgroups (e.g. [Danielsen, 2011](#): 502–503).

The analysis and argumentation presented here are organized as follows. Section 2 offers a brief presentation of the languages and the status of the Lokono-Wayuunaiki subgroup. Section 3 consists of an outline of the relevant synchronic phonological patterns. Section 4 advances an analysis of the two parallel systems for person-number marking, by means of prefixes and by means of independent personal pronouns, found in each language. A number of diachronic hypotheses on the development of these systems in Lokono and Wayuunaiki are proposed and these are shown to be consistent with attested morphophonemic patterns in these languages. In Section 5, I advance reconstructions of the cross-referencing prefixes and the independent personal pronouns at the level of the Proto-Lokono-Wayuunaiki language. [Sub-section 5.1.1](#) addresses some shortcomings in the alternative reconstruction of the ancestral language of this subgroup presented in [Captain \(2005\)](#), arguing that the reconstructions given here should be preferred. I will also speculate on the likely origins of the pronominal base reconstructed for the independent pronouns of the ancestral language of the Lokono-Wayuunaiki subgroup. In [5.1.2](#) I present the hypothesis that independent personal pronouns in the Lokono-Wayuunaiki subgroup (and, likely, elsewhere in the Arawak family) originate in lexicalizations of early, morphosyntactically transparent constructions involving the prefixation of the person-number markers to one or more formatives with a deictic/demonstrative function. Finally, [Section 5.1.3](#) is devoted to the relation between PLW and Proto-Arawak (PA). I will discuss a number of problems with the currently accepted reconstruction of the PA cross-referencing prefixes and I will suggest solutions to some of these shortcomings. Conclusions are presented in Section 6.

## 2. The Lokono-Wayuunaiki subgroup

This branch of the Arawak family is composed of three languages – Wayuunaiki (previously known as Guajiro), Añun (or Paraujano) and Lokono (also known as Lokono Dian or Arawak). Wayuunaiki is currently spoken by some 300.000 individuals (whose self designation is Wayuu) living in the north Caribbean coast of Colombia, mostly in the department of La Guajira, and in adjacent regions of Venezuela. Añun is a virtually extinct language that used to be spoken by communities around lake Maracaibo, adjacent to the eastern borders of the Wayuu territory. Most ethnic Añun nowadays speak Wayuunaiki and/or Spanish. Lokono is a strongly endangered language spoken by some 2.500 individuals in Suriname, Guyana and in a few isolated pockets in eastern Venezuela.

These languages are often singled out as a class by the label ‘Ta-Arawak’, a notion put into currency by the XIX century German ethnologist and explorer Karl von den Steinen ([Payne, 1991](#): 366–367; [Aikhenvald, 1999](#): 69, 73). This label calls attention to the fact that, where all other Arawak languages show a 1SG prefix of the form *nu-* (or another form easily derivable from this), this group of languages has *ta-* instead (or, more precisely, *da-* in Lokono and *ta-* in Wayuunaiki and Añun). The historical significance of this fact remains unclear, and, accordingly, some comparative studies of the family simply assume a primitive polymorphism for the Proto-Arawak (PA) language, that is, the co-existence of two prefixes for 1SG: *\*nu-* and *\*ta-* ([Aikhenvald, 1999](#): 87–88). Fortunately, there is no need to give a precise answer to the questions surrounding the diachronic status of this pattern, or to establish that the presence of *\*ta-* constitutes a shared innovation, to recognize that these languages form a rather close-knit subgroup of the Arawak family, a subgroup I will call here ‘Lokono-Wayuunaiki’.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> I have dropped consistently the use of the term ‘Guajiro’ as a glossonym for the language of the people who identify themselves as Wayuu, due to the pejorative overtones of the term in question. Thus, the common ancestor of Wayuunaiki, Añun and Lokono is here denoted Proto-Lokono-Wayuunaiki, not Proto-Lokono-Guajiro as it is called in [Captain \(2005\)](#). No reference is made to Añun in the name of the group since it is probably a recent dialectal offshoot of the Wayuunaiki branch. I will have nothing to say on other languages usually taken to be part of this group but for which only scanty documentation exists, such as Shebayo and Taino.

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