

Analysis of the term 'pariente' as a form of address in the Sikuaní community of Puerto Gaitán (Colombia)

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Abstract

The indigenous communities of the Sikuaní ethnic group in Colombia are presently experiencing an accelerated process of the loss of cultural identity because of the interethnic contact. Their relationship with the *blanco* (white man), from whom they try to emulate their life style, has led them to a state of estrangement that is evident in a simultaneous loss of identity and the non-acceptance on the part of 'civilized' groups. One of the elements that has been most affected by acculturation has been the Sikuaní language. Spanish, as a prestigious language, has certainly caused the Sikuaní language to lose representation and has caused a loss of interest for new generations. Consequently, they make less use of it in everyday life. Linguistically, the use of courtesy forms is one of the elements that best allows the establishing of the type of relationships that are characteristic of a community. It is through these forms that we will demonstrate with greater clarity and precision the language's sensitivity to social transformations. A prior diagnosis led us to conclude that the Sikuaní keep the Spanish form *usted* (formal you) for dealing with the white man therefore forcing them to think about the use of a more restricted substitute form of address. A marker of this kind was found in the use of the word *pariente* (relative). This word plays a crucial role in the characterization of their native identity.

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1. General aspects

Within the wide range of possibilities in the field of linguistic analysis, the study of **forms of address** acquired transcendental importance when dealing with cultures in contact. There is a natural tendency to retain the identity (idiomatic) that is expressed in the system with diastratic, diaphasic, and diatopic variations. Otherwise, the variation would not make sense and the differences between classes, castes, and groups would fortunately not exist. The study of forms of address shows with extreme clarity the sociolinguistic heterogeneity of the towns that they inhabit in a certain region.

There is a wide variety of forms of address in Colombia. There are also diverse uses of these forms that are in accordance with the extralinguistic factors that cause them. In this respect, Mireya Cisneros Estupiñán¹ –upon which we base many of our assumptions– states that:

¹ Researcher of the Linguistics Department of the Instituto Caro y Cuervo.

"The fact of finding various second person singular pronouns with **different pragmatic values** in written documents from different times in history is proof that it is not a simple caprice but a reflection of the different ways of looking at the world and dealing with it; therefore, in my opinion, they must be taken into account. [...] All of this can be explained by the fact that Spanish has different forms of address in the second person singular –tú, vos, usted, su mercé, etc.– that range from informality to the maximum reverence, there is a conflict in the choice and use even meaning a vertical move that leads to pejorative expressions of certain forms of address, most of all, those that are located somewhere in the middle." (Cisneros, 1999: 52–53
Bold print my doing)

These social (class differences) and linguistic elements (different pragmatic values of the forms of address) get worse when dealing with indigenous communities.

2. Hypothesis and objectives

The Sikvani ethnic group of Puerto Gaitán, in the region of Meta (see Fig. 1 in annex), in its daily interaction with the white man and due to the dominion of a common language (Spanish), finds itself at a crossroads that forces its members to adopt particular forms in the use of the linguistic standard. The purpose of this research is to perform an analysis of the value the term '**pariente**' acquires –as a basic form of address– in this region of Colombia guided by the problems that are established below.

It is, if you will, research done with the intention of making a serious contribution to the study of social dialectology (intradiasystematic), understanding that, according to Professor J. J. Montes:

"[if] dialectology must give a reason to the intradiasystematic variety and variation, it appears to be natural to conclude that sociolinguistics is a branch of dialectology that is identified with social dialectology (diastratics, diaphasics) ... any idiomatic form, no matter how spatially and socially limited it may be, has diastratic and diaphasic variations..." (Montes, 1995: 115-116)

This study can be seen as an empirical ratification of the posture that tends to include sociolinguistics in dialectology. Through it, you can feasibly see how it is deceptive to try and separate the diastratic variations of the diatopes. Likewise, it is easy to recognize the openly critical intent of the social facts that get rid of linguistic analysis, which doesn't cease to be objective because of this, and thus, we place it on the borderline of critical analysis in speech.

3. Methodology

In relation to methodology, a traditional model is kept of the linguistic geography having recognized a reduced number of informants (a total of ten). We used qualitative (observation of spontaneous speech, participative observation) and quantitative methods (interviews, surveys) for the gathering of materials, thus responding to the very nature of the problem based on class relations, that is to say, diastratic courtesy, noticed upon first contact with the Sikvani community that inhabits the area of Puerto Gaitán.

4. Variables

It should be pointed out that the preliminary character of this analysis, due, in part, to the problems in carrying it out such as: *i*) time spent with the community, *ii*) certain distrust of the informants toward the researchers, *iii*) paperwork and red tape for performing surveys and interviews, *iv*) lack of State support, *v*) difficulties in accessing the area because of the presence of subversive groups.

5. The Sikuni community and the form of address 'pariente'

The indigenous communities of the Sikuni ethnic group in Colombia are presently experiencing an accelerated process of the loss of cultural identity due to interethnic contact. Their relationship with the *blanco* (white man), from whom they try to emulate their life style, has led them to a state of estrangement that is evident in a simultaneous loss of identity and the non-acceptance on the part of 'civilized' groups. Today, the members of the Sikuni community live on the reservations as well as in the towns near them, in the middle of a hostile environment given the nature of their cultural masters and the mistaken class-changing derivation that the colonist masters make. Being Sikuni has ceased to be synonymous with 'national heritage' but has turned into a 'social problem'. Hidden behind that loss of nationalist idiosyncrasy the indigenous population sees itself as an 'object' of interest to tourists and mainly researchers that attend different universities. This condition tends to become an economical usufruct through the demands of the authorities (regional and national) to end up forgetting their responsibilities and casually leaving themselves in the hands of the government. In many cases, the land that they have been given is not even used for living on, much less for growing crops or raising livestock, poultry or fish farming. This only demonstrates the damage that the application of foreign models to reality (protectionist policies) has made on a culture with its own characteristics.

The cultural 'alienation' of the community is expressed in four basic ways in the region of Meta: social, religious, investigative, and political. The cultural alienation is produced by the penetration of colonists with their load of products, bars, festivities, brothels, etc., that is to say, the entire saga of typical daily habits of 'civilized' systems. Secondly, the crude and inconsiderate desire of the catholic and protestant 'missions' to increase their number of followers, forcing the community to get rid of their mythological wealth, rituals, and ancient beliefs. On the other hand, one finds the linguistic, anthropological, and other research groups that are not well trained in the methods of identity preservation who come in unprepared and get the information required for their work while stepping all over the autonomy of the communities. Finally, we find the heavy burden of State policies accustomed to solving social problems with the allocation of resources but never establishing a detailed study of the heterogeneous factors that focus on the problem in order to better direct the budget.

Within the main displays of depersonalization we find the marked penetration of commercial values; a change in the type of political-administrative authority which is less and less in the hands of the chief, medicine man, or shaman; a forgetting of cultural traditions such as dances (collective dances are substituted by tropical rhythms), food, drink, attire, fishing and hunting tools; and, in general, material, spiritual, and social acculturation (children leaving home, a change in the role of women...).

"In conclusion, the native that has endured an accelerated process of acculturation and physical persecution is a social misfit, without an identity of any kind. He is no longer tied to the community neither is he accepted by the "civilized" society. As he discovers that society revolves around money and the possession of material goods, he thinks that by obtaining these things, he can manage to erase some of his supposed inferiority and will therefore no longer be

treated or seen as a "brute". However, his limited experience in the commercial and financial world just paves the way for being deceived and falling into the traps that are traditionally set by the sectors with which he relates." (Agudelo y Cantor, 1988)

One of the factors that is most affected by acculturation is language. Spanish, as a prestigious language, has certainly made the Sikuani language lose representation and interest for new generations. Consequently, they make less use of it in everyday life. The preservation of a language and a significant number of speakers of that language does not guarantee the cultural identity of a people. It does not matter if the natives insist on declaring the contrary; reality is against the preservation of their linguistic identity.

The use of the Sikuani language is guided by social standards: to a colonist, a native can express himself in his native tongue if he desires to hide something from the person he is speaking to, or, if he does speak in his native language, he does it as a sort of demonstration, looking to satisfy the curiosity of the visitor and, in some cases, he may even be rewarded for it.

The data recorded while living with the indigenous community of Puerto Gaitán shows diaphasic differences in the use of both languages. If indeed adults speak and understand their primary language perfectly, they don't use it in every environment; youth and children understand but do not speak the language and when they do, it is only to so they are understood by their parents or family members. That is to say, the **Sikuani language is for family interaction** in the home. On the street with colonists, friends, and relatives they almost always speak in Spanish.

Now we find ourselves facing a contradictory problem and to a certain degree inherent to the collective conduct of the people in cultural conflict, expressible in purely linguistic terms: despite the marked and accelerated influence of the cultural paradigms of the white man, the 'cognitive style' of Sikuani prevails in the restricted use of their language, this –however the 'disdain' with which it is seen by the very natives themselves– represents a native value, and is considered the emblem of the people in the process of acculturation, a people that pretending to be another, 'better' people, has not ceased to see itself any differently in the mirror of its own identity. This is due to the fact that the Sikuani consider their language as a private tool and do not wish to share it with the foreigner.

One of the linguistic factors that most enables them to establish the type of relationships that are characteristic of a community (monoethnic or polyethnic) is found in their use of the **forms of address**. It is in these relationships where we see much more clearly and precisely the sensitivity of the language to social transformations. Prominent philologists in the country agree with this evaluation. One of them affirms that:

"It is also good to keep in mind that the linguistic sector of the pronominal and verbal forms used in directly addressing people is one of the most sensitive to social changes and that in the relationships between different social classes they are immediately and directly reflected." (Montes, 1967: 3)

Brown and Gilman (1960), in their universal model of forms of address, explain a series of fundamental and unavoidable ideas to bring us closer to the problem of interaction that natives and colonists experience in this area of Colombia. According to the authors, the use of the different forms of address that exist in any society are related to their feelings of solidarity and power. As they tell us, when there is **reciprocity in addressing each other** (use of the same intimate pronominal form between speakers), it is a definite sign of 'solidarity semantics'. On the other hand, when instead of following the 'rule of reciprocity' they follow a rule of 'non-reciprocity', it is a sign of 'power semantics'. What is important about the opinions of Brown and Gilman is the consideration of the language as a **marker** of social position and interpersonal relationships as well as a simple means of communication.

Research done a few years later by Catherine Rossfelder and Guy-Maxime Lizoir (1987) showed that, among the different conclusions they came to, one transcendental point was made: the forms of address 'tú', 'usted', and 'su mercé' are polysemes for they do not maintain a unique but a contextual character. This leads us to confirm that the forms of address are dynamic and depend on diatopes, diastratics and most of all diaphasics (situational context).

It is evident to devote serious analysis to these forms of address in order to try to explain the nature of the communicational phenomena within the Sikuni society starting with their contact with the white man's language. Without a doubt, the use of Spanish by the Sikuni is determined by the type of relationship they has with the white man.

We begin by framing the general context in which the Sikuni community moves linguistically with respect to pronominalization. In the same study by Professor Montes titled *Sobre el voceo en Colombia* to which we previously alluded, it is evident that "When it comes to directly addressing people, the inhabitants of the various regions of Colombia today use, **jointly, all of the resources** that the Spanish linguistic system offered from the 15th-16th centuries." (Montes, 1967: 17, bold print my doing). So, the forms of address 'vos', 'tú', 'usted', and 'su mercé' have more or less influence within the country. Colombia is a place that is rich in forms of address, due in part, from a historical point of view, to the level of contact with Spain, and socially in feudal relationships that made each region either open or egalitarian, or, on the other hand, extremely heterogeneous.² This 'colorful mosaic' makes up part of the regional folklore and gives each region, area, and town of Colombia their own identity.

The use of forms of address like **class markers** within socio-cultural contexts as well as outside of them, meaning, that those that forge regional and/or national identities and the 'distinguishing value' that Mireya Cisneros refers to is common to studies like these in Colombia³ as well as in America and Latin America:⁴

"So these uses [in our case, forms of address] instead of contributing to the division of social classes actually help even them out linguistically. You can see that the only distinguishing value they contribute is, on the one hand, for the *native people* of the region or the people that are living there and, on the other hand, for *outsiders*..." (Cisneros, 1998: 81-82. italicized text my doing)

It could be argued that these forms of address are innate to the language. In a linguistic process that supersedes the simple reference given to it by proper names, social and interaction marks of the subject who is immersed in a complex system of relationships, is used under the lexical variation of the pronominal forms. The most peremptory of these forms is perhaps the one that distinguishes between 'natives' and 'outsiders' which we will call **markers of origin**.⁵

² For more information in this respect see Jaime Jaramillo Uribe, *Historia de Pereira*, Pereira, 1963; José Joaquín Montes Giraldo, *Sobre el voceo en Colombia*, Santafé de Bogotá, 1967; or Antonio Jiménez, *Antioquia en la colonia*, en: *El pueblo antioqueño*.

³ J. J. Montes and M. Cisneros have done interesting research regarding this subject. Professor Cisneros is presently carrying out enterprising research for the Department of Dialectology of the ICC on the second person singular forms of address in Colombia; some of her results have been published by the Institute.

⁴ Mainly, María B. Fontanella, as well as Rodolfo Borello, Ivonne Botta, Adolfo Elizaincín, O. Díaz, Ana María Fernández, Rafael Lapesa, Ángel López-García, Félix Morales, among others.

⁵ We find it appropriate to differentiate between: a) class markers: use of forms of address in their diastratic variation; so, in Bogota 'tú' is used informally while 'usted' is used formally and b) markers of origin: use of forms of address in their diatopic variation; take the case of 'voceo' as a prototype of the "antioqueños" or 'su merced' used by the "boyacense" or the 'tuteante' of the capital.

Starting with the general framework that has been sketched out regarding the forms of address in Colombia and encouraged by the previous thought, the question arises: In the Sikuaní's use of Spanish as language that is not their own, which forms of address do they use?

Using a survey⁶ performed on the members of the Sikuaní ethnic group that live in the area of Puerto Gaitán, in the region of Meta, an attempt was made to tackle the aforementioned question. The social variation of ten informants between the ages of 15 and 55 (divided into two groups: ages 12-20 and 25 and older) were taken into consideration, most of which who had basic education levels and an optimum level of using Spanish. The questionnaire consisted of six general questions and one hundred specific questions regarding the forms of address in the different types of interaction that were asked in an informal manner (conversation) and also involved general information of the informant like their age, origin, schooling, etc.⁷

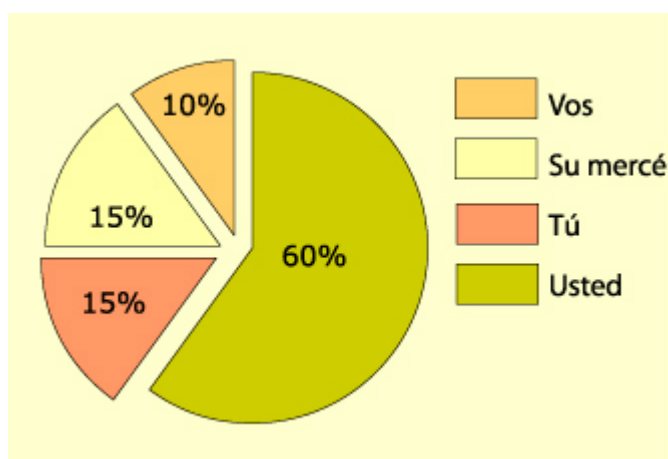
The quantitative analysis of the situation in Puerto Gaitán produced the following data. The form most often used –and almost exclusively– is the 'usted' form used with the white man and in some cases among relatives and friends. This is probably due in part to the fact that the teaching materials and written texts that generally end up in their hands do not contain any other forms of address than 'usted' as we can see in the following examples. 'Tú' and 'vos' are mostly used in oral conversations:

"Suerben yopo y se dicen a gritos:

- ¡Se murió UD.! ¡No vaya a hacer mala seña! ¡Ya está tiesito! ¡Le tenían odio a UD.! Seguramente los chamanes lo mataron. ¡Del chaman que lo mató vénguese UD. mismo! Cuando le cortemos algo de UD., entonces podrá vengarse." (Queixalos, 1991: 219)

The forms 'tú', 'vos' and 'su mercé' are practically unknown for individuals who live in the community except for one or two who, despite demonstrating their knowledge of these forms, don't use them because they don't feel they are their own (see Fig. 2).

Figure 2. Average use of forms of address 'tú', 'usted', 'su mercé' and 'vos'

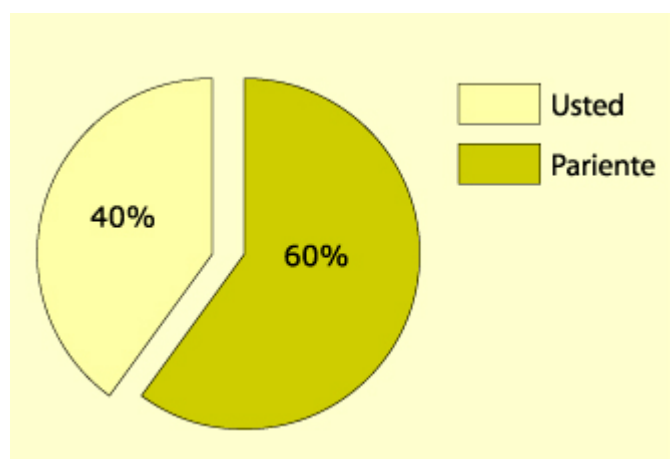


⁶ Ten surveys were performed on Sikuaní informants in which age and sex were considered as variables. Four of them were women between the ages of 16 and 55, the rest (6) were men within the same range of ages.

⁷ The questionnaire that is alluded to here was provided by the Linguistics Department of the Instituto Caro y Cuervo.

This diagnosis served to conclude that the Sikuni keep the Castilian form '**usted**' when addressing *the white man* (outsider) which makes us to have to think of a more preferential, familiar, intercultural, and supporting substitute form of address (marker of origin). This type of marker we find in the term '**pariente**' (see Fig. 3). Below you will see how and why the aforementioned word plays a crucial role in the characterization of native identity.

Figure 3. Average use of forms of address 'usted' vs 'pariente'



One of the main traits of the Sikuni society is their sense of family. From an early age, a child is taught a peculiar form of relating to his parents, a relationship that supersedes the model of the white man and drives him to establish a solid fraternal link with them. This relationship is based on the concept of **extended family**, 'penajipanabiwi'. They also share the idea of nuclear family, 'nacaemonae', but do not share the concept of individualism. The sense of group is very closely linked to the language, so a person, distant relative, or even a person who is not family, can be part of the family if he speaks the same language, if not, he is accepted under other circumstances. This way of viewing the social world has perhaps fostered the adoption of a term like 'pariente', which is an intermediate term between 'familiar' and 'amigo'.

Let's not forget that the word 'pariente', in Latin *parentem*, lacked, at first, any trait of blood relationship that is now associated with it. Also, *propinquus* meant 'vecino', 'cercano', 'allegado' or 'semejante', as well as the traditional structure to which it was necessary to include in an explanatory manner, the formula for relationships: *consanguinitate propinquus*. In looking up the term 'pariente', the *Breve diccionario de la lengua castellana* by Guido Gómez (1988: 518-519) refers to the word 'parir' (from the Latin *parere* 'parir', 'dar a luz', 'obtener') and the word 'parar' (from the Latin *parare* of *per-* 'otorgar', 'obtener' de la misma familia: amparar) therefore the double meaning of the term 'pariente' is etymologically corroborated: *i*) from the same family in some degree of blood relationship and *ii*) friend or **fellow man** (semejante). This last definition coincides with the Sikuni's idea of extended family and their idiomatic sense (same language = fellow man = 'pariente' - relative), means that the word, adopted from the white man, keeps a relevant trait that has a lot to do with the degree of **resemblance** among individuals.

Even the word 'familiar' appears in the *Diccionario de construcción y régimen* including words that are different from the characteristics of blood relationship: "**3. sust. m. a**) Pariente próximo o amigo de alguien... **b**) Criado, sirviente... **e**) Cofrade, el que toma la insignia o hábito de una comunidad religiosa... **Per. antec.** Siglo XV: X 'Familiar cosa: *familiaris, -e, Domesticus.*' Nebr. *Vocab.* X 'Familia... y familiares a los de la misma familia: Después también los seruentes se

començaron llamar deste nombre familiares... **Etim.** Fr. *familier*, it. *familiare*, port. *familiar*. Del lat. *familiaris*, 'familiar, amigo, sirviente'." (Tomo IV: 71-74).

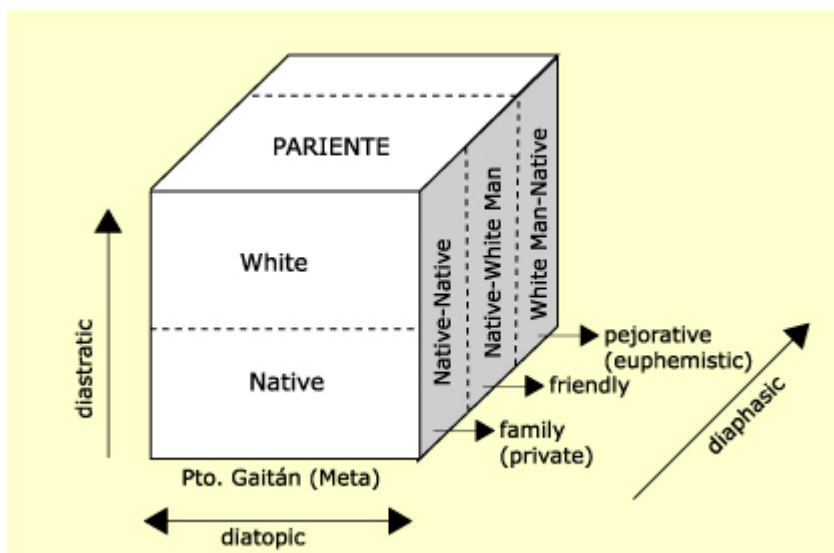
It is there that another direction of the term 'familiar' is described that, in my opinion, we consider is the basis of selection and present use of 'pariente' among the Sikuani: "**c**) Referido al genio que acompaña y dirige a la manera del demonio mitológico... **d**) Espíritu, demonio, ser sobrenatural que se suponía acompañaba a una persona para inspirarla y dirigirla y que se llevaba en un anillo o en otra alhaja doméstica. α) X '¡Sai acá, familiar que en ser diablo en cara y costumbres más pareces familiar de redoma o sortija!" (Tomo IV: 69 y 73). Among the people the term 'familiar' is a subtle way of referring to the devil, substituted by other burlesque terms like 'el patas', 'el putas' or 'el pariente' ("se lo llevó el pariente").

If we associate this diabolical idea with that of 'semejanza' referred to above, we can imagine that the image of this fearsome being is one of a male goat, a common figure in indigenous cultures and even in 'civilized' cultures. From a physical point of view, the 'familiar' or 'pariente' is very similar to man and animals. There is an obvious relationship between the two; consequently, one of informants responded that: "Pariente is a bad word. It sounds bad. It is said of an animal and person to make fun of them."

With the intention of corroborating these opinions and finding new data, a series of surveys were taken (10 total) using the same informants that were used in the case of the pronominal forms of address. Using this data, we came up with a general diagram of the use of the word 'pariente' among the natives and white men, considering its diatopic, diastratic, and diaphasic variation (see Fig. 4). According to the corpus collected, we see that the forms of address follow a particular 'polysemic dynamic' just as C. Rossfelder and G. Maxime Lizoir had declared. This means that the term acquires different meanings depending upon the situation. Thus, the word 'pariente' has various connotations that depend on the speakers, time, disposition, subject, etc.

Above all, I must say that 'pariente' is a word that is becoming obsolete. This is due to the process of acculturation and to the fact that each day it acquires the Spanish connotations of the colonist (blood relation) and moves away from the traditional Sikuani meaning that sought to reinforce the interethnic sense of 'extended family'. In Puerto Gaitán there are still some signs of this past at a desolate meat roasting place called 'El Pariente' and at a bar where many Sikuani living in the area go called 'Etnotaberna'.

Figure 4. Diagram use of “pariente” expression in Puerto Gaitán (Meta) established between colonists and natives depending on diatopes, diastratics and diaphasics



The different regions of Colombia recognize different ways of understanding and applying the word 'pariente', but they are always founded on basic traits that we get superficially from their etymology. In Puerto Gaitán the use of the term has a special factor that gives it a diatopic identity which is precisely that of the Sikuaní ethnic group of the region. Without a doubt, social factors are one of the main factors in establishing varieties in dialect, and in Puerto Gaitán this fact has acquired transcendental relevance when it comes to cultures in contact.

The percentages below show an increased influence in the selection of forms of address in view of the people participating in the conversation according to the three possible varieties of interaction: Native – native, native – white man, or white man – native (the group white man – white man is not relevant to this study).

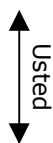
Table 1. Frequency of use of the forms of address 'usted' and 'pariente' between the colonists and natives of Puerto Gaitán

VARIATIONS	Native – Native	Native – White man	White man - Native
Usted	30%	80%	70%
Pariente	60%	10%	10%

The missing percentages correspond to the forms of address by name or title

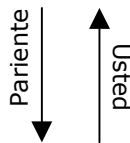
The white man has unarguably taken the place of preeminence in the social system which has forced the establishment of 'power semantics' that favors the white man. But, on the other hand, the recognition of this fact on behalf of the native has compelled him to adopt a linguistic formula of self-recognition of identity and unity that is based on the principle of 'solidarity semantics'. At this level you can see much more clearly the variety of use of 'pariente' because it has a motive of social or vertical courtesy:

Superior
(White man)



Superior
(White man)

Superior
(White man)



Inferior
(Native)

Inferior
(Native)



Inferior
(Native)

Reciprocal System

Same standing

In normal situations white men use 'usted' for interactions or, if there is greater intimacy, 'tú'.

Non-reciprocal System

Different standing

The term 'pariente' used by the white man has a pejorative connotation to the native that confirms his state of cultural inferiority.

Reciprocal System

Same standing

Among natives the euphemistic value of the term 'pariente' is substituted by a sense of solidarity and fraternity that characterizes the ethnic group in intimate situations.

In special cases, when a white man has lived with the Sikuaní for a long time and they begin to esteem him, they may use the term 'pariente' to refer to this white man in an expression of their respect and friendship.

In conclusion, the natives of the Sikuaní ethnic group in Puerto Gaitán have adopted the form of address 'pariente' to solve the lack of a term that expresses fraternity and that identifies them as a community, thus, its use is restricted to among themselves and is not extended to the white man. 'Pariente' is, therefore, a synonym of family and only one who has Sikuaní blood is worthy of being treated as such.

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7. Interesting links

At this site you will find information about the various indigenous communities of Colombia <http://galeon.hispavista.com/culturasamerica/Cultura.htm> and in particular information about the Guahibos <http://galeon.hispavista.com/culturasamerica/Guahibos.htm>

Website of the Universidad Javeriana (Colombia) that offers demographic information about the Sikuani <http://www.javeriana.edu.co/Humana/sikuani.html>

GRAIN's (Genetic Resources Action International) website on biodiversity by way of the Native Organization UNUMA and the communities that make it up <http://www.grain.org/sp/publications/produccion-ejemplo-colombia.cfm>

Ethnologue's website in English that contains an extensive review of publications on the languages of Colombia http://www.ethnologue.com/show_country.asp?name=Colombia

Official site of LINDA (Native Languages of the Amazon) dedicated to the study and dissemination of American Indian languages <http://www.abayala.org/Linda/index.html>

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