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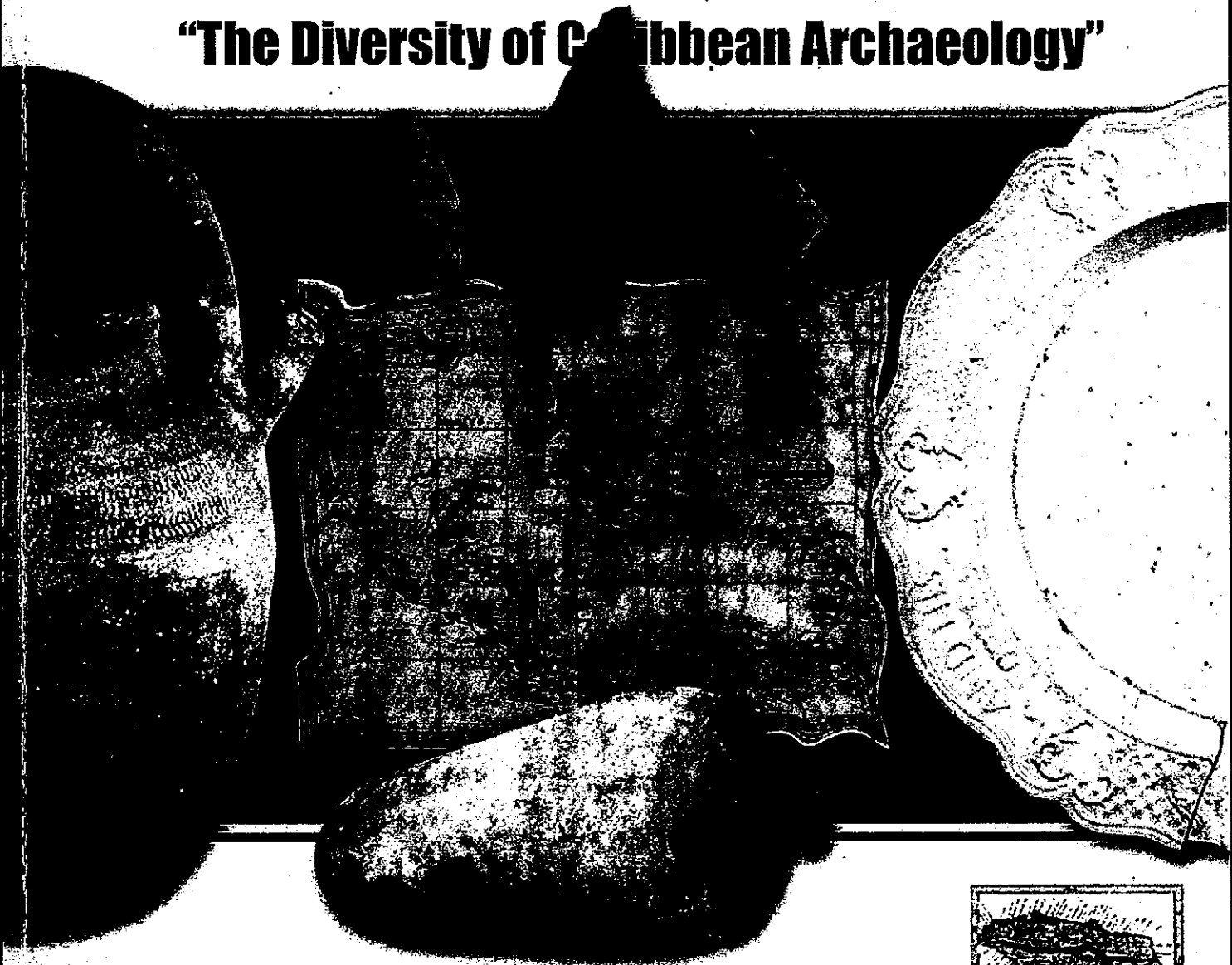


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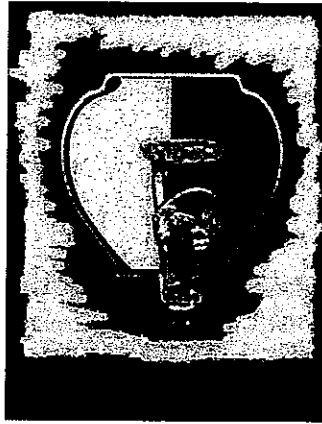
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Taino's linguistic affiliation with mainland Arawak

by

Silvia Kouwenberg

Abstract

This paper considers the extent of the similarities and differences between the Taino forms cited in Taylor's work (in particular 1977:17-22) and cognate forms in modern Lokono. The lexical and morphological evidence—limited though it is—supports the view that Taino and Lokono are closely related dialects of one and the same language. This is all the more remarkable considering the time depth of the geographic separation of Taino and Lokono.

Résumé

Cette contribution considère les ressemblances et les différences entre les mots tainos cités dans l'oeuvre de Taylor (en particulier 1977:17-22) et les mots apparentés du lokonos moderne. L'évidence des correspondances lexicales et morphologiques, quoique limitée, suggère qu'on peut considérer le taino et le lokono comme des dialectes très proches. Vu le temps écoulé depuis la séparation géographique du taino et du lokono, cette conclusion est remarquable.

Resumen

Esta contribución examina hasta qué punto las palabras taínas citadas en el obre de Taylor (en particular 1977:17-22) se parecen con las palabras aparentadas en el lokono moderno. Las correspondencias lexicales y morfologicas son tales que el taíno y el lokono pueden ser considerados dialectos cercanos. Este es un resultado remarcable, visto el tiempo que el taíno y el lokono estan geograficamente distanciados.

INTRODUCTION

The extant record of Taino, around two hundred words and phrases culled from Spanish and Italian sources of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, does not allow for the reconstruction of a full language.[1] Worse still, many of the words designate unidentified flora and fauna or denote proper names—useless for the purpose of studying the relationship between Taino and other documented indigenous languages of the region. Nevertheless, Taylor (1977:18)[2] points out that there are around sixty forms which allow for comparison and which appear to have cognates (i.e., genetically related forms) in languages such as Lokono or “true Arawak” of the Guyanas, Island-Carib of the Lesser Antilles[3] and Guajiro of Colombia.

Orality, language change, and language split

It is often claimed that languages which have only a tradition of orality are subject to change to a much greater extent than those with a literary tradition. This is because a tradition of writing is thought to have a conservative influence, acting as a brake on change. In actual fact, all languages, including those with only an oral tradition, are remarkably conservative, as the present example will illustrate. What precipitates change is contact with other languages and their attendant cultures, in particular where those cultures are seen as culturally superior. But where there is a strong desire to affirm one's identity, even close contact may not result in significant change.

In this context, it is useful to point out that the Taino are unlikely to have been in close contact with cultures which they considered superior to their own, and from which they may have wanted to borrow extensively. A striking contrast is provided by the case of Island Carib, where Arawaks in contact with Caribs apparently considered Carib culture sufficiently desirable

that their language became infused with Carib elements, and that their descendants came to identify themselves as ethnic Caribs (see fn.3).

Previously, it was thought that only basic vocabulary—understood in the sense of Swadesh's (1955) 200- and 100-word lists of basic vocabulary—is a reliable indicator of a language's genetic affiliation. We now know that basic vocabulary is not necessarily conservative. For instance, cultural taboo practices may conspire to cause rapid turn-over of many basic vocabulary items, quickly ridding a language of what are supposed to be prime markers of genetic stock. On the other hand, even peripheral vocabulary may be surprisingly stable, in particular, as noted above, where a community of speakers is isolated from what they may consider to be "superior" cultures.[4] In any case, as pointed out by Blench (2006:17), information is rarely complete for any given language phylum; therefore, attempts at reconstruction of genetic affiliations necessarily take place based on partial data.[5]

We shall see that the Taino material, limited though it is, and lacking in "basic" vocabulary items, is sufficiently rich that we can pronounce on its genetic linkages with some degree of certainty. Those Taino words for which the ancestry can be traced display remarkable stability, considering the time depth of the separation from the mainland. The movement of the Taino's ancestors into the Lesser Antilles is the event which marks the separation between mainland and island populations of Arawak speakers. From that point onwards, the possibility of language divergence exists. This means that at the time of the earliest recordings of Taino words and sentences, in the fifteenth century, island varieties and mainland Arawak had had the opportunity to diverge for well over a thousand years. We will see that this interval did not result in major divergences of the type which would seriously hinder mutual intelligibility. In fact,

modern Lokono forms—despite having had another 500 years in which to change—are so close to their Taino cognates that mutual intelligibility would still have been possible today.

It is customary, in family trees, to represent Taino as sister language alongside Island Carib and Lokono within a Northern Maipuran branch of the Arawakan phylum.[6] But while this accurately represents the population splits that took place, it also, inaccurately, suggests a language split. We will see in the following that no such language split obtains between Lokono and Taino.

The spelling of the Taino forms

Taino forms were recorded by “naive” observers, using the resources of their native language spelling systems, i.e. Spanish, Italian or Catalan of the relevant period. As a result, we see much variation in the recordings, and we cannot always be sure what pronunciation is intended for a given spelling. For instance, the pronoun ‘I’ is encountered variously as ‘daca, dacha, daça,’—spellings which variably suggest a k-like sound as well as an s-like sound. As it turns out, both of these may be right to some extent. Comparing the modern Lokono form ‘dakia,’ we note that the sequence ‘ki’ is pronounced as an affricate—a sound which would not have been known to those attempting to record Taino forms, and could easily have given rise to different attempts to solve this spelling problem. Other variations observed in the spelling are for an s-like or z-like sound (c, s, z, g, x), a k-like sound (c, qu), an h-like sound (g, h).

Another thing to keep in mind is that its observers wrote ‘gua’ to represent the Taino pronunciation ‘wa’. This can be seen in ‘guaiba’ (‘let us leave’), which corresponds to Lokono ‘wa-iiba’ of the same meaning.[7] In the same vein, ‘güe’ in Taino ‘higüera’ corresponds to ‘wi’ in Lokono ‘iwida’ (‘calabash’) (and one should note that initial ‘h’ is optional in Lokono). In

other words, it is unlikely that spelling forms containing 'gua' and 'gue' contained 'g' in their pronunciation (Taylor 1954:153).

A comparison of Taino and modern Lokono forms

Table 1 lists 23 Taino forms which are very clearly cognate with modern Lokono forms. I will just draw attention to a few systematic differences seen in corresponding forms.

(a) Taino 'r' corresponding to Lokono intervocalic 'd', which is consistently seen here (1, 5, 15, 23), is indicative of a change in the status of 'd' in Taino. Taino shares this property with Island Carib (eg. Island Carib 'uíra' 'calabash'), pointing to a shared innovation, one that took place before migration into the Greater Antilles; note that initial 'd' remains unaltered (cf. 9).

(b) There are also several instances where Lokono 'r' corresponds to Taino 'h' (2, 3, 18), possibly indicating that 'r' was similarly subject to historical change—this time not shared with Island Carib, where we find 'r' in all these cases. On the other hand, we have Taino 'cori' 'mouse' corresponding to Lokono 'kúri' (8), and several more forms of which the cognate status is not quite so clear, but which also contain intervocalic 'r'. It appears then, that this change was not systematic.

To put this in perspective, the correspondences noted in (a) and (b) are on the order of the differences in pronunciation of the English word 'letter' between Standard British English, Standard American varieties, and the nonstandard London variety ("cockney"). These are differences which do not seriously hinder communication even if one may be taken aback the first couple of times when confronted with an unfamiliar pronunciation.

(c) Another difference between Taino and Lokono which results from historical change, this time in Lokono, is seen in 11: the 'b' in Taino 'guanábana' as compared to 'f' in Lokono

'oarafana' is explained from the fact that Lokono 'f' was aspirated p^h at an earlier stage, with p^h evidently mistaken by the Spanish observer for 'b'. The corresponding Island Carib form is recorded as 'ouallápana', containing 'p'.

(d) The difference between the vowels in Taino 'cori' and Lokono 'kuri' (8) disappears when we consider that Lokono 'u' and 'o' are not distinct, 'u' being a variant of 'o'. This is also relevant to the forms in 7.

(e) Initial 'h' is completely optional in Lokono. Thus, the appearance of initial 'h' in the Taino form 15 but not in the corresponding Lokono form is neither here nor there; nor is the variation seen in this regard in 13 of any significance.

Table 1. Taino forms clearly cognate with Lokono[8]

Taino	translation	modern Lokono	comments
1. -ariquen	ear	-adikke (T), jikehi (B)	forms are identical but for r~d correspondence; 'qu' represents 'k'
2. -ahi-	tooth	-ári (T), ari (B)	forms are identical but for h~r correspondence
3. bagua, bahaua	sea	baráa (T), bará (B)	forms are identical but for h~r correspondence; 'gu' represents 'w'
4. canoa	canoe	kanóa, -kanan (T), kanoa (B)	forms are identical
5. cara-	having skin	kada- (= attributive ka- + uda 'skin') (T)	forms are identical but for r~d correspondence
6. cocuyo	<i>Pyrophorus spp.</i>	kokkui (T)	forms are identical
7. conuco	garden	kúnnuku (T), konoko 'forest' (B)	forms are identical; note that the forest is where "gardens" (subsistence farms) are cut
8. cori	mouse	kúri (T); cf. shimorokore 'rat' (B)	forms are identical (note that o~u alternate freely)
9. daca, dacha, daça, da-	I, me	dákia, dáí, da- (T), dai, da- (B)	forms are identical; note spelling variation arising from palatalization of k before i
10. guaiba	let us leave	waiiba (T), wa-iiba [we-leave] (B)	forms are identical; note that 'gua' represents 'wa'
11. guanábana	<i>Annona muricata L.</i>	oarafána (T); cf. bana 'leaf' (B)	clearly cognate; historically, p ^h > f; note instability of r; 'gua' represents 'wa'
12. haba	(kind of) basket	hábba (T), haba (B)	forms are identical
13. hage, haje, aje, axe, ase	sweet potato	háliiti, halti (T), halichi (B)	clearly cognate, but "missing" [l] needs to be explained; note that affricatization of t before i leads to different spellings
14. hatty, hatsi, haxi, hagi	<i>capsicum</i> (cayenne pepper)	háthi (T), hachi (F)	forms are identical; note that affricatization of t before i leads to different spellings
15. higüera	calabash (<i>Crescentia cujete</i>)	iwida (T), ida (B)	forms are identical but for r~d correspondence; note that initial h is optional
16. hobo	<i>Spondias mombin L.</i>	hóbo (T), hobo 'hog plum' (B)	forms are identical
17. iguana	iguana	jóana, ioána (T), yuwána (B)	forms are identical; note that 'gu' represents 'w'
18. máhici, mahiz	maize	márisi (T), marishi (B)	forms are identical but for h~r correspondence; note palatalization of s before i, hence 'sh' in Bennett's spelling
19. nacan	middle (of a place)	ánnakē (T), nakañ (B)	forms are identical; Bennett's 'ñ' symbolizes a velar nasal (ng)
20. papaya	papaya	papáia (T)	forms are identical
21. cemí, zemí	spirit-helper, god	sémehe (T); cf. related forms semechichi 'medicine man' (B), semeheyu 'obeah man, witch doctor' (F)	clearly cognate
22. ciba, ziba	stone	siba (T), shiba (B)	forms are identical; note palatalization of s before i, hence 'sh' in Bennett's spelling
23. yari	necklace, jewelry	-iédi (T), yedi (B)	clearly cognate; note r~d correspondence, and unexplained vowel difference

In all, keeping in mind the time depth of the separation of the island varieties from mainland Arawak, the fragmentary nature of the record and the spelling issues noted in the preceding, these Taino and Lokono forms are strikingly close. In fact, 13 forms are identical, 6 nearly so

("identical but for..."), the remaining 4 being clearly cognate but involving what appear to be unsystematic differences.

A list of additional forms cited in Taylor's work with an assessment of their cognate status is provided in Appendix 1. Some forms have no known cognates because either Taino or Lokono borrowed a word from another source (indicated as "not cognate"). The list also includes several forms for which a cognate can be suggested, but which show too many unsystematic differences for comfort; hence, their cognate status is unclear. Finally, there are several forms for which no known cognate exists in Lokono. Sometimes this simply reflects our lack of knowledge of Lokono—a language which is still only partially described, and for which no complete dictionary exists. But there may also be a difficulty with the interpretation of the pronunciation and meaning of the Taino forms. What to think, for instance, of a sentence such as "ocama guaxeri guariquen caona yari," which comes with the explanation 'usada por una India de Haiti para decir a su principal o encomendero que mirase una veta o piedra de oro' (Taylor 1954:154). Despite Taylor's valiant attempts to make sense of such forms, their interpretation frequently remains too speculative to be useful. In this case, he is able only to identify with some certainty 'caona yari' as referring to a gold piece of jewelry (see Table 1). His suggestion that 'guariquen' is 'our ears' makes little sense in the context of this utterance, and I have not adopted it. He makes no suggestions for the other forms in this utterance.

Word formation

Fortunately, several of the Taino words which we are able to interpret are morphologically complex, providing evidence of grammatical subparts which correspond to similar forms in Lokono, as discussed in Taylor (1954, 1960). Thus, judging from the translation 'let us leave',

the initial 'gua-' in Taino 'guaiba' corresponds to the 'wa-' prefix of Lokono which marks 'we'. The same prefix is seen in Taino 'guarocoel' (our grandfather)—compare Lokono 'uadukuti' (and note again the r~d correspondence and the o~u correspondence). Some Taino words contain a 'da-' prefix which means 'I' or 'my', as it does in Lokono. Thus, Taylor quite reasonably suggests that Taino 'guatiao' and 'datiao', both translated as 'friend', are in fact 'our friend' and 'my friend', containing 'wa-' and 'da-' prefixes. Note though that there is no known cognate for that part of the word which is assumed to mean friend (-tiao).

Taylor breaks the Taino word 'mahite' (toothless) down into ma-ahi-te; initial 'ma-' translates more or less as 'without', as it does in Lokono 'mári' = ma-ari 'toothless'; 'ahi' is 'tooth'; final '-te' points to the syntactic context in which the word was used.

One final affix to be recognized here is the ending '-no' seen in the word 'taino,' which marks a human collective (but note that there is no known cognate for the initial part). Taylor (1954, 1960) surveys several other forms which may be morphologically complex, but there the analysis becomes more speculative, and I will not consider them here. Attempts at morphological analysis in Granberry & Vescelius (2004:95ff) are also frequently speculative, and this is even more true of their treatment of Taino toponyms (63-79).

In sum, where complex Taino words were recorded, the processes involved in their formation appear to be identical with word formation processes in Lokono.

CONCLUSION

By naming the Greater Antillean population, their culture, and their language, “Taino”—a label which these people did not choose for themselves—we suggest a separateness which, where language is concerned, is clearly unfounded. The Taino vocabulary that is available to us for comparison shows systematic correspondences between Taino and modern Lokono, both lexical and morphological. The more striking differences between Taino and Lokono—involving allophony of ‘d’ in both Taino and Island Carib but not in Lokono, and involving a correspondence between several (but not all) occurrences of Lokono ‘r’ in intervocalic position to Taino ‘h’—do not seriously hamper mutual intelligibility. In all, the resemblances are close enough—despite centuries of geographic separation—that Taino and Lokono can be considered dialects of the same language.

This has obvious implications for the question whether or not the Greater Antilles constituted a separate cultural complex in the Caribbean in other respects. The situation is of course made difficult by the geographic separation caused by the presence of Island Carib between the mainland and the Greater Antilles. Nonetheless, recognizing that mainland Lokono and the Taino variety of the Greater Antilles are dialects of the same language, they ought to be named the same as well.

Appendix 1. Taino words for which a meaning, hence possibly a cognate relationship (or lack thereof) with related varieties can be established (based mainly on Taylor 1977)[9]; the clearly cognate forms of Table 1 are not repeated here

Table 2. Taino forms for which there is no known cognate in Lokono

Taino	translation	modern Lokono (and related varieties)
1. aon	dog	pero (B); Island Carib has ánli
2. anaqui	enemy	Island Carib has ácani
3. -arima	anus	Island Carib has árima, áriouma
4. batea	trough	Island Carib has batáya
5. bixa, bija	<i>Bixa orellana</i> L.	shirabuli (B)
6. buhiti, buhítihu, bohiti	shaman	Island Carib has bóye
7. cabuya	cord, mooring	khayoro (B)
8. caona	gold, yellow metal	karokuri (B); Island Carib has caouánam
9. dita	calabash cup, dish, or dipper	Island Carib has rita (T) (note d-r correspondence)
10. duhu	Indian bench	Guajiro has tulú[10]
11. guayaba	guava	mariaba (B); Island Carib has coyábou
12. hicaco	coco plum	Island Carib has icácou (note optionality of initial h)
13. hupia	specter	Island Carib has ópoyem; note o~u variation
14. hyen	manioc juice	keheli (B); Island Carib has ínhali
15. macaná	wooden sword	sappakanne (T)
16. manati	manatee	kuyumuro (B); Island Carib has manáttoui (T)
17. maní	peanut	Island Carib has mánli (T)
18. hibiz	basketry sifter	manari (B)
19. nagua	woman's loincloth	Guajiro has naáwa
20. nigua	chigoe (<i>pulex penetrans</i>)	Guajiro has níwa
21. cigua	sea snail (Fr. burgau)	Island Carib has chíoua
22. -tiao	(formal) friend	bethechi (B); Island Carib has -tíao
23. xagua, jagua	genipa	Island Carib has cháoua
24. xagüeye	cave, grotto	babo (B); Island Carib has chaouái
25. yamoca	two	biama (T, B); ditto for Island Carib
26. yamoncobre	four	biábite, bibiti (T), bibichi (B); Island Carib has biánbouri

Table 3. Taino forms for which there appears to be a cognate in Lokono, but unsystematic differences make the relationship unclear; Island Carib forms are provided where they may

throw light on the historical relationship, for instance where no known cognate exists in Lokono.

The source is always Taylor (1977).

Taino	translation	modern Lokono (and related varieties)	status of Taino-Lokono relation
27. -aco, -caco	eye	ka- Attributive, akússi 'eyes', kakússi 'having eyes' (T); koshi 'eye' (B); Island Carib has ácou	cognate, but not identical
28. arcabuco	woodland	cf. adda 'tree' (T); ada 'tree, timber, wood'; adébero 'forest' (B); Island Carib has arábou	relation is unclear; the Taino form is possibly complex, containing an initial part meaning 'tree' (note r-d correspondence)
29. behique	doctor	cf. ibihi 'medicine', ibihikin 'treat with medicine' (T)	semantic correspondence is not perfect
30. burén	griddle	búddali (T), bodali (B)	cognate, but l-n difference needs to be explained; note r-d correspondence
31. cacique, cazique	chief	cf. isi 'head', ísika 'to lead', attributive prefix ka- (T)	relation unclear; see discussion in Taylor (1954:153, fn.5)
32. caniba, canima	Carib	kallipina (T)	cognate, but not identical
33. canocum	three	kabun, kabuin (T), kabuñkhañ (B)	cognate, but not identical
34. caya, cayo	island	kaíri (T), kairi (B); Island Carib has acáera	relation cannot be clearly established; loss of r may have occurred, but this does not explain the final vowel
35. daguita	my rope	da- 'my', taho 'rope' (T)	relationship unclear; note that gu=w
36. guarocoel	our grandfather	uadukuti (T), wa-dokochi (B); Island Carib has árgouti 'grandfather'	cognate, but final -l in Taino form cannot be explained; 'gua' represents prefix 'wa'; note r-d correspondence
37. hequeti	one	ikini-, -ikin 'single' (T)	possibly cognate, but relation is somewhat speculative
38. manaya	stone knife	-mana- 'sharp edge' (T)	relation is unclear
39. mayani	be quiet, not do/say	mani- (T)	relation is unclear
40. nahe	paddle (n.)	-nahàlle (T); Island Carib has néhene	cognate, but not identical
41. cimu, zimu	face	íssibu (T); üshí, üshíhi 'head', ushíbo(hü) 'face' (B), shi(ishí) 'head' (F)	precise relation is unclear; note that m-b correspondence is quite unproblematic
42. tua, toa, tona	frog	tontonle 'small ground frog' (F)	relation unclear; perhaps the modern Lokono form derives from an older unreduplicated form
43. yagua	spp. of palm	awara (T, B); Island Carib has iaouálla	relation unclear; the palm species referred to is not known

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Footnotes

[1] I wish to acknowledge the very useful comments received on earlier versions of this paper from Philip Allsworth-Jones, Roger Blench, Mily Crevels, Jo-Anne Ferreira, José Oliver, and the encouraging responses from members of the audience at IACA 2007.

[2] Other works of relevance include Taylor (1954.a), (1960), Taylor & Rouse (1955). Taylor made use of the earlier compilation of Taino forms by De Goeje (1939), but appears to have reexamined the original sources.

[3] Although the name suggests otherwise, Island-Carib is in fact an Arawakan language which has undergone some amount of influence from contact with Carib. Island Carib became known as Black Carib in the version in which it was adopted by Africans marooned in St Vincent in 1635. Black Caribs were deported to Central America by the English in 1796-7; their descendants now inhabit coastal villages in Honduras and Belize. Taylor (1977) contains a description of Island Carib. See also Taylor (1951) and (1954.b), Taylor & Hoff (1980), Hoff (1994).

[4] Granberry & Vesceius (2004) argue that Taino was not uniform across the Greater Antilles, and that a distinction should be made between the more prestigious variety of southwestern Hispaniola and various other dialects. Their point is well taken, but dialectal variation does not detract from the main thesis of this paper. Much more controversial is their claim that, in

addition, different languages were spoken across the Greater Antilles: different varieties of Macoris in parts of Hispaniola and Cuba, Ciguayo in parts of Hispaniola, and Guanahatabey in western Cuba. Apart from somewhat ambiguous statements about linguistic separateness in Bartolomé de Las Casas's writings, the linguistic evidence consists of only a few forms, in one case only a single word.

[5] It is unfortunate that glottochronology (the historical method which attempts to calculate the date at which related languages have split) continues to be cited as unproblematic by those outside the field, whereas few historical linguists now accept its premises (Blench 2006:40-42.)

[6] Oliver (1989) distinguishes a separate, Caribbean branch within the Northern Maipuran branch, for which there is clearly good evidence. Rouse (1992) does not make such a distinction.

[7] Modern Lokono spelling varies between authors. Thus, 'wa', 'oa' or 'ua' all represent the same form. Twentieth century work on Lokono includes Van Baarle & Sabajo (1997), Bennett (1994), (1995), De Goeje (1928), Hickerson (1953), Pet (1979), Taylor (1969).

[8] Modern Lokono forms marked as (B) are taken from Bennett (1994 [1989]), (T) taken from Taylor (1977) (based on De Goeje 1928), (F) from Fanshawe (1949).

[9] Some forms were found scattered throughout other publications by Taylor (see fn.1 for a listing).

[10] Guajiro, a more distantly related Arawakan language, sometimes provides cognates where no Lokono or Island Carib cognates are known to exist; in all likelihood, this is a reflection of the quality of descriptions available for these languages. The source is always Taylor (1977).

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