

THE INDEFINITE PERSON: A JOURNEY ACROSS ARAWAK LANGUAGES¹

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A few of the world's languages have a marker indicating an indefinite possessor or an indefinite subject. Eight Arawak languages, belonging to five subgroups, have a prefix **i-*, with the meanings of indefinite, or unspecified, possessor and subject on nominalizations and a focused and unspecified subject on verbs. Three of these languages, all of them members of the Uaupí subgroup in the Upper Rio Negro region, add to this a marker of generic, or impersonal, possessor and subject, translatable as 'one' or 'someone,' thus creating an unusual five-term set of person values. Notwithstanding the brevity of the prefix's form, its shared functions and geographical spread point toward its antiquity. This article offers an in-depth investigation of semantic and syntactic features of the indefinite person prefix on nouns and on verbs and suggests possible scenarios for its historical development.

[KEYWORDS: Arawak languages, person system, indefinite person, impersonal, reconstruction]

1. The indefinite person in Arawak languages: A preamble. In many Amazonian languages, the values of "person" go beyond just 'the speaker' (or first person 'I'), 'the addressee' (or second person 'you'), and 'third person'. In a number of languages from the Arawak language family, we find additional values, cross-linguistically less well attested. The prefix **i-*, with the meanings of indefinite, or unspecified, possessor and subject, is a case in point. The indefinite person prefix is found in seven Arawak languages spoken north of the Amazon and in one language spoken to the south of it. This article aims at providing an in-depth investigation of semantic and syntactic features of the indefinite person marker. The prefix can be reconstructed to the proto-language, especially in its function as the marker of unspecified possessor. The indefinite prefix is part of the same paradigm as the markers of first, second, and third person. Some languages add to this an impersonal, or generic human, prefix, thus creating a cross-linguistically uncommon system of multiple person values.

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A snapshot of the expression of person in Arawak languages is in **2**. The functions of the indefinite person prefix are addressed in **3**. In **4**, I turn to the meanings and the development paths of the prefix. This section offers a typological perspective for multiterm person systems in Arawak languages and finishes with brief conclusions.

2. Marking person in Arawak languages.

2.1 General features. The Arawak language family is the largest in South America in terms of its geographical expanse—ranging from a number of locations in Central America to as far south as Bolivia (and formerly Argentina and Paraguay). Within South America, languages of the family are, or have recently been, spoken in at least ten locations north of the Amazon and at least ten to the south of the river (see Aikhenvald 2020 and 2018:2–5 for a map with a distribution of extant languages). Studies of Arawak languages have a long history, ever since the family was tentatively recognized by F. S. Gilij in 1783. An alternative name for the family is Maipuran. The term *Arawakan* was earlier used for the combination of a well-established genetic subgrouping (known as Maipuran) and a number of other groups not demonstrably related (see, inter alia, Noble 1965 and criticism in Taylor and Hoff 1966; Matteson 1972) and is to be avoided. The classification of Arawak languages in Payne (1991:364) is of a preliminary nature. Classification by Ramirez (2001c) is based on limited information (additionally, his information on Kawiyari [cbb], Achagua [aca], and a few others is at odds with published grammars; his materials on Tariana [tae] are based on limited information from Baniwa of Içana [bwi] speakers, and examples from extinct languages are often misspelled). A detailed discussion of the family, its shared grammatical features, and an up-to-date subgrouping are in Aikhenvald (1999, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021), with a comprehensive bibliography in Aikhenvald (2015b). Selected lexical reconstructions and phonological correspondences are in Payne (1991).

Arawak languages are generally synthetic and suffixing with a closed set of prefixes, most of which mark person of the subject (A/S_n) on the verb and possessor on the noun (a summary and further discussion are in Aikhenvald 1999, 2002:288–95, 2018, and 2020). Most person-marking prefixes are uniform and relatively stable across the family. Two exceptions are the impersonal prefix **pa-* and the indefinite prefix. The distribution and meanings of the prefix **pa-*—which can also mark reciprocals on verbs and coreferential possessor on nouns—are discussed in detail in Aikhenvald (2018). The expression of indefinite person is the topic of this article.

Similar to many highly synthetic languages in Amazonia and elsewhere, Arawak languages employ bound morphemes for marking participants on the verb. These include subjects and, in many instances, also objects and other grammatical roles (see Aikhenvald 1999:88–89, 2020; Mihás 2017). Personal

prefixes across Arawak languages typically mark the subject of a transitive verb (termed A) and of an active intransitive verb (S_a) and also the possessor on nouns and the object of adpositions (many of which have a nominal origin: Aikhenvald 2020). In approximately two thirds of the languages, personal suffixes or enclitics express the object (O) and the subject of stative verbs (S_o) and/or the subject of nonverbal predicates.² As pointed out in Aikhenvald (2018:3n4), nonverbal predicates may include nouns, adjectives, manner adverbs, and time words in the predicate slot. In the majority of Arawak languages, adjectives differ from stative verbs in their morphological categories (such as the presence of genders and classifiers and the distribution of diminutive and augmentative morphology) and their syntactic functions: adjectives, but not stative verbs, can modify a noun directly (see, for instance, Aikhenvald 1999 and 2020 and further references there).

Having the same (or almost the same) set of markers on verbs and on nouns is a typical feature of the languages of the Amazon (see more on this in Aikhenvald 2015a:176, 2017). Arawak languages (with the exception of Tariana: 3.2) do not employ cases for marking core grammatical relations. Table 1 contains a composite statement of bound person markers reconstructed for proto-Arawak. Additional prefixes that go back to proto-Arawak include **ka-* ‘attributive, relativizer’ and **ma-* ‘privative’ (see Aikhenvald 1999, 2020 on their distribution across the family). Nouns divide into obligatorily (or inalienably) and optionally (or alienably) possessed (see an up-to-date statement on possession classes across the family in Aikhenvald 2020). The system of person markers in table 1 reflects a typologically uncommon system with five values, which include the impersonal and the indefinite distinctions.³ I turn to some typological analogies in 4.3.

Gender distinctions are neutralized in plural number (a few languages have developed additional inclusive-exclusive distinctions and dual number: see Aikhenvald 2020 for a summary; see also Aikhenvald 1999:88, 2015a:303, and 2020 for a discussion of Arawak languages with lack of pronominal genders and those that innovated a three-gender system). In the majority of languages that preserve gender, non-feminine (or masculine) gender is the functionally unmarked choice.

² The system of marking grammatical relations in Arawak languages can be looked at as a subtype of the split S system (Dixon 1994:71–77), with the S_o person-marking pattern expanded to nonverbal predicates.

³ The indefinite prefix **a-* is attested in seven languages, all of them spoken north of the Amazon (Wayuu-naiki, Añun, Baré, Palikur, and Kawiyari, with traces in Lokono and in Island Carib). Its meanings and functions are a matter for a separate study, as are the distribution and the meanings of the putative dummy S_o/O marker *-ni*.

TABLE 1
A COMPOSITE STATEMENT OF RECONSTRUCTED A/S_A/POSSESSOR PREFIXES AND O/S_O SUFFIXES/
ENCLITICS IN ARAWAK LANGUAGES

person	prefixes		suffixes	
	sg	pl	sg	pl
1	* <i>nu-</i> or * <i>ta-</i>	* <i>wa-</i>	* <i>nu</i> , * <i>na</i> or * <i>te</i>	* <i>wa</i>
2	* <i>pi-</i>	* <i>(h)i</i>	* <i>pi</i>	* <i>hi</i>
3 non-feminine	* <i>ri-</i> , <i>i-</i>	* <i>na-</i>	* <i>ri</i> , <i>-i</i>	* <i>na</i>
3 feminine	* <i>thu-</i> , <i>ru-</i> , <i>u-</i>	* <i>na-</i>	* <i>thu</i> , <i>-ru</i> , <i>-u</i>	* <i>na</i>
‘impersonal’	* <i>pa-</i>			
nonspecific person	* <i>i-</i> , <i>a-</i> (?)			
dummy S _O /O	-	-	* <i>ni</i> (?)	

Sources: Aikhenvald 1999:83, 2002:289, 2018:3, 2020:13

Free independent pronouns in most Arawak languages are used in restricted contexts—to express focused arguments, subjects of copula clauses and of verbless clauses, and copula complements (see Aikhenvald 2018:6 and 2020:17 for more information on the origin of personal pronouns across the family). This is similar to many other languages with bound pronouns. Not every bound pronoun has a corresponding free form. Of twenty-one Arawak languages that have a reflex of the impersonal prefix **pa-*, only two languages—Baniwa of Içana and Tariana—have a corresponding free pronoun, *p(a)ha* (Aikhenvald 2018:10–11, 40–41). This can be considered an independent innovation in the two closely related languages.

A number of Arawak languages (see also Aikhenvald 1995, 1999:88) have a vocalic prefix **i-* that marks an unspecified, or indefinite, possessor and sometimes also an unspecified subject (A/S_A). This does not have a corresponding suffix (or enclitic). No language has a free pronoun correlate of the indefinite person prefix. In contrast to other person-marking prefixes in Arawak languages, the indefinite prefix was not recognized as part of the pronominal paradigm until Aikhenvald (1999:88). I now turn to the functions of the indefinite person marker.

2.2. The indefinite person marker: An illustration. Across the Arawak language family, nouns that refer to body parts, important possessions, and kin relations are bound forms. They must be accompanied by a possessor. And if the possessor is not known or left unspecified, the noun will take an unspecified possessor suffix—a reflex of proto-Arawak **t/i* or **hi*. In most languages the unspecified possessor suffix also marks deverbal action nominalizations (addressed in Aikhenvald 2015a:171 and 2020, with a detailed analysis of the

distribution of this polysemous pattern in Aikhenvald 2021).⁴ A number of Arawak languages add to this an indefinite prefix.

An illustrative example comes from Baniwa of Içana (Hohôdene dialect) (ISO 639-3 code [bwi]),⁵ a member of the Uapuí subgroup of Arawak spoken in the Alto Rio Negro region, north of the Amazon.⁶ The noun *-ka:pi* ‘hand, arm’ is obligatorily possessed and has to take a prefix: see (1) and (2).⁷

Baniwa of Içana Hohôdene

(1) no-ka:pi
1SG-hand
‘my hand’

(2) pi-ka:pi
2SG-hand
‘your (singular) hand’

If the owner of the hand is unknown, the noun stem must occur with the suffix *-tti* ‘unspecified possessor’ and the indefinite prefix *i-*. The noun can then be used on its own, as an independent well-formed word, as shown in (3).

⁴ This recurrent polysemy is reflected in the glossing of the suffix as UNSP/NOM ‘unspecified possessor/nominalizer’ where applicable.

⁵ There are a number of issues with assignment of ISO 639-3 codes to many Arawak languages, as some, such as Warekena of Xié, Añun, and Marawan, are missing from the lists and have not been assigned any codes. The characterization of Tariana [tae] does not correspond to the real situation of the language and the distribution of its dialects (see 3.2). Baniwa of Içana [bwi] and Kurripako [kpc] form part of a dialect continuum (see, for instance, Aikhenvald 2019); however, they are represented as different languages with different codes. See Aikhenvald (2019, 2021) for an up-to-date classification of Arawak languages and vital facts on Arawak languages in the Upper Rio Negro and surroundings.

⁶ Examples follow the sources they come from. Alternative terms for the unspecified possessor suffix (including ‘absolute’ and ‘alienator’) are discussed in Aikhenvald (2021).

⁷ The following abbreviations are used: 1, first person; 2, second person; 3, third person; A, transitive subject; AFF, affix; ANIM, animate; ATTR, attributive; C, consonant; CAUS, causative; CL, classifier; DECL, declarative; DEM, demonstrative; DIM, diminutive; EMPH, emphatic; FEM, feminine; FREQ, frequentative; FRUST, frustrative; FUT, future; IMP, impersonal; INDEF, indefinite; INDIV, individualizer; INTRANS, intransitive; LOC, locative; MASC, masculine; NEG, negation; NF, non-feminine; NOM, nominalizer; NP, noun phrase; O, object; PEJ, pejorative marker; PL, plural; POS, positive; POSS, possessive marker; POSS.CL, possessive classifier; PRES.NONVIS, present non-visual; PRON, pronominal marker; REM.P, remote past; REM.P.REP, remote past reported; REM.P.VIS, remote past visual; S, intransitive subject; S_a, subject of active intransitive verbs; SEQ, sequential marker; SG, singular; SG.FEM, singular feminine; SG.MASC, singular masculine; SG.NF, singular non-feminine; S_o, subject of stative verb; TH, thematic marker; TOP.NON.A/S, topical nonsubject; UNSP, unspecified possessor; UNSP/NOM, a marker of unspecified possessor and a nominalizer; V, vowel. In Baniwa of Içana, the digraph *tt* is the orthographic symbol used for lamino-dental stop [t̪] or a lamino-alveolar stop [t̪ʲ], depending on dialect. The symbol + indicates phonological fusion on an affixal boundary.

Baniwa of Içana Hohôdene

(3) *i-ka:pi-tti*
 INDEF-hand-UNSP

‘a hand (not belonging to anyone)’

During the early stages of linguistic work with the Hohôdene variety of Baniwa of Içana, the late Marcília Fontes offered the following explanation: “When you say *i-ka:pi-tti*, it is like when you find a hand in the forest and you do not know whose hand this could be.”

The prefix *i-* as a marker of indefinite possessor contrasts with possessed forms using the impersonal prefix *pa-*. The form of ‘hand’ with *pa-* is shown in (4).

Baniwa of Içana Hohôdene

(4) *pa-ka:pi*
 IMP-hand

‘someone’s hand, hand of a person’

The difference between (3) and (4) is subtle. In (3) a hand in general refers to a body part detached from the unknown and unspecified possessor—the hand exists on its own rather than being conceived of as a part of the whole (see also (9)). In (4) the generic prefix implies a human possessor who could be anyone and is not identified specifically.⁸ In other words, (4) involves the existence of a human possessor with generic reference. In (3) the hand is not possessed—there is no specified possessor at all. (A comprehensive analysis of the prefix *pa-*, and its realization and meanings, across the Arawak family, including its functions in Baniwa, can be found in Aikhenvald 2018). The impersonal prefix *pa-* in Baniwa of Içana and its close relative Tariana has a corresponding free pronoun, *p(a)ha* ‘one, person in general’. As stated earlier, there is no free pronoun corresponding to the indefinite prefix.

The indefinite prefix *i-* also marks an unspecified subject (A/S_a) of nominalizations of transitive and active intransitive (S_a) verbs. An action nominalization of the verb *-a:ko* ‘speak’ is shown in (5a), and a nominalization of the verb *-dzáami* ‘be sick’ is in (6a). Examples (5b) and (6b) illustrate the corresponding verbs with pronominal prefixes.

Baniwa of Içana Hohôdene

(5a) *i-a:ko-tti*
 INDEF-speak-UNSP/NOM

‘voice, speech in general’ (Ramirez 2001a:352, 2001b:34, and data from the author’s fieldnotes)

⁸ The existing distinction between indefinite and generic persons in pronominal systems of Arawak and a number of other languages (see 4.3) demonstrates that generic person cannot be considered an ‘alternative’ to an indefinite pronoun (pace Haspelmath 1997:52).

- (5b) no-a:ko
 1SG-speak
 ‘I speak/say’
- (6a) i-dzáami-ka-tti
 INDEF-be.sick/faint/die-TH-UNSP/NOM
 ‘sickness, illness’
- (6b) no-dzáami
 1SG-be.sick
 ‘I am sick, I am fainting’

The indefinite prefix in Baniwa of Içana is obligatory in a number of other contexts. Within a possessive noun phrase that contains a nominal possessor, the possessed noun takes the indefinite prefix. This is shown in (7).

- Baniwa of Içana Hohôdene
- (7) íinaro i-ka:pi
 woman INDEF-hand
 ‘woman’s hand, the hand of a woman’

Here the prefix *i-* can be considered a placeholder in the prefix position. These, and other, contexts for the use of the indefinite prefix in Baniwa of Içana are the topic of 3.1.

2.3. The indefinite person across the family: Its distribution and contexts of use. The indefinite prefix occurs in two kinds of contexts across the Arawak family.⁹

The first set of contexts (a) involves marking the unspecified, or indefinite, possessor on nouns and the unspecified A/S_a on deverbal nominalizations (along the lines of examples (3), (5a), and (6a) from Baniwa of Içana).

The second set of contexts (b) involves the prefix occurring as a placeholder for person prefixes, if the possessor is preposed to the possessed, as in (7) in 2.2 or (10) in 3.1.2; or if a nominal object occurs before a postposition, as in (11) in 3.1.2; or if the subject constituent is focused and preposed to the verb, as in (14), in 3.1.2.

⁹ In the past the indefinite prefix may have been found in a larger number of languages. Due to mass language extinction in Amazonia following the European invasion, numerous languages fell into oblivion before having been documented. Only scant word lists are available for scores of languages, including Taino (the first indigenous group encountered by Christopher Columbus), the Caquetio of the Caribbean coast, the Shebayo off the coast of Venezuela, and numerous others: see Aikhenvald (1999, 2015a:31–36) and references there. Word lists of varied length are available for some languages that are no longer spoken, but they often do not contain enough grammatical information (see also Aikhenvald 2018:7–8).

In its context (a), the indefinite prefix is similar to the indefinite possessor marker in Woods Cree [cre] (an Algonquian language), aptly described by Brightman (1985:355) as reflecting “the speaker’s inability to characterize the object in terms of an identifiable possessor.” The context (b) is connected to the context (a). Here the indefinite prefix marks a neutralized, and thus no longer identifiable, person value, as the person is left unspecified.

The indefinite person prefix *i-* has been attested in the following languages from four subgroups north of the Amazon (see the classification in Aikhenvald 2019, 2021):

- four languages of the Uapuí subgroup—the Baniwa of Içana-Kurripako dialect continuum, Tariana, Piapoco [pio], and Kawiyari [cbb];
- Achagua, a member of the Circum-Uapuí subgroup (which shares a number of features with the Uapuí subgroup);
- Palikur [plu], the only extant member of the Oiapoque subgroup, spoken in the Brazilian state of Amapá and in French Guiana (with remnants of the prefix *i-* discernible in the extinct †Marawan, closely related to Palikur);
- †Island Carib [crb], a member of the Caribbean subgroup, formerly spoken on the island of Dominica.

A reflex of the prefix *i-* is also found in Baure [brg], a Bolivian Arawak language spoken south of the Amazon.

The indefinite prefix as a marker of unspecified possessor or unspecified A/S_a on nominalizations (contexts (a)) can co-occur with the unspecified possessor suffix on nouns (a reflex of proto-Arawak *-t/i*, discussed in Aikhenvald 2021; an example, from Baniwa of Içana, is in (3)). The principles of co-occurrence are addressed separately in the subsections of this article.

In a few Arawak languages, the third person masculine (or non-feminine) prefix has the form *i-*. In some languages, such as Piapoco and Kawiyari, both from the Uapuí subgroup, the third person non-feminine prefix can be distinguished from the homophonous indefinite prefix *i-* by their grammatical contexts (see 3.3). Since the form **i-* can be reconstructed to the proto-language as an alternative third person singular non-feminine prefix, analytical problems arise, to be discussed in 4.1.¹⁰

The distribution of the prefix on nouns and on verbs, its productivity, and contexts of use are summarized in table 2. In the table ‘yes’ in parentheses indicates limited productivity of the marker. ‘Yes’ with a question mark indicates that the degree of productivity of the prefix is not clear from the sources. A question mark on its own indicates gaps in the available data.

¹⁰ The second person plural prefix **(h)i-*—reconstructible for proto-Arawak (as shown in table 1)—is homophonous with the indefinite person prefix *i-*. The two can be distinguished by their grammatical contexts.

TABLE 2
THE INDEFINITE PERSON PREFIX *i-* IN ARAWAK LANGUAGES: FORMS AND CONTEXTS

Subgroup	Language	Contexts (a): nonspecific possessor or argument of nominalizations		Contexts (b): placeholder for personal prefixes		Co-occurrence with unspecified possessor suffix <i>*-iSi</i> on nouns (a)	More in
		Possessor on nouns	Argument of nominalizations	Nouns: NP with preposed possessor and postpositions	Verbs: A/S _a preposed to the verb		
Uapui	Baniwa of Içana-Kurripako	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	3.1
	Wamiarikune	no	(yes)	yes*	(yes)	no	3.2
	Tariana		yes	yes	yes		
	Kumandene	yes?	yes	yes	yes	yes	3.3
Circum-Uapui	Piapoco	?	yes	partly yes**	yes?	?	3.3
	Kawiyari		yes	yes	yes?	yes	3.4
Oiapoque	Achagua	yes?	yes?	yes	yes?	yes	3.4
	Palikur	no	no	no	no	no	3.5
Bolivian	†Island Carib	yes	no	no	no	yes	3.5
	Baure	no	no	yes (archaic)	no	no	3.6
		yes	no	no	no	no	3.5

* The prefix undergoes partial loss on postpositions: see 3.2.

** One of the sources indicates the presence of the prefix in possessive constructions: see 3.3.1.

3. The indefinite prefix *i-* up close. The fullest range of functions of the indefinite prefix *i-* is found in the Baniwa of Içana-Kurripako dialect continuum (discussed in 3.1) and three other languages from the Uaupí subgroup of Arawak languages (see Aikhenvald 2019). These include the two extant dialects of Tariana (3.2) and also Piapoco and Kawayari (see 3.3). The prefix used to be attested in a wide range of functions in older varieties of Achagua, a member of the Circum-Uaupí subgroup (3.4). In Palikur, from the Oiapoque subgroup, and in Baure, a Bolivian Arawak language, the prefix occurs only on obligatorily possessed nouns (3.5). Traces of the prefix have been documented for Island Carib (3.6).

3.1. The Baniwa of Içana-Kurripako dialect continuum. The Baniwa of Içana-Kurripako dialect continuum is spoken by 3,000–4,000 people in the basin of the Içana River and its tributaries in the Upper Rio Negro region of Brazil (the municipality of São Gabriel da Cachoeira) and the adjacent regions of Colombia and Venezuela, stretching into the basin of the Middle Vaupés. Cross-referencing markers in Baniwa of Içana (based on the Hohôdene variety: Ramirez 2001a, 2001b, author’s fieldwork) are shown in table 3. The impersonal prefix has a corresponding pronoun *pha* ‘one, a person in general’. As mentioned above, there is no corresponding full pronoun for the indefinite prefix. The indefinite prefix in the members of the Baniwa of Içana-Kurripako dialect continuum regularly occurs in contexts (a) and (b). These are discussed in 3.1.1–2.

3.1.1. The indefinite prefix in contexts (a). The indefinite prefix *i-* marks an unspecified possessor on obligatorily possessed nouns and is accompanied by the unspecified possessor suffix *-tti* across the whole of the Baniwa of Içana-Kurripako dialect continuum. This was illustrated in (3), with an inalienably possessed noun *-ka:pi* ‘hand’.

TABLE 3
CROSS-REFERENCING MARKERS AND PERSONAL PRONOUNS IN BANIWA
OF IÇANA-KURRIPAKO (BASED ON THE HOHÔDENE VARIETY)

PERSON/GENDER	PREFIXES		ENCLITICS	
	SG	PL	SG	PL
1	<i>no-</i>	<i>wa-</i>	<i>=nhua</i>	<i>=hwa</i>
2	<i>pi-</i>	<i>i-</i>	<i>=phia</i>	<i>=ihia</i>
3NF	<i>ri-</i>		<i>=ni</i>	<i>=hna</i>
3F	<i>ʃu-</i>	<i>na-</i>	<i>=nu</i>	
impersonal		<i>pa-</i>		—
indefinite		<i>i-</i>		—

In the Hohôdene dialect, the combination of prefix *i-* and the unspecified possessor suffix *-tti* is not used with obligatorily possessed kinship terms. The only exception is *-eenipe* ‘child of’, with the unspecified possessor form *i-ee-nipe-tti* (INDEF-child-UNSP) ‘a child (with no possessor specified)’ (see also Ramirez 2001a:133, 2001b:86; G. Taylor 1991:34; author’s fieldwork).

In contrast, in Kurripako dialects the indefinite prefix and the unspecified possessor suffix appear on all obligatorily possessed nouns, including all kinship terms such as *i-pheeri-tti* (INDEF-older.sibling-UNSP) ‘older brother’ (Bezerra 2005:43; see also Granadillo 2004:34–35). The combination of suffix and prefix appears on obligatorily possessed terms for important possessions across dialects, for example, Hohôdene *i-dzawithiapó-tti*, Kurripako *i-yawwithiapotti* ‘bow (in general)’ (Ramirez 2001b:77; Bezerra 2012:4).¹¹

The unspecified possessor marker *-tti* is usually accompanied by the indefinite prefix *i-*. The indefinite prefix is not used on the following obligatorily possessed nouns (listed by Ramirez 2001a:134): *-pânia* ‘plantation, garden (of someone)’, *panía-tti* ‘plantation, garden (in general)’, *-jamáka* ‘cloth (of someone)’, *jamaká-tti* ‘cloth in general’; and *-pana* ‘house (of someone)’, *pantti* ‘house (in general)’.¹²

In just a few obligatorily possessed nouns in Hohôdene, the form of the unspecified possessor suffix is *-i* (Ramirez 2001a:134). This is a regular reflex of the proto-Arawak unspecified possessor suffix **-hi* (see Aikhenvald 2021: table 3). These nouns do not take the indefinite prefix, for example, *no(o)-hiníma* (1SG-bad.omen) ‘my bad omen’, *hiníma-i* (bad.omen-UNSP) ‘bad omen (in general)’. Some have alternate forms with the suffix *-i* and no prefix and the suffix *-tti* and the indefinite prefix, for example, *no-iipítana* ‘my name’ and *pítana-i* (name-UNSP) or *i-ipítaná-tti* (INDEF-name-UNSP) ‘name (in general)’. Others have alternate forms with and without the indefinite prefix, for example, *noo-pira* ‘my domestic animal’ and *pira-i-tti*, *ii-pirá-tti* ‘domestic animal in general’ (cf. Kurripako *pira-i-tti* ‘domestic animal in general’—see Aikhenvald 2021 on the distribution of the unspecified possession suffix *-i* and *-tti* in Baniwa of Içana and Kurripako and their origins).

These nouns pose an additional problem. The fact that they do not contain the indefinite possessor prefix may reflect a tendency toward the loss of the prefix. This is echoed by its obsolescence in the closely related Tariana (see 3.2.1); its absence in Guarequena and Resígaro, also from the Uapuí subgroup;

¹¹ For a summary of further subtle differences between the dialects, see Bezerra (2005, 2012) and Granadillo (2004:34–35, 2006:77).

¹² The irregular possessive forms for the term ‘house’ go back to Proto-Arawak (see Payne 1991; Aikhenvald 2002:291–92). Its reflex in Tariana, *panisi*, is optionally possessed and does not take prefixes.

its historically documented demise in the Circum-Uapuí language Achagua (see 3.4); and its absence in the other language of that subgroup, Yucuna. Alternatively this may reflect an archaic feature, pointing toward the relatively recent spread of the indefinite prefix.

The indefinite prefix also marks an unspecified A/S_a in deverbal action nominalizations. The verb *-a:ko* ‘speak, say’ can be nominalized as *i-a:ko-tti* (INDEF-say-UNSP/NOM) ‘voice, speech’. If the nominalization is used within a possessive construction, the suffix disappears, yielding *no-a:ko* ‘my voice, speech’, as in (8) (see also Ramirez 2001a, 2001b; Bezerra 2005, 2012; G. Taylor 1991).

Baniwa of Içana Hohôdene

- (8) *i-a:ko-tti*
 INDEF-speak-UNSP/NOM
 ‘voice, speech (in general)’

no-a:ko
 1SG-speak
 ‘my speech, my voice’

A noun marked with the indefinite prefix will refer to the object in general, without specifying who it belongs to. In (9) a speaker asks someone to draw a head (as a shape or an object) whose possessor is unspecified (Ramirez 2001a:132–33; also found in author’s fieldwork data).

Baniwa of Içana Hohôdene

- (9) *pi-danaa: pa-da i-hwida-tti*
 2SG-draw one-CL:ROUND INDEF-head-UNSP
 ‘Draw a head!’

Similarly an action nominalization with an unspecified A/S_a refers to the action or state in general, for example, *i-dzaami-khê-tti* (INDEF-be.sick-NOM-UNSP/NOM) ‘illness’. The personal prefix will indicate the subject of the nominalized verb—a notional possessor, as in *no-dzaami-khe* (1SG-be.sick-NOM) ‘my illness, my being ill’.

We can recall, from (3) and (4), that the indefinite prefix in Baniwa of Içana-Kurripako contrasts with the generic person prefix *pa-* (which has a corresponding free pronoun *pha* ‘people in general’ but no corresponding enclitic). A nominalization with the prefix *pa-* will refer to a general human subject, as in *pa-dzaami-khe* (IMP-be.sick-NOM) ‘people’s illness, people being ill’.

3.1.2. The indefinite prefix in contexts (b). In its contexts (b), the indefinite prefix occurs on nouns and on adpositions. A possessed noun or an adposition takes the indefinite possessor prefix if preceded by the possessor or the object of an adposition. This is shown in (7), with an obligatorily possessed noun ‘hand’, and (10), with an optionally possessed noun ‘dog’. Optionally possessed

nouns in Baniwa of Içana-Kurripako and numerous other Arawak languages take special possessive suffixes (see a summary in Aikhenvald 2020:18–19). Example (10) illustrates the possessive suffix *-ni* on the noun ‘dog’.

- Baniwa of Içana Hohôdene
 (10) Afonso i-tsinu-ni
 Afonso INDEF-dog-POSS
 ‘Afonso’s dog’

The form with a pronominal possessor is *li-tsinu-ni* (3SG.NF-dog-POSS) ‘his dog’. A noun phrase consisting of a noun and a postposition that takes the indefinite prefix is shown in (11).

- Baniwa of Içana Hohôdene
 (11) Afonso i-lhio
 Afonso INDEF-for/to
 ‘for/to Afonso’

If the possessor, or the object of the adposition, is focused, the cross-referencing prefix will be used. Then the possessor will follow the possessed noun and the adposition will precede the object. Examples (12) and (13) illustrate this.

- Baniwa of Içana Hohôdene
 (12) li-tsinu-ni Afonso
 3SG.NF-dog-POSS Afonso
 ‘Afonso’s (not anyone else’s) dog’
 (13) li-lhio Afonso
 3SG.NF-for Afonso
 ‘for Afonso (not anyone else)’

Discourse motivations for word order variation in possessive and adpositional noun phrases in Baniwa of Içana-Kurripako, and the corresponding differences in the use of cross-referencing markers, are further discussed in Aikhenvald (1995:168–69) (see also Ramirez 2001a:121–22).

In its contexts (b), the indefinite prefix occurs on a verb if an A/S_a constituent precedes it; then the A/S_a constituent is the topic (see also Aikhenvald 1995:173, 179; Ramirez 2001a:117–18; Bezerra 2005:96). In (14), from the Hohôdene dialect of Baniwa of Içana, ‘jaguar’ is the topic of subsequent discourse (Ramirez 2001a:117, own data). This was the beginning of a story about a jaguar and the man’s fight to save his dog.

- Baniwa of Içana Hohôdene
 (14) dzaawi i-ihña-ka no-tsiinu-ni
 jaguar INDEF-eat-DECL 1SG-dog-POSS
 ‘A jaguar has devoured my dog’

If the A/S_a constituent has been mentioned before and must be repeated for clarification, it can occur postposed to the verb, which then takes personal prefixes (Aikhenvald 1995:166; similar examples in Ramirez 2001b:117; G. Taylor 1991; Bezerra 2005). An example is given in (15).

- Baniwa of Içana Hohôdene
 (15) li-ihña-ka no-tsiinu-ni lhie dzaawi
 3SG.NF-eat-DECL 1SG-dog-POSS DEM jaguar
 ‘He has devoured my dog, the jaguar’

In its contexts (b) illustrated with examples (10), (11), and (14), the indefinite prefix can be synchronically described as a placeholder in the situation where all person, number, and gender distinctions are neutralized, both on nouns and on verbs.¹³

3.2. Tariana. Tariana is an endangered Arawak language spoken by over a hundred people in the Vaupés River basin in northwestern Amazonia (Brazil), with two extant dialects. The Wamiarikune Tariana dialect is spoken by about 70 speakers in two villages in the vicinity of Iauaretê in the Middle Vaupés area (Santa Rosa and Periquitos, with minor differences between the two). The language is under pressure from Tucano, an East Tucanoan language, spoken by the majority of people in the region. There is evidence of substantial structural influence of Tucano and other East Tucanoan languages on the dialect (see Aikhenvald 2002, 2020). In addition, there are notable differences between Traditional Tariana (now almost gone; documented by the author in the 1990s and early 2000s) and Innovative Tariana, currently spoken by those born from 1950 onward. Innovative Tariana bears an increasing impact of Tucano in the structure of words, clauses, and sentences and discourse devices. Phenomena absent from Tucano undergo attrition. This is what happens to the indefinite person prefix.

The Kumandene Tariana dialect is spoken by about 60 people in the village of Santa Terezinha on the Iauarí River. The majority of the inhabitants of the village speak closely related Hohôdene Baniwa, with many having some competence in Tucano. Kumandene Tariana shows a high degree of influence from Hohôdene Baniwa (see Aikhenvald 2014 on the emergence of a blended Tariana-Baniwa variety in Santa Terezinha). Neither Kumandene nor Wamiarikune Tariana is fully acquired by children.

Cross-referencing prefixes attested in both dialects of Tariana are given in table 4 (the same forms are used in both dialects, with minor phonological differences). Like Baniwa of Içana-Kurripako, the impersonal prefix has a full pronoun

¹³ Bezerra (2005) calls the prefix *i-* “connective” (following Ramirez 2001a). Granadillo (2006) refers to it as a focalizer. Note that neither of these terms covers the full gamut of uses of *i-* in the language (see Aikhenvald 1995:167–79 for its uses in a further variety of constructions, including relative clauses and complement clauses).

TABLE 4
CROSS-REFERENCING PREFIXES IN TARIANA

	SINGULAR	PLURAL
1	<i>nu-</i>	<i>wa-</i>
2	<i>pi-</i>	<i>i-</i>
3nf	<i>di-</i>	
3f	<i>du-</i>	<i>na-</i>
impersonal	<i>pa-</i>	-
indefinite	<i>i-</i>	-

Sources: Aikhenvald 2003, fieldwork

counterpart, *paha* (see Aikhenvald 2018 on this as a shared innovation of the two languages). There is no free pronoun counterpart for the indefinite prefix.

In contrast to Baniwa of Içana-Kurripako, Tariana has no cross-referencing suffixes or enclitics (although some remnants of those appear to have been attested in the list collected by Natterer 1831). The two extant dialects differ in the source of contact-induced change. Wamiarikune Tariana shows the influence from the unrelated Tucano, and Kumandene Tariana is influenced by the closely related Baniwa of Içana (mostly Hohôdene). The fate of the indefinite prefix in the two dialects reflects differential impact of language contact in both dialects. The major differences between Wamiarikune and Kumandene Tariana concern the usage of the indefinite prefix.

In both dialects of Tariana, the indefinite prefix is used in contexts (a) to express the unspecified argument of nominalizations. It is productively used in contexts (b) on obligatorily possessed nouns in possessive constructions with a non-pronominal possessor and on postpositions of nominal and verbal origin that take prefixes (see sets A–D in Aikhenvald 2003:223). The difference between the dialects lies in its degree of productivity with postpositions and on verbs—summarized in table 5. Speakers of the Innovative Wamiarikune

TABLE 5
THE INDEFINITE PREFIX IN WAMIARIKUNE AND IN KUMANDENE TARIANA

	Contexts (a)		Contexts (b)		
	unspecified possessor on nouns	unspecified A/S _a on nominalizations	possessed nouns with preposed possessor	postpositions	verbs with preposed subject
Wamiarikune		yes (optional)		yes (most)	vestiges
Kumandene	no	yes (obligatory)	yes	yes (all)	yes

Tariana tend to replace the indefinite prefix in contexts (a) with a third person pronominal prefix or omit the prefix altogether.

3.2.1. The indefinite prefix in contexts (a). In both dialects of Tariana, the indefinite prefix *i-* is not used to mark an unspecified possessor on inalienably possessed nouns used on their own—unlike Baniwa of Içana-Kurripako (see (3)). Obligatorily possessed nouns in Tariana cannot be used without specifying a possessor (see Aikhenvald 2003:122–38 on the semantic content of the class of obligatorily possessed nouns and variations thereof). If possessor is not specified, the impersonal prefix *pa-* will be used: that is, the distinction between ‘a hand’ (as in (3) from Baniwa of Içana) and ‘someone’s hand’ (as in (4)) is neutralized.

Tariana has all but lost the unspecified possessor suffix, a reflex of proto-Arawak *-tʃi* and cognate to Baniwa *-tti*. Its reflex (Wamiarikune Tariana *-si*, Kumandene Tariana *-tsi*) survives in a few nouns, all of them synchronically treated as optionally possessed, for example, *yaru-si* (possession/thing-UNSP) ‘possession’, *yaru-maka-si* (possession/thing-CL:CLOTH-UNSP) ‘clothing’, *hini-si* ‘milk’, *hiti-si* ‘tear’, *ka-dui-si* (ATTR-fan-UNSP/NOM) ‘fan’, and *pani-si* ‘house’. Only Wamiarikune Tariana forms will be given if the Kumandene and the Wamiarikune forms are the same, except for regular phonological differences (see also Aikhenvald 2003:129, 2021).¹⁴ The suffix also appears in a limited number of action nominalizations (in contrast to Baniwa of Içana, where it is fully productive). Only some of these contain the indefinite prefix indicating the unspecified A/S_a, for example, *hiwya-si* (underlying form *i-why-a-si*) (INDEF-breathe-UNSP/NOM) ‘magic breath, breath’, *i-rena-ka-si* (INDEF-be.sick-TH-UNSP/NOM) ‘illness’, and *i-aku-si* (INDEF-speak-UNSP/NOM) ‘speech’.

The difference between Wamiarikune and Kumandene Tariana lies in the use of the indefinite prefix. A prime example is a frequently used nominalization, Kumandene Tariana *i-hña-ka-tsi*, Wamiarikune Tariana (*i*)*hña-ka-si* (INDEF-eat-UNSP/NOM) ‘food, process of eating’. The prefix *i-* is always used in Kumandene Tariana. In Wamiarikune Tariana the indefinite prefix is a feature of older and traditional speakers. Younger and innovative speakers use the form *hñakasi*, without the prefix. The nominalization cannot take personal prefixes in either dialect. If it must occur in a possessive construction, it is treated as an optionally possessed noun with the possessor juxtaposed to it, for example, Wamiarikune Tariana *nuha (i)-hña-ka-si* (I (INDEF)-eat-TH-UNSP/NOM) ‘my food’.

3.2.2. The indefinite prefix in contexts (b) In both dialects of Tariana, the indefinite prefix *i-* is productively used in contexts (b) on obligatorily possessed nouns within noun phrases with a nominal possessor, as in (16). The

¹⁴ The materials on Wamiarikune Tariana are based on Aikhenvald (2003) and additional fieldwork by the same author; materials on Kumandene Tariana are based on original fieldwork (Aikhenvald 2014).

first line of (16) reflects Wamiarikune Tariana forms, and the second line those from Kumandene Tariana.

Wamiarikune Tariana / Kumandene Tariana

- (16) inaru i-pitana
 inazu i-pitana
 woman INDEF-name
 ‘woman’s name’

A pronominal possessor will be expressed with a corresponding prefix, for example, Wamiarikune *du-pitana*, Kumandene *zu-pitana* (3SG.FEM-name) ‘her name’.

The extent of use of the indefinite prefix in possessive NPs differs between the two dialects. In Kumandene Tariana the prefix is obligatory in contexts such as (16), with no variation between generations of speakers. In Wamiarikune Tariana the indefinite prefix is undergoing attrition, especially among the speakers of Innovative Tariana who use Tucano on a daily basis. This attrition is, in all likelihood, part of contact-induced change: Tucano has no equivalent for such a prefix.

Speakers of the Innovative Wamiarikune Tariana tend to use the third person non-feminine prefix *di-* in possessive constructions where *i-* ‘indefinite person prefix’ would be required in the traditional language. This can be seen in (17), from a story by an Innovative speaker.

Innovative Wamiarikune Tariana

- (17) diha-nai di-kuda-se
 it-CL:LAKE.LIKE.WATERWAY 3SG.NF-bed-LOC
 ‘on the bed of a lake’

As we were transcribing the story, the speaker corrected the form and said (18). On another occasion a Traditional speaker made a correction (further examples are found in Aikhenvald 2003:124).

Traditional Wamiarikune Tariana

- (18) diha-nai i-kuda-se
 it-CL:LAKE.LIKE.WATERWAY INDEF-bed-LOC
 ‘on the bed of a lake’

Some innovative speakers omit the personal prefix altogether, for example, Traditional Tariana *diha-phe i-pitana* (he-CL:FOLIFORM INDEF-name), Innovative Tariana *diha-phe pitana* (he-CL:FOLIFORM name) ‘the name of the book (lit. the foliform one)’. The indefinite prefix is never replaced with the personal markers or omitted in fixed expressions. These include personal nicknames, like *Hi:ri i-sipi* (Mouse INDEF-tail) ‘tail of a mouse’ (a nickname for Jacinto Brito: Aikhenvald 2003:16, 25).

The behavior of the indefinite prefix with postpositions also differs between dialects. Similar to Baniwa of Içana (see (11)), all postpositions in Kumandene

Tariana take the indefinite prefix when they follow a noun. This is shown in (19a) and (20a). A postposition with a pronominal object will take a personal prefix, as shown in (19b) and (20b).

Kumandene Tariana

(19a) yalana i-enipe i-tsiu
 white.person INDEF-child INDEF-for
 ‘for white person’s children’

(19b) nu-tsiu
 1SG-for
 ‘for me’

(20a) nu-nu-peta haĩ-tse nuha haniži i-dalipa
 1SG-come-AGAIN here-LOC I father INDEF-close.to
 ‘I have come back here close to my father’

(20b) nu-dalipa
 1SG-close.to
 ‘close to me, at my place’

Postpositions in Wamiarikune Tariana vary as to whether they take personal prefixes or not and whether they must take the indefinite prefix (some of these features and a few other syntactic features of postpositions, such as co-occurrence with case markers, are addressed in Aikhenvald 2003:223–33, especially table 11.6 there).¹⁵ Once again Traditional Tariana and Innovative Tariana behave differently.

In Traditional Tariana the indefinite prefix is obligatorily used on postpositions derived from (i) deverbal nominalizations, for instance, *-pu-mi* (follow-NOM) ‘after’ and *-pu-mi-na* (follow-NOM-NOM) ‘because of, as a consequence of’; (ii) dependent forms of directional verbs, including *-ruku-ita-ka* (go.down-CAUS-SEQ) ‘downward from’ and *-peya* (be.first) ‘before’; and (iii) body parts, for example, *-sami-se* (back-LOC) ‘at the back of’ and *-whida-na* (head-POSS) ‘at the end of’. An example is given in (21).

Traditional Wamiarikune Tariana

(21) ha-dapana i-ruku-ita-ka alia-pidana
 DEM-CL.HOUSE INDEF-go.down-CAUS-SEQ exist-REM.P.REP
 kaidoko
 beach

‘Downward from that house there was a beach (or a stretch of sand)’

¹⁵ Prepositions derived from optionally possessed nouns (which cannot take personal prefixes), adjectives, and adverbs take no prefixes, for example, *mayakani* (be right/straight) ‘on the right side of’, *pamuña* ‘(in) the middle’, *kayu* ‘like, how’.

Like in possessive noun phrases, speakers of Innovative Tariana replace the indefinite prefix *i-* on these postpositions with the functionally unmarked third person singular non-feminine prefix *di-*.

All underived postpositions have well-established cognates in other languages of the Uapuí subgroup, especially Baniwa of Içana-Kurripako, pointing toward their antiquity. In Tariana they fall into two groups, defined phonologically.

A well-formed phonological word in Tariana has the minimal structure CVCV or V:CV, with the exception of onomatopoeia and interjections (Aikhenvald 2003:40–46). A sequence VCV or CVV cannot form a felicitous word. The indefinite prefix is obligatory with those underived postpositions that cannot form a felicitous phonological word on their own. These are *-api* ‘together with’, *-eda* ‘downstream’, *-kwe* ‘upstream’, *-ewhe* ‘amid, between’, and *-siu* ‘for’ shown in (22) (cf. (19a–b) and (11)).

Traditional Wamiarikune Tariana

- (22) pa-dapi-kha matsia-kha pitu
 one-vine-CL:CURVED good-CL:CURVED 2SG+daughter
 i-siu phita
 INDEF-for 2SG+get

‘Get a nice curved vine for your daughter’

This postposition with a pronominal object will always take a personal prefix, for example, *nu-siu* (1SG-for) ‘for me’, *di-siu* (3SG.NF-for) ‘for him’, and so on. In agreement with the tendency toward attrition of the indefinite prefix, speakers of Innovative Tariana replace the indefinite prefix with the corresponding personal prefix, as in (17). An Innovative speaker repeated the noun phrase *pitu i-siu* (2SG+daughter INDEF-for) as *pitu du-siu* (2SG+daughter 3SG.FEM-for) ‘for your daughter’.

The indefinite prefix can be omitted from those underived postpositions that can form a felicitous phonological word on their own. These are *wika* ‘on top of’, *wika-se* (top-LOC) ‘exactly on top of’, and *dalipa* ‘close to, at someone’s place’. The postposition *wika-se* with a nominal object and the indefinite prefix is illustrated in (23), from a story told by a Traditional speaker.

Traditional Wamiarikune Tariana

- (23) Ne-nuku di-wika-se hawa i-wika-se
 then-TOP.NON.A/S 3SG.NF-top-LOC eagle INDEF-top-LOC
 dhipa di-uka de:ru-pidana
 3SG.NF+grab 3SG.NF-arrive 3SG.NF+get.stuck-REM.P.REP

‘Then he (the person) got on top of him, on top of the eagle, and grabbed (him)’

The noun phrase *hawa i-wika-se* (eagle INDEF-top-LOC) ‘on top of the eagle’ is a clarification to *di-wika-se* (3SG.NF-top-LOC) ‘on top of him’—here the

postposition *-wika-se* takes the personal prefix, which corresponds to its third person object. Later in the same story, the same speaker omitted the prefix, as shown in (24).

- (24) hawa wika-se di-ka di-a-pidana diha
 eagle top-LOC 3SG.NF-see 3SG.NF-go-REM.P.REP he
 ‘He looked (around) on top of the eagle’

Innovative speakers regularly omit the prefix, as shown in (25).

Innovative Wamiarikune Tariana

- (25) ne di-wika e:di wika na-hwa-pidana
 then 3SG.NF-top bench top 3PL-sit-REM.P.REP
 nha-yana-pe
 they-PEJ-PL
 ‘They, the naughty ones, sat on top of it, on top of the bench’

An alternative to *e:di wika* for some speakers is *e:di di-wika* (bench 3SG.NF-top) ‘on top of the bench’—expanding the use of the third person prefix (as in example (17) above). Those Innovative speakers who have little contact with the two Traditional speakers still alive within the Wamiarikune Tariana-speaking community reject noun phrases such as *hawa i-wika-se* in (23) as incorrect.

The postposition *dalipa* ‘close to, at someone’s place’ always takes pronominal prefixes if its object is a pronoun, as in *nu-dalipa* (1SG-close.to) ‘close to me’ (just like (20b), from Kumandene Tariana). Most speakers omit the prefix if the postposition has a nominal object, as shown in (26)—the same sentence was produced on different occasions by a Traditional and by an Innovative speaker.

Wamiarikune Tariana

- (26) diha tsiãri haniri dalipa du-dia-pidana
 he man father close.to/at 3SG.NF-stay-REM.P.REP
 ‘She stayed at the man’s father’s place’

An alternative is to use personal prefixes on the postposition, as in *haniri di-dalipa* (father 3SG.NF-close.to/at) ‘at father’s place’. One Innovative speaker has reanalyzed the form *dalipa* as *d-alipa* (3SG.NF-near) and consistently uses a new nonce form *alipa*, for example, *haniri alipa* (father close.to/at;nonce) ‘at the father’s place’. This is an instance of an individual innovation, typical of Tariana as an obsolescent language (see the discussion in Aikhenvald 2002:253).

Just one Traditional speaker, the late Ricardo Brito, consistently used the indefinite prefix with *dalipa* ‘close to, at’ in a noun phrase, as shown in (27), as in Kumandene Tariana (20a).

The Kumandene dialect of Tariana shows a much more productive use of the indefinite prefix on verbs. In (29), one of the oldest speakers of Kumandene Tariana laments how little people in the village know of their past. The focused subject ‘no-one’ is preposed to the verb, which takes the indefinite prefix.

Kumandene Tariana

(29) Hi kika-mha ne kwa-mhade i-yekha
 here thus-PRES.NONVIS NEG how/who-FUT INDEF-know
 matsia nu-yekha nhua-ni tuki-ya
 well 1SG-know I-EMPH little-EMPH

‘Nobody knows (the history) well here, I know just a little bit’

All the speakers of Kumandene Tariana are fully fluent in the Hohôdene variety of Baniwa of Içana, the dominant language of the village. The maintenance of the indefinite prefix in Kumandene Tariana on verbs could be an instance of Baniwa of Içana influence on the language, enhancing the previously existing feature.

In its contexts (b), subject fronting and the subsequent use of the indefinite prefix are a means of focusing the subject. The gradual demise of the indefinite prefix on Tariana verbs in the contexts (b) can be partly accounted for by the existence of the focused subject (A/S) case in the language, which does a similar job. The loss of the prefix in Wamiarikune Tariana may well be due to the impact of contact with Tucanoan languages that have no equivalent to the indefinite prefix. Its survival in Kumandene Tariana is enhanced by ongoing contact with Baniwa of Içana, where the indefinite prefix is used in a full range of contexts.

3.3. Piapoco and Kawiari. Piapoco is spoken by 5,000–6,000 people in the region of the Upper Vichada, middle Guaviare, Upper Orinoco, and Atabapo in Colombia and adjacent areas of Venezuela (sources include Klumpp 1990, 1995; Reinoso Galindo 2002; Reinoso Galindo, Curvelo, and Gonzalez 1994). The system of pronominal prefixes in the language is given in table 6.¹⁶

Kawiari (or Cabiari) is a poorly documented and highly endangered language, spoken by about twenty old people on the Apaporis River and its tributaries (Cananari and Pirá-paraná), within the Vaupés River Basin linguistic area (see Reinoso Galindo 2012 and the list of sources there; some notes on the language are also found in Ramirez 2001c:387). Cross-referencing prefixes marking possessor and A/S_a in Kawiari are featured in table 7 (Reinoso Galindo 2012:36, 50). The language has no pronominal suffixes or enclitics.

¹⁶ Piapoco has only one object suffix, *-ni* ‘third person non-feminine’ (Klumpp 1990:14–15; Reinoso Galindo 2002:155–56). This feature is shared with Achagua (see comments to table 8).

TABLE 6
PERSONAL CROSS-REFERENCING PREFIXES
IN PIAPOCO

PERSON/GENDER	PREFIXES	
	SG	PL
1	<i>nu-</i>	<i>wa-</i>
2	<i>pi-</i>	<i>pi-...-cué</i>
3MASC	<i>i-</i>	
3FEM	<i>u-</i>	<i>na-</i>

Sources: Klumpp 1990:12, 94; Reinoso Galindo 2002:63, 99

According to Reinoso Galindo (2012:36), the prefixes *pa-* and *a-* are said to refer to ‘impersonal forms’ covering plural and singular, for example, *pa-nàpi* (PL.IMP-arm) ‘arms of all’ and *a-nàpi* (SG.IMP-arm) ‘arm of someone’. The prefix *pa-* is very likely to be a reflex of the proto-Arawak impersonal **pa-* (Aikhenvald 2018:21). We cannot exclude that the prefix *a-* could be related to the indefinite prefix of the same form in other languages (see note 3). Piapoco has no reflexes of the impersonal prefix *pa-*.¹⁷

In both Piapoco and Kawiyari, the putative cognates of the indefinite prefix *i-* (described for Baniwa of Içana-Kurripako and Tariana in 3.1–2) coincide in their form with the third person non-feminine prefix (see Reinoso Galindo 2002:47–48 on Piapoco and Reinoso Galindo 2012:13 on Kawiyari). The identification of reflexes of the putative indefinite prefix *i-* (not included in tables 5 and 6) can be done on syntactic grounds. In both languages the prefix *i-* occurs in contexts (a) and (b), similar to what can be found in the related languages Baniwa of Içana-Kurripako and Tariana. In all of these contexts, *i-* cannot be replaced with personal prefixes in tables 5 and 6.

3.3.1. The indefinite prefix in contexts (a). In Piapoco, the prefix *i-* marks an unspecified possessor on obligatorily possessed nouns in contexts

¹⁷ Ramirez (2001c:387) gives the form *?éni-* for second person plural and \emptyset for third masculine or non-feminine singular. He interprets all instances of prefix *i-* as equivalent to the indefinite prefix in Baniwa of Içana (calling it “connective”). The differences between his data and the data in Reinoso Galindo’s (2012) work are a matter for further study. Ramirez’s six-page sketch was based on a brief stay in a Kawiyari village and does not contain a detailed analysis, lengthy examples, or texts. In contrast Reinoso Galindo (2012) spent a lengthy amount of time working with several speakers in the regional town of Mitú. According to Reinoso Galindo (2012:7), the number of speakers is 170; Katherine Bolaños (p.c.), who visited the actual communities in 2016, revised the number down to about 20. The missing fonts in the 2012 grammar were adjusted based on the manuscript version of the text, kindly provided by Bolaños (Reinoso Galindo n.d.).

TABLE 7
CROSS-REFERENCING PREFIXES IN KAWIYARI

PERSON/GENDER	PREFIXES	
	SG	PL
1	<i>nu-</i>	<i>wa-</i>
2	<i>pi-</i>	?
3MASC	<i>i-</i>	<i>na-</i>
3F	<i>u-</i>	
IMPERSONAL (NOUNS ONLY)	<i>a-</i>	<i>pa-</i>

Sources: Reinoso Galindo 2012:35, 36, 50

(a), where it may co-occur with the unspecified possessor marking *-si/-Øi*. Examples include *i-ápi-mi* (3SG-bone-PAST) ‘his dead bone’ (after death), *i-ápi-si-mi* (3SG-bone-NONSPEC-PAST) ‘dead bones’ (for example, lying scattered around on the ground (Klumpp 1990:83)); *y-ana* ‘his arm’, *y-ana-Øi* ‘arm (in general)’, *nu-kutsúi* ‘my knee’, *i-kutsúi-Ti* ‘knee’ (Reinoso Galindo 2002). The same suffix and the prefix occur in nominalizations marking the unspecified A/S_a argument, for example, *i-baRá-kái-Øi* (3SG.MASC-fish-FREQ-UNSP/NOM) ‘fishing’ (Reinoso Galindo 2002:97–98).

The prefix *i-* in Kawiyari appears in deverbal nominalizations with unspecified A/S_a accompanied by the nominalizer *-ti* (a reflex of the proto-Arawak **tʃi*), for example, *i-àrapa-ka-ti* (3MASC.SG/INDEF-run-?-UNSP/NOM) ‘race’ (Reinoso Galindo 2012:40). Based on the available sources, it appears that the indefinite prefix does not occur on nonpossessed forms of inalienably possessed nouns.

3.3.2. The indefinite prefix in contexts (b). In Piapoco the prefix *i-* is obligatory on possessed nouns with preposed possessor, for instance, *àicu i-ùwi-ná* (tree 3SG.NF/INDEF-ear-POSS) ‘tree mold (lit. tree’s ears)’ (Klumpp 1990:81; Galindo Reinoso 2002:96). In contrast, in Kawiyari personal prefixes on possessed nouns with preposed possessor are omitted (and the indefinite prefix does not occur), for instance, Kawiyari *ná:pa tuhú* (paca brain) ‘the brain of a paca’, *nê:ri kâwa* (deer leg) ‘the leg of a deer’ (Reinoso Galindo 2012:36).¹⁸

In both languages postpositions take a full set of personal prefixes if they have a pronominal object in agreement with the common Arawak pattern,

¹⁸ In his brief sketch of the language, Ramirez (2001c:388) states that the prefix *i-* appears on vowel-initial possessed nouns with preposed possessor, for example, *nú-apúhá* ‘my road’, *Pablo í-apúhá* ‘Pablo’s road’. His results are different from those obtained by Reinoso Galindo. At present the situation remains inconclusive.

for instance, Piapoco *u-ápicha* (3SG.FEM-with) ‘with her’, *i-ápicha* (3MASC.SG-with) ‘with him’, *u-ícha* (3FEM.SG-from) ‘from her’, and *i-ícha* (3MASC.SG-from) ‘from him’ (Klumpff 1990:42–43). In Piapoco, if the postposition has a nominal object, the person marker is always *i-*, no matter what the gender (or number) of the object is, as shown in (30) and (31) (Klumpff 1990:43, 135).

Piapoco

- (30) nu-à-ca-wa Cecilia i-ícha
 1SG-go-POS-INTRANS Cecilia INDEF/3MASC.SG-from
 ‘I went away from Cecilia’

There are no clear examples of *i-* on postpositions with the nominal argument in Kawayari.

In both languages the prefix *i-* appears on verbs if the subject is focused and preposed to the verb. This is shown in (31), from Reinoso Galindo (2002: 266, 267).

Piapoco

- (31) nu-á i-ta:ni-iri hurebe
 1SG-PRON INDEF/3SG.MASC-speak-SG.MASC Hulebe
 y-ápitsa
 INDEF/3SG.MASC-with
 ‘It is me who spoke with Hulebe’

In none of these contexts in Piapoco can *i-* be replaced with another pronominal cross-referencing prefix. The uses of the prefix *i-* in contexts (b) in Piapoco are similar to what is found in Old Achagua, where the prefix *i-* was productive (Meléndez Lozano 2008:24; Reinoso Galindo 2002:267) (see 3.4.1). Compare (32) from Piapoco and (33) from Old Achagua.

Piapoco

- (32) pi-á i-wawa-ítsúa Maria
 2SG-PRON INDEF/3SG.MASC-wish-SG.FEM Maria
 ‘Maria is the one you want (lit. of your wishes)’

Old Achagua

- (33) Nuya icaberriji
 nu-ya i-kaba-irri-ji
 1SG-EMPH 3person-see-SG.MASC-2SGO
 ‘I who see you (have respect for you)’

In Kawayari the prefix *i-* occurs on the verb if its subject is fronted and topicalized, like in (14) from Baniwa of Içana-Kurripako in 3.1.2 and (30)–(32) in Piapoco. This is similar to contexts (b). An example is in (34).

Kawiyari

(34) *qe qe-mi kedzuá i-dzà-dze*
 we we-REM.P first 3SG.MASC/INDEF-live-PL

‘We were the ones who lived/stayed first’ (Reinoso Galindo 2012: 35, 39)

The form *i-dzà* on its own would also mean ‘he lives’ (cf. *i-kawâ* ‘he fishes’). The prefix *i-* is obligatory here and cannot be replaced with any other personal prefix. The fact that the prefix *i-* is used in (34) in lieu of the first person prefix in the contexts similar to contexts (b) in related languages suggests that we are dealing with a reflex of the indefinite prefix *-i-*.

In all likelihood both Piapoco and Kawiyari have merged reflexes of the third person singular masculine prefix and the indefinite prefix into the form *i-*. The functions of the prefix *i-*—covering subsets of contexts (a) and (b)—allow us to surmise the existence of an indefinite prefix homophonous with the third person singular masculine or non-feminine (see also Meléndez Lozano 2008). Synchronically these instances of *i-* ‘third person non-feminine singular’ for nonspecific possessor or nonspecific argument of a nominalization can be alternatively interpreted as an argument in favour of non-feminine singular forms as a functionally unmarked choice in both languages. I return to this in 4.1.

3.4. Achagua: Historically attested loss of the indefinite prefix. Decrease in productivity and eventual loss of the indefinite person prefix has been documented throughout the history of Achagua, the language of a once powerful group, currently spoken by about 200 people in the northeast of the Vichada department in Colombia and adjacent areas of Venezuela. The language belongs to the Circum-Uapuí subgroup with Yucuna and the extinct Guarú and displays affinity with the languages of the Uapuí subgroup, especially Piapoco (see 2.3 and Aikhenvald 2019:127, 2021). The first relatively comprehensive documentation of the language goes back to Neira and Ribero (1828 [1971]), making Achagua one of the earliest attested Arawak languages (see also Loukotka 1968:129–30; Pérez de Vega 1963). The system of pronominal prefixes in Achagua is given in table 8.

Modern Achagua has one pronominal suffix *-ni* ‘third person’ (Wilson 1992:24–25; Meléndez Lozano 1998:113), a reflex of proto-Arawak **-ni* ‘S/O’ (see table 1) shared with a number of Arawak languages, including Piapoco and Baniwa of Içana-Kurripako.¹⁹ An additional set of suffixes on the verb is used if the subject (A/S) is focused and clefted (Meléndez Lozano 1998:42; see also Aikhenvald 1995:191, based on Wilson 1992). Achagua has no reflexes of the impersonal prefix *pa-*.

¹⁹ A fuller set of cross-referencing suffixes was attested in the earlier source Neira and Ribero (1828 [1971]).

TABLE 8
CROSS-REFERENCING PREFIXES IN ACHAGUA

PERSON/GENDER	PREFIXES	
	SG	PL
1	<i>nu-</i>	<i>wa-</i>
2	<i>hi-</i>	<i>i-</i>
3NF	<i>li-</i>	
3F	<i>ru-</i>	<i>na-</i>

Sources: Meléndez Lozano 1998:46, 2000; Wilson 1992:23–24

The indefinite prefix in Achagua has undergone substantial changes throughout the documented history of the language. This can be seen through comparison between the early source on the language (Neira and Ribero 1828 [1971]) and later documentation (Meléndez Lozano 1989, 1998, 2000, 2008, 2011; Wilson 1992). I refer to the language documented in 1762 as Old Achagua and the language documented in later sources as Modern Achagua.

3.4.1. The indefinite prefix in contexts (a). Remnants of the indefinite prefix in contexts (a) in Modern Achagua mark an unspecified possessor on obligatorily possessed nouns. Most of them also take the unspecified possessor-marking suffix *-fi* (reflex of proto-Arawak **-tʃi* and cognate to Baniwa of Içana *-tti* and Tariana *-si*: see Meléndez Lozano 1998, 2000), for example, *júbawia-fi* ‘fingernail’, *nú-bawia* ‘my fingernail’; *íbanafi* ‘house, hearth’, *nu-íbana* ‘my house’. It is absent from other forms, for example, *báina-fi* ‘hair, feather, leaf’ and *nu-báina* ‘my hair’ (Meléndez Lozano 2012:475; see also Meléndez Lozano 1998:54). Note, however, that the overwhelming majority of nonpossessed forms of obligatorily possessed nouns in Neira and Ribero’s account of Old Achagua do not contain the prefix, for example, *ubabia-sí* (fingernail-UNSP) ‘fingernail’ (1828 [1971]:70), *baní-sí* ‘house’ (19), *cage-sí* ‘hand’ (46), *beta-sí* ‘head’ (17).²⁰ This may indicate that the replacement of the indefinite prefix with zero in this context started at a stage earlier than the first documentation in 1762.

The indefinite prefix marks an unspecified A/S_a on deverbal nominalizations that contain a reflex of proto-Arawak *-tʃi* in a number of deverbal nominalizations in Old Achagua (Neira and Ribero 1828 [1971]), for example, *y-nenídaca-si* (INDEF-believe-UNSP/NOM) ‘belief, trust, hope’ (as in *nu-nenida Dios nako* (1-believe God in) ‘I believe in God’) (22, 34), *y-abacáida-ca-sí* ‘putting together; meeting’ (cf. *nu-abacáidau* ‘I put together’) (44), *y-barinaídaca-si*

²⁰ Page numbers for the 1762 source indicate the pages in the original source as reproduced in the 1971 edition quoted in the references. Glossing for (35)–(38) was supplied by the author.

‘death’ (48), *nu-barinau* ‘I die’ (49). The prefix is absent from some nominalizations in Old Achagua, for example, *barinacare-si* ‘death’ (cf. Modern Achagua *balina-ka-si* (be.sick-NOM-EMPH-UNSP/NOM) ‘sickness’). The prefix is no longer used on nominalizations in the sources on Modern Achagua (as also shown in Meléndez Lozano 1998:62).

The indefinite prefix in Old Achagua is used to mark an unspecified object of postpositions. In Modern Achagua the prefix is no longer used in this context. Postpositions in Old Achagua and in Modern Achagua are contrasted in (35) (Meléndez Lozano 2008:17). The indefinite prefix in Old Achagua is in boldface.

(35) Old Achagua	Modern Achagua
<i>y-agiba</i> ‘together with someone’	<i>jáhba:</i> ‘sociative; with’
<i>y-agicha</i> ‘underneath (something)’	<i>jáhtfa</i> ‘underneath’
<i>irrico</i> ‘inside’	<i>riku</i> ‘inside’
<i>ibeche</i> ‘before’	<i>bé:tfa</i> ‘before’

In Modern Achagua postpositions with an unspecified object take no prefix, mirroring the technique of prefix omission or zero-prefix (see (25) and (26) from Tariana). The presence of the initial *j-* in vowel-initial postpositions in Modern Achagua may be indicative of a reflex of the original indefinite prefix; this issue requires further investigation.

The indefinite prefix in contexts (b) appears to have been regularly used in Old Achagua on postpositions with preposed objects and in possessive constructions (Meléndez Lozano 2008:17–18). This is shown in (36). The prefix is absent in the modern language.

(36) Old Achagua	Modern Achagua
Pedro irru	Pedro ru
Pedro INDEF+to	Pedro to
‘to Pedro’ ²¹	

Postpositions with a pronominal object take personal prefixes, a typical feature of an Arawak language, for example, Old Achagua *Nu-agicha*, Modern Achagua *nú-ahtfa* ‘with me’.

In Old Achagua the indefinite prefix used to occur on the obligatorily possessed noun within a possessive noun phrase with the preposed nominal possessor. An example is in (37) (similar to (7), from Baniwa of Içana).

²¹ A variant *rirru Pedro* (3SG.NF+to Pedro) ‘to Pedro’ was documented in Old Achagua (Meléndez Lozano 2008:17). Here the adposition precedes its object and takes the personal prefix (similarly to what is shown in (13) for Baniwa of Içana-Kurripako). Such instances appear to no longer be attested in the modern language.

functions in the language. The combination of indefinite prefix and the suffix with an inalienably possessed kinship term is illustrated in (39).

- Palikur
 (39) *i-kamkayh-ti*
 INDEF-daughter-UNSP
 ‘a daughter’

nu-kamkayh
 1SG-daughter
 ‘my wdaughter’

In (40) the prefix and suffix are used with a body part (the same data come from Launey 2003:78; Valadares 2006; Green et al. 2016).

- Palikur
 (40) *i-yakni-t(i)*
 INDEF-heart-UNSP
 ‘heart’

punahmna gi-yakni
 alligator 3SG.MASC-heart
 ‘alligator’s heart’

The combination of prefix *i-* and suffix *-ti* was attested in the closely related Marawan, an extinct language formerly spoken in the basin of the Oiapoque River (Rivet and Reinburg 1921:106), for instance, *i-kurgu-ti* (INDEF-foot-UNSP) ‘foot’; cf. *pi-kuréu* (2SG-foot) ‘your foot’ and Palikur *i-kurgu-ti* (Loukotka 1963:18), *i-kuk-ti* (INDEF-foot-UNSP) (Green et al. 2016:377) ‘foot’. Since the materials on Marawan are limited to short word lists, Marawan was not included in table 2.

Baure is the only Arawak language spoken south of the Amazon River to have an indefinite prefix. It is spoken by about 50 people in the Department of Beni in Llanos in northeast Bolivia. The language belongs to the Bolivian Arawak subgroup (together with the Mojeño and Paunaka languages). The unspecified possessor prefix is limited to one subset of contexts (a), as in Palikur. The form of the unspecified possessor prefix that replaces possessive prefixes is *e-* (Danielsen 2007:119–21), as in (41). Unlike Palikur, the prefix is restricted to inalienably possessed body part terms. The unspecified possessor prefix *e-* is cognate to the indefinite prefix *i-* in North Arawak languages (see Payne 1991:465 for *e* as a reflex of proto-Arawak **i-* in Baure; and Aikhenvald 1999:88).

- Baure
 (41) *ni-ser*
 1SG-tooth
 ‘my tooth’

e-ser'
UNSP-tooth
'tooth (of someone)'

The language has no reflexes of the proto-Arawak unspecified possessor suffix *-*fi* or **-hi*. A few obligatorily possessed nouns take the unspecified possession-marking suffix *-ko* and no prefix if their possessor is not specified, for example, *ni-toer* 'my field', *toero-ko* 'field in general' (Danielsen 2007:121; see also Adam and Leclerc 1880:4).

3.6. Island Carib. Island Carib was formerly spoken in the area of the island of Dominica (see D. Taylor 1977). The language has no reflexes of the proto-Arawak prefix **pa-*. The indefinite appears to have been used only in restricted circumstances. Prefix *i-* does not occur in nonpossessed forms of inalienably possessed nouns, such as *ugúdi* 'foot/feet' and *tígudi* 'her foot/feet', *égei* 'shoulder', *nége* 'my shoulder' (D. Taylor 1956:31). No traces of either prefix have been documented for Garifuna [cab], the direct descendant of Island Carib, spoken by more than 150,000 people in Belize, Honduras, and Nicaragua (see Haurholm-Larsen 2015, 2016:49–50; Suazo 2002).

The indefinite prefix *i-* appears to have been used in contexts reminiscent of (b), with a nominal possessor focused and preposed to the possessed noun (see D. Taylor 1956:4–5, based on data collected in 1947–48). This is illustrated in (42), the only example given in the source (glossing is mine).

Island Carib
(42) Ká i-dóbu-ri
 who/what INDEF-stone-POSS
 'whose stone?'

In contrast, in (43) 'stone' has a pronominal possessor and takes the corresponding prefix.

Island Carib
(43) li-dóbu-ri
 3SG.NF-stone-POSS
 'his stone'

In (44) 'what' is a modifier to 'stone', and no prefix is used.

Island Carib
(44) ká dóbu
 what stone
 'what stone?'

D. Taylor (1956:5) notes that younger speakers tended to replace the prefix with *ka-* 'relativizer, attributive marker' in a similar function, for example,

ká-uori (ATTR-matchet) ‘whose matchet?’, following the analogy of *ná-uori* (1SG-matchet) ‘my matchet’ (similar examples are found in Suazo 2002:63 forms *egei*: ‘shoulder’, *ka ege?* ‘whose shoulder?’, based on the data from Garifuna).²²

4. The indefinite prefix: Meanings, functions, and development paths. I now turn to the discussion of the origins and putative development of the prefix *i-* in contexts (a) and (b). In 4.1 I look at the putative development paths of the prefix *i-* and associated problems. Omission of prefixes as an alternative for contexts (a) and (b) across the family is explored in 4.2. Then in 4.3 I turn to a typological perspective on the systems of person values in languages with the indefinite marker. The last subsection, 4.4, offers a summary.

4.1. The prefix *i-*: Innovation or archaism? The indefinite prefix *i-* is attested in eight extant Arawak languages. Traces of the marker in Marawan (3.5), an extinct language, suggest that in the past the prefix may have been found in a broader range of languages. The fact that the prefix has been found in languages from five subgroups, together with its geographical spread, points toward a considerable time depth.

In the majority of languages, the prefix marks an unspecified possessor on nouns (a subset of contexts (a)). The prefix may or may not be accompanied by an unspecified possessor suffix on nouns—typically a reflex of proto-Arawak *-tʃi* ‘unspecified possessor; nominalizer’ (see the penultimate column of table 2 and Aikhenvald 2021). The fact that the prefix *i-* marks exclusively the unspecified possessor on nouns in two languages—Palikur in northern Brazil and French Guiana and Baure in Bolivia—points toward the antiquity of this context.

The occurrence of the prefix *i-* in the other subset of contexts (a)—to mark an unspecified A/S_a argument of nominalizations, especially one occurring with a reflex of proto-Arawak *-tʃi* ‘unspecified possessor’—is more limited. It is a feature of four languages of the Uapuí subgroup (Baniwa of Içana-Kurripako, Tariana, Piapoco, and Kawiyari) and one language of the Circum-Uapuí subgroup, Old Achagua. I hypothesize that the erstwhile marker of unspecified possession may have been extended to marking unspecified A/S_a on nominalizations. This extension can be interpreted as a shared innovation in the languages involved. We can recall from table 1 that A/S_a arguments and possessors tend to be expressed with prefixes across the family. This polyfunctionality underlies the surmised analogical development.

²² D. Taylor (1956:4) also notes the existence of what he refers to as an “absolute-marker” prefix *h-* used with inalienably possessed nouns “often (but not always) in conjunction with an absolute-marker suffix” *-hV* marking a unspecified possessor. This remains a matter for further study.

Contexts (b) present a more complex picture. The prefix *i-* occurs on nouns in possessive noun phrases with possessor preposed to the possessed. The prefix also appears on postpositions in three languages: Baniwa of Içana-Kurripako, Tariana, and Old Achagua (note that it is never found on postpositions used without a noun phrase object). I also find the remnants of this use in the now extinct Island Carib (see (44)). This suggests that such uses of the prefix may not have been an independent innovation shared only by the Uapuí and Circum-Uapuí languages. Here we may be dealing with an instance of parallelism in drift (Sapir 1921:171–72), whereby related languages, even those “long disconnected, . . . will pass through the same or strikingly similar phases.”

The use of the prefix *i-* on verbs, with a focused subject (A/S_a) preposed to it, is attested in only four languages of the Uapuí group (Baniwa of Içana-Kurripako, Tariana, Kawiyari, and Piapoco) and in Old Achagua from the Circum-Uapuí group. In all likelihood this feature is a Uapuí-Circum-Uapuí innovation. In these instances the verb may or may not be fully inflected for other categories (including gender, number, tense, and others, depending on the language). The indefinite prefix can be considered a placeholder person marker, similar to its functions in possessive noun phrases and also on postpositions with preposed objects.

Figure 1 summarizes the putative historical development of the indefinite person prefix **i-*. We can recall that the indefinite person marker *i-* has the same segmental form as the non-feminine (or masculine) A/S_a /possessor prefix in a number of Arawak languages. This raises an additional issue.²³ The prefix *i-* is in a paradigmatic relationship with other personal prefixes, including third person markers in the languages for which it has been described (table 2). Synchronically it can be considered a distinct morpheme.

Of the languages discussed here, the prefix *i-* in Piapoco and Kawiyari differs from the homophonous third person non-feminine prefix in terms of its distribution (3.3). However, in view of the functionally unmarked character of third person non-feminine singular form, we cannot exclude an alternative solution: that the prefix **i-*, as a marker of indefinite person, has its roots in the generalized use of a third person non-feminine singular form. This is reminiscent of what we saw in Innovative Wamiarikune Tariana—see (25) and discussion after (26) in 3.2.2. Here the functionally unmarked third person non-feminine singular prefix *di-* replaces *i-* in the contexts attested for the traditional language (and the closely related Baniwa of Içana-Kurripako). The split between two contexts of **i-* may have occurred at the level of individual subgroups. At present the question of whether **i-* as an exponent of indefinite

²³ The third person non-feminine singular prefix *i-* is also found, inter alia, in the Warekena of Xié, Pareci (or Haliti), Waujá, Piro, and Kampa languages (see Mihás 2017:781, 791). Individual historical developments are a matter for an independent study.

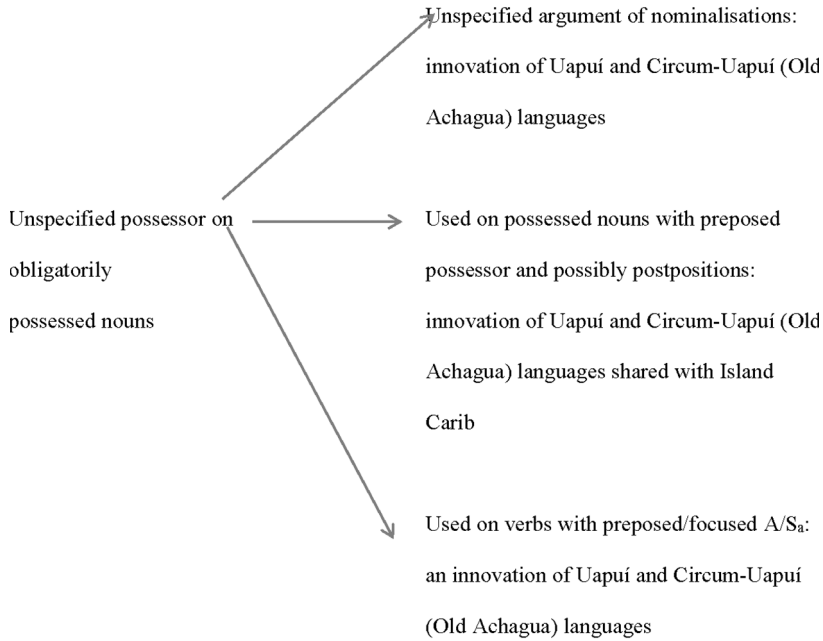


FIG. 1.— The putative historical development of the indefinite prefix **i-* in Arawak languages

person can indeed be reconstructed for proto-Arawak or whether it represents a subgroup-level innovation due to a development of a third person non-feminine singular marker as a default choice remains open.

The indefinite prefix *i-* has been historically unstable in a number of instances. It has been all but lost in Modern Achagua, as transpires from the comparison of the language documented in 1762 (Old Achagua) with modern sources (3.4). The loss of prefix among younger speakers of Island Carib was documented in Douglas Taylor's work (undertaken in the 1940s: D. Taylor 1956). Its descendant, Garifuna, lost the prefix altogether.

The existence of inalienably possessed nouns with unspecified possessor that do not take the indefinite person prefix in Baniwa of Içana (3.1.1) may reflect a tendency toward early loss of the prefix. Alternatively this may reflect an archaic feature of a different kind. In a number of Arawak languages, unpossessed forms of nouns are marked by a reflex of the proto-Arawak suffix *-hi* (rather than *-t/i*). These include three closely related languages of the Xié-Guainia subgroup (Warekena of Xié, Yavitero, and Baniva of Guainia), Wapishana (from the Rio Branco subgroup), Lokono, Island Carib, and Garifuna (Aikhenvald 2021: table 3). None of these languages uses the prefix *i-* on unpossessed forms of nouns (only Island Carib has remnants of the prefix *i-* (3.6)

but does not employ it on unpossessed nouns; see table 2). Baniwa of Içana is unusual in that it has reflexes of both unspecified possessor suffix forms, *-tʃi* and *-hi*. Following a common pattern, nouns that take *-hi* do not occur with the indefinite prefix, in all likelihood reflecting an archaic pattern.

The prefix does not mark the unspecified possessor on nouns in Tariana, across all its known varieties. Its fate as a marker of the unspecified A/S_a on nominalizations (subset of contexts (a)), on nouns with a preposed possessor and on postpositions, and on verbs with preposed A/S_a differs in the extant dialects. The prefix is undergoing attrition in the Wamiarikune variety exposed to the influence of the unrelated Tucano (an East Tucanoan language). It continues being productively used in the Kumandene variety, spoken in contact with the Hohôdene dialect of Baniwa of Içana (where the prefix *i-* is productively used in all the contexts; compare tables 3 and 5). The survival of the prefix *i-* in Kumandene Tariana can be treated as an instance of enhancement of a shared feature, due to close contact between related languages.

4.2. Omitting prefixes. A common alternative to an indefinite prefix in many Arawak languages is having no prefix at all. An inalienably possessed noun with unspecified possessor in Baré will take the suffix *-hVi*, but no prefix, for instance, *numa-hai* (mouth-UNSP) ‘mouth in general’ versus *nu-numa* (1SG-mouth) ‘my mouth’. A possessed noun within a possessive construction with a nominal possessor will not take any prefixes, for instance, *tʃinu numa* (dog mouth) ‘dog’s mouth’. The antiquity of this technique is corroborated by the behavior of the common Arawak form for ‘house’, which does not take the indefinite prefix even in those languages where it is productive (see 3.1.1).

Prefix omission can be considered the functional equivalent of the indefinite prefix in possessive constructions in two languages of the Uapuí subgroup, Guarequena (González-Ñáñez 1997:61, 69–73, 78, and lexical materials in González-Ñáñez 2005), Resígaro (Allin 1975:109–12, 171), and in Kawiari (3.3). Personal prefixes are omitted in all contexts in Modern Achagua where the indefinite prefix did occur in the previous stages (3.4). In Wamiarikune Tariana omission of prefixes on postpositions is determined phonologically (see 3.2.1).

Further examples of the omission of personal prefixes in contexts (b) have been attested in Warekena of Xié (Aikhenvald 1998:293, 380–83), Apurinã, Yawalapiti, and Lokono (Aikhenvald 1995:187–89; see also Facundes 2000:238, n.d.). I hypothesize that prefix omission in contexts (a) and (b) may have been an old feature preserved throughout the family, as an alternative to a default or an indefinite person-marking prefix in neutralized contexts. This technique is attested in a number of other languages across the world (see, for instance, Anderson 1974; and Hewitt 1979:268 on the suppression of personal agreement markers in Abkhaz, a Northwest Caucasian language).

4.3. How many persons? In those languages where the indefinite prefix *i-* marks unspecified possessor and unspecified A/S_a argument of nominalizations (contexts (a)) and occurs as a placeholder for personal prefixes on nouns and postpositions and also on verbs with a focused subject (A/S_a) (contexts (b)), the unspecified person value is part of the person paradigm, notwithstanding the fact that it bears no person value. A number of typological parallels are attested in languages from other families.

A special person prefix for a ‘generic’ form of obligatorily possessed nouns containing an unspecified possessor is a feature of numerous Amazonian languages. These include Tupí-Guaraní languages (see Jensen 1999:153 for a reconstruction), a number of Carib languages (see, for instance, Carlin 2004:83; Payne and Payne 2013:75 on Panare; and Derbyshire 1985:199–201, 1999), and Tacanan languages (see, for instance, Guillaume 2008:409–16 on Cavineña and Emkow 2019:162–63 on Araona). A similar phenomenon is attested in Zamucoan languages of the Chaco region (Ciucci 2016:438–43 in general, 393–402 on Chamacoco, and 351–60 on Ayoreo; Ciucci and Bertinetto 2017:322–24; see also Aikhenvald 2021:39–42). The indefinite possessor prefix across Algonquian languages marks a nonpossessed form of obligatory possessed nouns (see Brightman 1985 on Woods Cree; Wolfart 1973:15–16 for Plains Cree; A. Taylor 1969:195 and Frantz and Creighton 1982 for Blackfoot; Costa 2003:224, 232–37 on Miami-Illinois; Hamp 1976:204–5; Goddard 1975:252; and Monica Macaulay p.c.). In some languages, such as Meskwaki (or Fox), the indefinite possessor prefix is accompanied by an indefinite possessor suffix, creating an almost perfect analogy to Baniwa of Içana (see example (3) above) (Amy Dahlstrom p.c.). An unspecified possessor prefix is a common feature of Athabaskan languages (described for Northern Athabaskan by Rice 1989:209 and Rice p.c. for Slave; Moore 2002:381 for Kaska; Holton 2000:156–57 for Tanacross; Hargus 2007:237 and Saxon and Wilhelm 2016 for Witsuwit’en; and Reichard 1951:56, Young and Morgan 1980:28, and Keren Rice and Willem de Reuse p.c. for Southern Athabaskan Navaho). A generic possessive prefix is a feature of numerous Totonacan languages (see Beck 2004, 2012; Levy 2002; McQuown 1990; David Beck, p.c.). Thus having an exponent of indefinite possessor is not a rarity in itself.

Three Arawak languages discussed here add to this a reflex of the impersonal, or generic person, prefix **pa-* (as we saw in (4), from Baniwa of Içana). This is what we saw for Baniwa of Içana-Kurripako (see (4) and 3.1.1), Tariana (3.2.1), and Kawiyari (3.3.1). These four languages have a cross-linguistically uncommon system of five values in their pronominal systems—including an indefinite and an impersonal marker. Baré, from the Baré-Guinau subgroup of Arawak, also has a five-person system, including the impersonal prefix *ba-* (used on nouns and on verbs) and an indefinite person subject prefix *a-*, which occurs on the verb if its subject (A/S_a) is preposed and focused (Aikhenvald 1995).

The closest typological parallel in having a five-person system within an unspecified person as part of the paradigm comes from Kwaza, an isolate from Rondônia (Brazil: van der Voort 2004:259–73). Here the suffix *-wa* marks an indefinite or unspecified subject. Another suffix, *-na*, has the impersonal meaning ‘one’, extended to first person plural (a common development across the languages of the world, also found in Tariana and Baré within the Arawak family; see Aikhenvald 2018:16, 22–23). In contrast to Arawak languages, both indefinite and impersonal markers in Kwaza are used exclusively on verbs.

Another possible analogy comes from Koyukon, an Athabaskan language (Thompson 1996:666–67), where forms of body parts with unspecified possessor are marked with the prefix *k'e-*. The prefix *denaa-* (Thompson 1996:656) functions as an indefinite person marker for human referents or as a first person plural prefix. In addition there is a further marker for unspecified, or low topicality, subject, *k'i-*, restricted to verbs (Thompson 1991; a comprehensive discussion is found in Rice 2000:199, 230–33). The system in Koyukon is further complicated by the existence of the ‘areal’ prefix *hu-*, which can mark nonindividuated and nontopical arguments or topical human arguments in different contexts (Thompson 1993).

The systems of four- or five-person markers on nouns and verbs—including an indefinite and an impersonal marker—within the same paradigm are cross-linguistically uncommon. Systems with five values are a rarity. Within the context of Arawak languages, they appear to be unstable—as is shown by the documented loss of the indefinite prefix in Tariana, Achagua, and Island Carib.

4.4. Conclusion. The indefinite person prefix *i-* is a feature of eight Arawak languages from five subgroups, most of them spoken north of the Amazon. The prefix marks an unspecified possessor on inalienably possessed nouns and the unspecified subject argument of nominalizations (contexts (a)). It also appears on nouns and postpositions with a preposed nominal possessor and object, respectively, and on transitive and active intransitive verbs with preposed focalized subject (contexts (b)). The presence of the indefinite person value and the impersonal marker creates a cross-linguistically uncommon five-person system, synchronically documented for Baniwa of Içana-Kurripako, Tariana, and Kawayari and potentially reconstructible for the proto-language.

The geographical spread of prefix *i-* points toward its antiquity in the Arawak family, as a marker of unspecified possessor on nouns in the first place. Its other meanings appear to have evolved as an independent innovation in the languages of the Uapuí and Circum-Uapuí subgroup (fig. 1). Despite the brevity of its form, the contexts of its use are remarkably similar across languages where it is attested. Reconstructing the prefix *i-* to the proto-language is complicated by its segmental form shared with third person non-feminine singular prefix *i-*: the uses of the prefix in all its contexts may have originated in the use of the third person prefix as a default choice.

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