

Comments on Salles
D. Everett August 3, 2023

Salles used Keren Madora, a fluent speaker of Piraha with a long-term relationship to the people, as an informant and translator and never bothered to learn the language herself.

1. The phonology (as most of the paper) is either lifted from my work, or fails to note that in almost every case where her analysis differs from mine (and her bibliography is very limited. She prefers to stick with my 1986 HAL article, which is acceptable in her community, largely ignoring my later work). For example, she says, citing Heinrichs, that glottal stops are predictable word-initially. That is the same as saying that /k/ is predictable word-initially - if you choose to represent all Piraha consonants word-initially, except /k/ the same conclusion follows. The point is, as I discuss in Everett 1979, that glottal is not predictable anywhere else. And if you choose to omit it word-initially, as Heinrichs did (he had no linguistic degree), or as Nimuendaju did everywhere, you are saying it is not a consonant. Otherwise you would need to say why you choose to omit glottal stop word-initially but not other consonants. It is a very poor phonological analysis. As are the rest of her analyses.

2. She compares Mura and Piraha. So do I in my MA thesis. The only ones who took reliable word lists of Mura are Nimuendaju (his Handbook of South American languages article) and Von Martius, 1821). Not clear to me where she got the lists. But she fails to note that the main thing we can say is that proto-Mura *d became /g/ in Piraha and /d/ in Mura. She raises issues that she treats so superficially they are misleading and one wonders why they are raised.

3. I cannot emphasize too strongly how much of what she passes off as her work in this just comes from my dissertations and other publications.

4. Her use of [e] as a phonemic vowel violates her own conclusion that the vowels are i,a,o - and fails to discuss why I say it is an allophone of /i/

5. She cites Sandalo and Abaurre a couple of times. But what she cites them as saying comes from my 1979 MA thesis.

6. The "absence" of the weird [l] sound from her corpus she explains by saying that it has been lost by younger speakers. But she then observes that Keren still hears it. That is because it is still there and as I discuss in my JIPA article of about 1982 they don't use it around foreigners, i.e. people who do not speak the language. The fact that she doesn't hear it is simply a reflection of the fact that she doesn't speak the language and is thus still seen as an outsider.

7. p963 - her reanalysis of Silva's work (who the hell is this person - they have never been to the village) is nothing more than my 1979 analysis.

8. -háí is not future. It is 'relative certainty.' She begins here a long series of errors in which she confuses the free Portuguese translation with the Piraha meaning. This is a common error. For example, if someone gives you a construction and says that this corresponds to a construction in Portuguese, that does not mean that their structures are the same. She confuses this Translation 101/Fieldwork 101 error time and time again. A middle construction in Portuguese might be translated as a passive, etc. in English but that doesn't make it a passive in Portuguese. This is such a common error among amateurs. Sheldon and Heinrichs might have called -háí a future tense in Piraha, but it is not. For example:

Hi soʔóá kah - á -pi- háí ʔahoahíai. Hiagía hi kahápi - ta- hiaba piʔái
He already go - relative certainty another day. Thus he go-repetitive-not now.

"I believe he already went yesterday. Therefore he is not going now."

No future there.

Numbers (68) and (69) - she ignores subtle meaning shifts. These do NOT form a minimal pair. She'd have to understand the language to get these facts.

(71) ff on tense - Her glosses, again, confuse Portuguese free translations with Piraha meanings. She could have avoided this by paying attention to what I wrote. But she is out to subtly criticize me, so of course she pays attention only when it supports or doesn't contradict her line of argumentation.

P971ff - Her account of numerals is self-contradictory. She admits that the numerals are in fact proximate quantities, but she then calls them numbers. They are the former, not the latter. To call them both is inconsistent and contradictory.

p977 I do discuss "remote" - a and "proximate" - i potential tenses, but then I explain why these are not tenses (see HAL), because they show the control (-i; proximate) or lack of control (-a, remote) of the speaker and either one of them can be in the past or future. The point is that -a means farther from the moment of speech and -i means closer (past or future) to the moment of speech or greater or lesser control by the speaker. These are subtle points. She glosses over them entirely, because she doesn't speak the language and therefore cannot converse about them.

Example (87) and earlier. It is true that in 1986 I might not have provided enough context for someone to know what I meant by deduction vs. induction. However, just lumping the two suffixes together and saying that they both mark the same thing, INFERENCE, is stupid. She should either accept my analysis or say why she is not convinced. But don't lump things together because you cannot see a difference unless you have done experiments, discourse analysis, etc.

(120) ff - I discuss correlatives in my dissertation and HAL and even talk in my dissertation about how I discovered them (interesting little story). When she uses this term, she is once again, just using my analysis without attribution.

#(122) - she fails to relate these examples to the clarification that she mentioned earlier. The following material doesn't show embedding, it shows appositional clarification. She should say why she doesn't apply her (my) earlier analysis here if she is going to contradict my own analysis. She also says that the postverbal stuff can indicate "afterthought" as well as clarification. This is totally lifted from my work. Des in fact asked me about this in 1983 at my thesis defense, as a member of my committee.

Ex (123) - she fails entirely to discuss "pro-drop" of both objects and subjects in the examples and why, based on discourse analysis, it is common to omit overt subjects in contiguous sentences when there is no change of subject. This is a discourse phenomenon and has nothing to do with embedding, though I did analyze it this way before I could understand their texts. Now it would be fine for her to disagree. But then she needs to say why. She doesn't do that here, considering - as she usually does - only one analysis without saying why that is preferable to my analysis.

Exx 125 and 126 - in this section she fails entirely to discuss my newer work, which is directly related to her points. Non-finite forms in Piraha are (almost) never found in sentences, because, for one thing, they would usually be only a single consonant. Her "non-finite" forms are never simple forms where she uses them. She ignores all of my 1986 HAL discussion of verb structure. I suspect that this is because, again, she does not speak the language and this is some hard shit, requiring an ability to discuss the examples in detail in the language. And if she or anyone else were completely honest, they would have to acknowledge that the Pirahas (none of them, not even the so-called "gatekeepers") can carry on a conversation in Portuguese.

Below (128) she discuss Sauerland without mentioning what shit his analysis was according to Everett and Gibson.

It is all either right because she cited me, or superficial, poorly argued, or embarrassing.