

# Official Language, Social Weapon

By Alex Bellos

Tucano is a language spoken by about 4,600 people in the Amazon, mostly in the northwest corner of Brazil, called the Dog's Head because of the shape of the border there.

Tucano is one of the five official languages of the municipality of São Gabriel de Cachoeira, alongside Portuguese and three other Indigenous languages: Nheengatu, Baniwa, and Yanomamo. Tucano is an isolate, meaning that it is not related to any other known language. The following problem plays on the unusual way suffixes work in Tucano.

Here are some words in Tucano and their translations in English. (Tones have been omitted to make the problem easier to solve.)

<i>ohôgi</i>	banana tree
<i>yukíti</i>	container for wood
<i>sêraga</i>	pineapple
<i>koméwi</i>	metal pipe
<i>siôwa</i>	sieve
<i>biâga</i>	bell pepper
<i>kométi</i>	pan
<i>kiiga kasero</i>	cassava peel (that has fallen on the floor)
<i>ãrigi</i>	stalk of sugar cane
<i>pekâgi</i>	wood for a fire
<i>mekawa</i>	ant's nest
<i>di'iro</i>	slice of meat
<i>sa'pôro</i>	fragment of foam
<i>kiipúti</i>	ceramic pan
<i>îâga</i>	rock
<i>a'tíwi</i>	this tube
<i>akôro</i>	rain
<i>siîga</i>	bum



## Your Challenge

Here are 11 more words in Tucano, with their translations listed in random order. Match the Tucano words to their correct translations. Note that *-rô* is different from *-ro*.

- |                        |                             |
|------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. <i>akôga</i>        | A. avocado tree             |
| 2. <i>di'i</i>         | B. meat                     |
| 3. <i>kiipûu</i>       | C. cup of water             |
| 4. <i>ôpekôga</i>      | D. foam made by a waterfall |
| 5. <i>pekâ po'kâro</i> | E. cassava leaf             |
| 6. <i>pekâwi</i>       | F. can of milk              |
| 7. <i>po'kâti</i>      | G. a bunch of leaves        |
| 8. <i>pûrîwa</i>       | H. container for flour      |
| 9. <i>sa'pôwa</i>      | I. sawdust                  |
| 10. <i>ûyûgi</i>       | J. wind                     |
| 11. <i>wî'rô</i>       | K. blowpipe                 |