

Official Language, Social Weapon

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1. C 2. B 3. E 4. F 5. I 6. K 7. H 8. G 9. D 10. A 11. J

To begin to understand the Tucano words, we can start by grouping them by suffix. Note that the suffix corresponds to the physical form of the object being described.

The suffix *-gi* is associated with long things:

<i>ohôgi</i>	banana tree
<i>ârigi</i>	stalk of sugar cane
<i>pekâgi</i>	wood for a fire

The suffix *-ti* refers to containers that hold things:

<i>yukíti</i>	container for wood
<i>kométi</i>	pan
<i>kiipúti</i>	ceramic pan

Round or plump things have *-ga* at the end:

<i>sêraga</i>	pineapple
<i>biâga</i>	bell pepper
<i>ĩâga</i>	rock
<i>siîga</i>	bum

Objects that are long and tubular carry the suffix *-wi*:

<i>koméwi</i>	metal pipe
<i>a'tíwi</i>	this tube

The suffix *-wa* is attached to domed or hill-like things:

<i>siôwa</i>	sieve
<i>mekawa</i>	nest of the meká ant

Finally, fragments or pieces of things end in *-ro*:

<i>kiiga kasero</i>	cassava peel (that has fallen on the floor)
<i>di'iro</i>	slice of meat
<i>sa'pôro</i>	fragment of foam
<i>akôro</i>	rain

Among the 11 new words, only one word, 10., ends in *-gi*, and it is likely that that is “avocado tree” because the only other tree we know (a long thing) has the same suffix. One word, 7., ends in *-ti*, and “container for flour,” is our only container. Likewise, only one word, 5., ends in *a-ro*, and it is likely that this is “sawdust,” the only object that represents some kind of fragment. And finally, only one word, 6., ends in *-wi*. This must be “blowpipe,” our only tubular thing.

To make sense of the others, we can begin to look at each word’s root. We know that *di'iro* is a “slice of meat,” so we can be fairly confident that 3., *di'i*, is “meat.” *Kiiga kasero* is “cassava peel,” so *kiiga* is probably “cassava,” and we can note that *-ga* is a suffix associated with fruits and vegetables. Thus, we can guess that 3., *kiipûu*, must be “cassava leaf.”

If *akôro* is “rain,” we might interpret it as “pieces of water,” making *akô-* the root for “water,” and 1., *akôga*, is a round or plump form: a “cup of water.” For the same reason, we know that *sa'pô-* is the root for “foam,” and thus *sa'pôwa* is hill-like foam, or “foam made by a waterfall.”

The remaining *-ga* word must be “can of milk,” the only round object left, and the remaining *a-wa* word, *pûrîwa*, must be “bunch of leaves.” In fact, this word contains the element *pû-*, which also appears in “cassava leaf.” It’s always nice to have a second piece of evidence to support our guesses.

The final word, *wî'rô*, has none of the suffixes, and so it must be “wind.” Notably, “wind” has no suffix because it has no form!