

## On the influence of indigenous languages on Brazilian Portuguese

### *Sobre a influência das línguas indígenas no português brasileiro*

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The contact between the Portuguese and Brazilian Indians began early in the 16th century. Let's recall that Brazil was discovered by the Portuguese in 1500 and that the settlement of Portuguese colonists started in 1530. By that time most of the Brazilian coast was occupied by the Tupinamba Indians, whose culture and language presented only very slight variation in spite of the great extension of their territory. Probably this extension without differentiation was due to a very recent expansionist movement, which was yet in course and could be observed in the beginning of the 16th century by the Portuguese (cf. Metraux 1927).

As a consequence of this situation, the Portuguese got in contact predominantly with local groups of Tupinamba, be it in Pernambuco or Bahia, in Espírito Santo or Rio de Janeiro, or on the coast of São Paulo. In spite of the presence at some spots of the coast of culturally and linguistically different Indians, the Portuguese were led to consider the language of the Tupinamba as the Brazilian language *par excellence* (*lingua brasilica*) and to build on it a binary distinction of the Indian peoples they met: “nations of Brazilian language” and “nations of blo-

cked languages” (*nações de língua travada*). Later on the expression *língua brasilica* was replaced by *língua geral*, “general language”.

The first Portuguese settlements in Brazil took place not through the immigration of constituted families, but almost exclusively on the basis of either bachelors, or married men whose wives were left back in Portugal. The women in the settlements were Indians and the offspring was mestizo, and the family language was of course Tupinamba. In the first phase of the colonization, when the Portuguese had to learn for the first time every peculiarity of the new country and of its native inhabitants, this situation was decisive for the absorption of Tupinamba nomenclature.

In the settlements that developed more rapidly, such as those of Pernambuco and Bahia, the continuous immigration of the Portuguese, now in general with their wives, and the extinction of the Indians led to the progressive predominance of the Portuguese language over the Tupinamba. In some of these settlements the Indian language went out of use already by the second half of the 17th century. In areas more removed from those centers of economical development the dialects of *língua geral* lasted longer, in the south (São Paulo) until the end of the 18th century, in the north (Pará and Amazonas) until the 19th and, in some places, the 20th century. In both cases these dialects became the language of pioneering penetration in the interior of Brazil. In São Paulo *língua geral* was the language of the *bandeiras*, the expeditions that opened to settlement the west of São Paulo, most of Minas Gerais, Goiás, and southern Mato Grosso. In the north it spread to the west with the catholic mission and the conquering expedition. In Amazonia it came to be spoken exclusively by non Tupi-Guaranian Indians and by mestizoes. As a result of the process of being adopted by such non Tupi-Guarani Indians and of coexisting with Portuguese, under conditions not yet enough known, Amazonian *língua geral* presents phonological and grammatical simplification coincident with pronounced assimilation to Portuguese patterns.

No other of the more than 100 Indian languages of Brazil offers a parallel to the long and widespread interaction of Tupinamba with Portuguese. Contacts of Portuguese with other languages were more restricted as to place and as to time. For most cases of contacts that

must have occurred in the past we have no data thus far. One of the few known cases has to do with Kiriri (Kipeá), a language formerly spoken in northern Bahia and on the São Francisco river, but now completely replaced by Portuguese. It should be noted that no Indian language other than Tupinamba and Kiriri was object of description by the Portuguese in the three centuries of their colonial rule.

Cases of more recent contact with marked reflexes at least in place names are those of Kaingang in the southern states from São Paulo to Rio Grande do Sul, which dates from the first half of the 19th century, and Bororo and Paresi in western Mato Grosso, mostly in the 20th century.

In the present state of the genetic classification of Brazilian Indian languages we distinguish about 20 language families. Each language family comprises from two to twenty or more languages supposed to have a common origin. Some families are comprised in greater units, the linguistic stocks. The Tupi stock comprises seven families – Tupi-Guarani, Munduruku, Juruna, Arikem, Tupari, Monde, Ramarama – and a linguistic isolate, the language Purubora. Just now we are working out evidences of genetic relationship of the Carib family with the Tupi stock, as well as evidences for connecting to this stock the Je family.

Tupinamba is a member of the Tupi-Guarani family. Another member of the family plays a role in the contacts with Brazilian Portuguese – Guarani. Old Guarani was abundantly documented by a Spanish missionary in the 17th century in the west of present day State of Paraná. Modern Guarani dialects are spoken today by Indians in the States of São Paulo, Paraná, Santa Catarina, and Rio Grande do Sul as well as in southern Mato Grosso (extending also to Paraguay and Bolivia).

In the study of Portuguese lexical borrowings from the Indian languages we can distinguish words originated in Tupinamba from word coming from the Guarani dialects and those stemming from Amazonian *língua geral*. On the one hand the geographical distribution of the loanwords is relevant – Guarani contributed only to dialects of Portuguese in Southern Brazil, and Amazonian *língua geral* only to Amazonian Portuguese; on the other hand the phonology of loanwords gives many cues for identifying the source. For instance, Tupinamba /w/ and /b/ are

reflected in Brazilian Portuguese as /gw/ and /b/ or /v/, respectively. In Amazonian *língua geral* both Tupinamba phonemes merged into /w/ and this is reflected in regional Portuguese as /w/: *Jaguaribe* /zagwa-ribe/, a placename in Pernambuco, comes from Tupinamba yawaribe ‘at the river of the jaguar’, while *Iauarete* /yaware/, a placename in Amazonas, comes from Amazonian *língua geral* yawarete ‘true jaguar’; Itapeva /itap va/ in São Paulo proceeds from Tupinamba itapeba ‘flat stone’, while *Itapeua* /itap wa/ in Pará stems from Amazonian *língua geral* itapewa, with the same meaning. In comparison with Tupinamba, the Guarani dialects lost final unaccented syllables, and Brazilian Portuguese reflects this difference: *Piratininga* in eastern São Paulo comes from Tupinamba /piratinina/ ‘dried fish’, while *Piratini* in Rio Grande do Sul is due to Guarani piratini with the same meaning.

Sometimes it has been claimed that Tupinamba (Old Tupi) strongly influenced Brazilian Portuguese phonology. In general such claims have been put forward without an appropriate knowledge of the indigenous language, and thus far no good case of phonological interference was satisfactorily demonstrated. One of those claims tries to justify the lost of word final -r in Brazilian Portuguese under the assumption that the so-called Tupi language had no final consonants. The assumption is false in so far as Tupinamba, the most probable source for such a phonological interference, does have final consonants, including final -r: aypotar ‘I will it’, opor ‘he jumped’, oypiter ‘he sucked it’, eresem ‘you went out’, oymoneb ‘he introduced it’, and so on. As a matter of fact, it is Amazonian *língua geral* that does not present final consonants (saputari, upuri, upitera, resema, umuneu for the same meanings as above). But Amazonian *língua geral* could not exert such a general influence on Brazilian Portuguese as the lost of the -r.

The study of possible phonological and grammatical influence of Indian languages on Brazilian Portuguese should be made not only on the basis of a good knowledge of the Indian language or languages involved, but also taking into account the particular dialects of Brazilian Portuguese, where the investigated fact really occurs. Thus far we lack studies conjugating knowledge of both, the Indian languages and Brazilian Portuguese dialects.