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The Status of Akuntsú

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Handout

1. Overview

According to Rodrigues (1999), in Brazil, there are around 200 languages, that is, much linguistic and culture diversity:

Portuguese

Asian, European, and Indigenous languages

There are approximately 180 indigenous languages, which exclude those languages spoken by uncontacted Indian groups, not in contact with Brazilian society. Their languages are not known and have not been studied yet.

The largest languages: Tikúna: 32,000 speakers and Kaingáng: 25,000 speakers. Languages with fewer than 20 speakers – Avá-Canoeiro (16), Kanoê (6), Xipáya (2), Puruborá (2). A total of 76% of the Indigenous Languages are spoken by fewer than 1,000 speakers¹.

The Akuntsú language is among the latter group – only 6 speakers, all monolingual.

2. Linguistic classification

Akuntsú is a member of the Tuparí subfamily of Tupían together with other 5 languages: Makuráp, Tuparí, Mekéns, Wayoró and Kepkiriwat (already extinct).

3. Context

They are survivors of a genocidal massacre that occurred in the early 1990's.

The Akuntsú people were first contacted by the National Foundation of Indians only in 1995.

¹ Rodrigues, A.D. 2005. Sobre as línguas indígenas e sua pesquisa. Revista Ciência & Cultura, 57-2: 35-38.

After that contact, the Akuntsú were free to begin their life again on a small part of the land.

4. Akuntsú: an endangered language

Akuntsú is among the languages considered most highly endangered in Brazil.

They are not able to pass their native language on to another generation.

5. Some aspects of the structural properties of the language

5.1 Laryngealization

/waʔi/ [kwaʔi] ‘stone’

/koʔa/ [koʔa] ‘periquito’

However, creaky voice seems to be also produced under conditions of psychological stress.

5.2 Numbers

/kite/ ‘one’

/t̃iri/ ‘two’

/t̃iri t̃iri o-ipa kom/

two-two I-come will

‘(After) two (days) I will come’

5.3 Possession

Makuráp

(1) o-r-ao-t-amenko

1-R-pet – gen.- dog

‘my dog (my dog pet)’ (Braga 2006)

Akuntsú

(2) u-menpit kupiba

1-son parrot

‘my parrot’

(Literally, ‘my son, the parrot’)

6. Future plans

Grammar; Materials- folklore, music, etc; Analysis of oral histories; Audio/Video/Texts

“Languages are interesting in themselves: Each language manifests a fresh coming-together of sounds, grammar, and vocabulary to form a system of communication which, while demonstrating certain universal principles of organization and structure, is an unprecedented and a unique encapsulation of a world view.”
(Crystal 2000:54)

References

Braga, Alzerinda de Oliveira. 2006. Aspects Morphosyntaxiques de la Langue Makurap/Tupi. Doctoral thesis, Université de Toulouse Le Mirail.

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