

**A Survey of Three Northern Nambiquara Groups:
The Mamaindê, Negarotê, and Latundê**

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Abstract

This report looks at three closely related speech varieties spoken along the border of the states of Rondonia and Mato Grosso in Brazil. The varieties are: Mamaindê (population 200), Negatotê (population 100), and Latundê (population 20). These groups entered into contact with Brazilian society about three generations ago. Interaction with Brazilians has resulted in the young people becoming very interested in literacy in Portuguese, the national language.

One of the main goals of the survey was to determine whether these groups could benefit from additional literature in their languages. The results seemed to indicate non-print media would be more effective.

Introduction and purpose

From December 26, 2004 to January 4, 2005, David (Dave) Eberhard and Stan Anonby conducted a sociolinguistic investigation in the border area of Mato Grosso and Rondonia, two states in northern Brazil. There were two basic purposes for this trip:

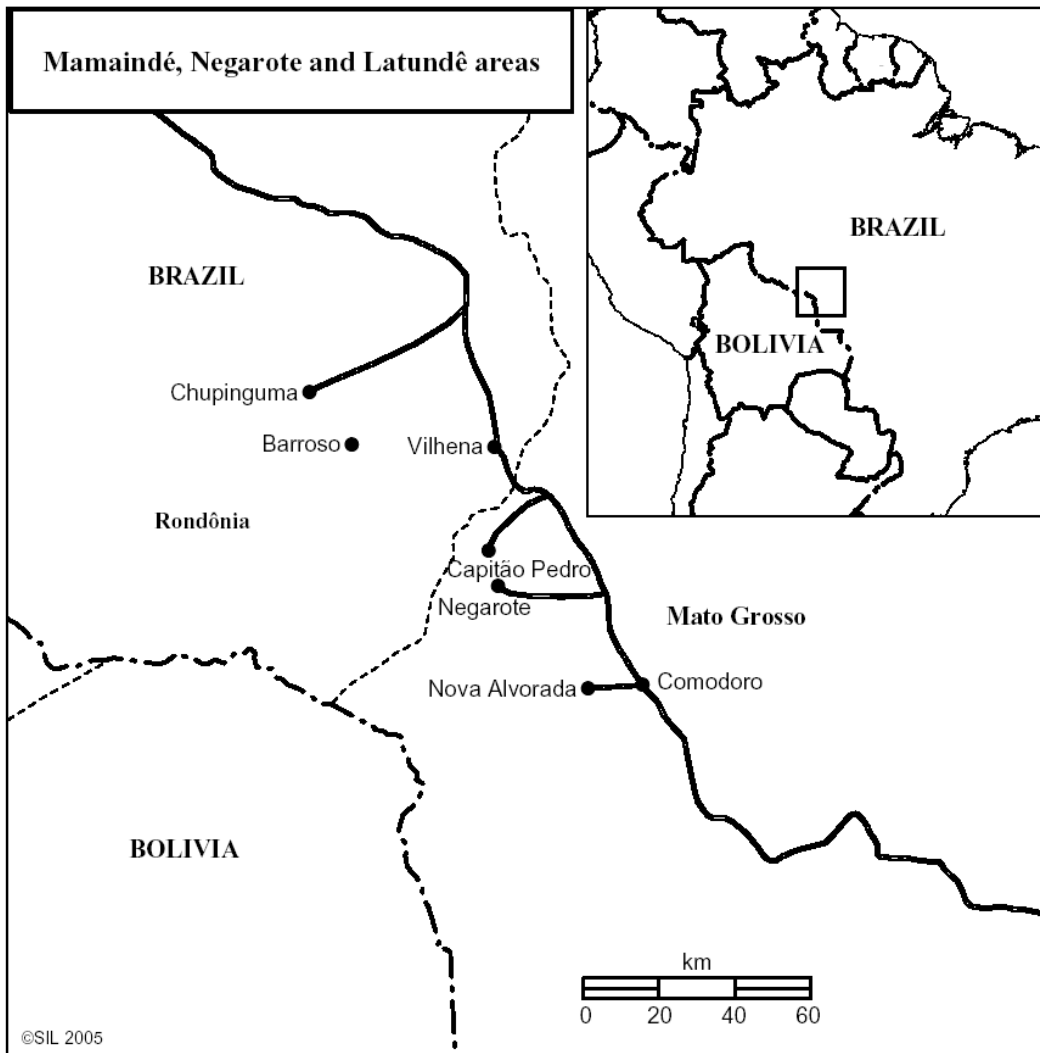
1. To determine how well the Negarotê and Latundê understand Mamaindê.
2. To determine these people's attitudes towards their language and literacy.

1. Geographic location

The Mamaindê live in a village called Capitão Pedro. It is located in Mato Grosso, very near the border of Rondonia. The nearest town is Vilhena, in Rondonia, which has a population of 70,000 (Cirilo, personal communication). Capitão Pedro is approximately a two-hour drive from Vilhena in a four-wheel-drive vehicle.

The main Negarotê village is about two hours to the south of the Mamaindê by truck, very near the Cuiaba-Porto Velho highway. Their nearest town is Comodoro, in Mato Grosso. Comodoro has a population of 15,000 (Ferreira, 2001:436), and is approximately a one-hour drive from the village on a good road. There is a small splinter group of the Negarotê that moved to the south, closer to the small town of Nova Alvorada.

The Latundê live about 150 kilometres west of the city of Vilhena, in a reserve called Tubarão-Latundê. There are three villages on this reserve: Rio do Ouro, which is mostly Aikanã; Gleba, consisting of a mixture of Aikanã, Kwazá, and Latundê; and Barroso, which is mostly Latundê. Gleba is easily accessible, with the small city of Chupinguaia only 19 kilometers away on a fairly good road. Barroso village is 31 kilometers from Gleba. The road is very bad the first 25 kilometers and becomes a footpath the last six kilometers.



2. Previous work

Five successive SIL teams have worked among the Mamaindê, beginning in the early 1960s. The team members are 1) David Barnard, 2) Irene Meech, 3) Peter and Shirley Kingston, 4) Dave and Rebecca Spencer, and 5) Dave and Julie Eberhard.

Peter Kingston's masters thesis (1974 - unpublished) from Reading University covered Mamaindê repetition and other discourse features. Kingston later published a paper in 1976 on verb and noun morphology entitled "Sufixos referenciais e o elemento nominal na lingua Mamaindê" which appeared in *Serie Linguistica* 5:31-81, Brasilia, SIL.

From 1967 to 1970, David Price did fieldwork among the Nambikuara for his doctoral dissertation in anthropology. He was later hired as a consultant by FUNAI, the government agency in charge of indigenous people, to develop a plan to assist this group. Price wrote several works on the indigenous people in the area. One of them, on the classification of the

Nambikuaran languages, is entitled “The Nambikuara Linguistic Family”, in *Anthropological Linguistics*. 20:14-37. Price’s 1983 article, “Pareci, Cabixi, Nambikwara: a Case study in the Western classification of native peoples” was published in the *Journal de la Societe des Americanistes*. 69:129-48. His 1989 book, entitled *Before the Bulldozer*, talks in detail about the history of all the Nambikuara groups.

In 1979, Paul Aspelin wrote a dissertation in which he explained the food exchange among the Mamaindê.

In 1995 Dave Eberhard published a phonology thesis on Mamaindê stress. Eberhard also produced two phonology articles on Mamaindê prosodic features; a paper on Mamaindê nasals posted on the Rutgers Optimality Archives website, and a paper on Mamaindê tone which appears in the proceedings of the Symposium on Andean and Amazonian Languages and Cultures, 2004, Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam.

Stella Telles wrote a dissertation on the phonology and grammar of Latundê in 2002.

3. History

Before contact with Brazilians and other nonindigenous people, the area along what is now the border of Bolivia, Mato Grosso, and Rondonia was inhabited by several thousand indigenous people belonging to a variety of different groups. These included the Mamaindê, Negarotê, Latundê, Lakonde, Yalapmunxte, Tawanxtu, and Taxwensitxu. These groups are now categorized as Northern Nambikuara.

Sporadic contact with Brazilians ebbed and flowed over the last three hundred years. It wasn’t until the telegraph line went through the area in 1911 that Brazilians began to permanently settle in the area. The contact process was sometimes violent, sometimes peaceful. However, the end result was genocidal. Within thirty years, most tribes had been decimated by measles and massacres. Shortly thereafter, survivors from several tribes began working for Brazilians in the area. Some Brazilian bosses treated them well, while others held them in virtual slavery. A pidgin Nambikuara developed in some areas, a mixture of several dialects and simple Portuguese (Peter Kingston, personal communication). Many of these tribes eventually melted into the local Brazilian population. Others were forced to merge into a single village with other tribes who had lost their land.

The Northern Nambikuara groups that did not assimilate into the dominant culture were the ones that were able to gain legal title to their land. For many, the process of gaining legal title was grueling. In 1961, for example, the Mamaindê and Negarotê were given a barren reserve on which they were unable to eke out an existence (Price, 1984: 48). They walked almost 400 kilometers back to their homeland and about 30% of them died along the way (<http://socrates.berkeley.edu:7001/Gallery/zmekhol/>).

In 1975, a small Latundê village was discovered by the Aikanã, who had just recently been moved to the Tubarão-Latundê reserve. When the Aikanã went on a subsequent visit to the area, they were surrounded by nineteen trembling Latundê, with bowstrings drawn (Price, 1977:72-3). The Aikanã made it understood that they were peaceful, and eventually the

Latundê were persuaded to visit Gleba. In 1980, a measles epidemic hit, and only eight Latundê survived.

SIL involvement began with the Mamaindê in the early 1960's with David Barnard, who was followed by Irene Meech. Then from 1965 until 1977, Peter and Shirley Kingston worked with the Mamaindê. They arrived on the heels of epidemics, and the tribe's population was down to 50 people. At one point in time, the Mamaindê were so desperate that some went to the Cuiaba-Porto Velho highway and were giving their babies away to any trucker who would take them, just so the babies would have a chance to survive. The medical help given by the Kingstons likely saved the tribe from extinction. The Kingstons were also quite successful at teaching the Mamaindê to read and write in their language. They were followed by Dave and Becky Spencer, who worked in community development. In 1990, Dave and Julie Eberhard began working with the tribe. Today, the Mamaindê population has quadrupled.

4. Economics

The traditional economy of the Mamaindê, Negarotê, and Latundê is based on slash and burn agriculture, fishing, and hunting. Of the three groups, the Latundê seem to be the ones who continue to follow a traditional lifestyle. Among the Mamaindê and Negarotê, hunting, and particularly, farming, is mainly an activity of the older generation.

During the 1990s, logging was a big part of the economy. For example, the roads into the villages, and the village houses were mostly built by loggers. There were many violent confrontations with the loggers, including the suspicion that loggers were behind the killing of the grand chief of the Mamaindê, Capitão Pedro (PIB/CEDI, 17/08/93, in *Povos Indigenas*). Several Mamaindê and Negarotê became relatively wealthy in the timber extraction business. The valuable wood has recently run out, and logging has become much less profitable.

Some of the money that circulates in the Mamaindê and Negarotê villages comes from retirement pensions and, to a lesser extent, salaries from teachers and health agents.

All three groups make necklaces and other jewelry for sale. Since the local market for their jewelry is not adequate, Julie Eberhard has been a key person in finding other markets.

Due to the influence of a local government agent, the Mamaindê have also learned in recent years to harvest and sell cash crops. These crops are planted in a community field, where each family is expected to contribute to the workload. They have had relative success in making a profit with pineapples and rice which they sell in the nearby town of Vilhena.

Some funding comes from projects/agencies. The process usually involves writing proposals and submitting them to various, mostly foreign, funding agencies. Both the Mamaindê and Negarotê are involved in a cattle project that involves fencing off huge tracts of land. Their plan is to eventually sell enough beef to meet the economic needs of their villages.

5. Population distribution

There are almost two hundred Mamaindê living in their present village, called Capitão Pedro (Paulo Nego, personal communication). There is one Mamaindê woman who married a Parecis fellow and has been living in Vilhena for many years with some of her children and grandchildren.

The Negarotê village is about half the size of the Mamaindê. It has dwindled in size since several Negarote couples have moved south from the main village and are living in a rather isolated spot on the very edge of the reserve. There is also one Negarotê living in Vilhena.

Barroso village consists of two houses, with a combined population of seventeen. There are also three more Latundê living in Gleba village.

6. Education

Mamaindê

Peter Kingston began to teach literacy shortly after arriving in the village. He remembers the Mamaindê excitement about literacy during the 1970s. Peter surmises, “Their interface with the outside world had taught them that literacy and numeracy were essential, so motivation was very high indeed.” All of the tribe, except the pre-schoolers and older women, could read and write to some extent. Many Mamaindê were regularly writing stories and letters to one another. After the Kingstons left in 1977, the Mamaindê literacy program came to a halt.

The succession of Brazilian teachers who replaced the Kingstons tried their best to teach in Portuguese, but have met with only limited success. They were usually demoralized and did not remain in the village very long. One exception was the most-recent teacher who was able to remain and live in the village for 3 years, from 2000-2002. She actually lived in the village that whole time, and was there long enough to gain their trust. By the time she left, she had a large group of students in her classes—most of the children in the village. There was quite a surge of excitement in learning to read and write Portuguese during her time there. She left in 2002 and there is currently no Brazilian teacher in Capitão Pedro. Another teacher, who is paid to instruct in Mamaindê, almost never teaches.

There was an interesting discrepancy in what the Mamaindê said and how they performed. We asked several people which language they preferred reading, and most said they could read Mamaindê best. However, when we tested the Mamaindê, all of them could read Portuguese better. They may have answered this way because of the presence of Dave Eberhard, who they know has invested a lot of effort in promoting literacy in Mamaindê.

We found there were a few men, but no children, who could read some Mamaindê. The village teacher gave us an unexpected reason for practicing his language. He said he was taking college courses and the teachers were pressuring him to write in Mamaindê. The Mamaindê do better at reading Portuguese simply because they practice it more. For example, several people we interviewed said they had read their Bibles in Portuguese last

year, but had not read any Mamaindê scripture. The teacher explained that the children want Portuguese literacy and not Mamaindê. He said he has taught mostly in Portuguese this year, because that is what the children desire.

SIL has been engaged in literacy efforts among the Mamaindê for over thirty years. For various reasons, over the last several years, these efforts have made little impact. In fact, while the number of people literate in Portuguese has been increasing since 1977, the number of people literate in Mamaindê has been steadily decreasing. Since 1977, it appears that the percentage of Mamaindê literate in Portuguese has increased from 0% to 50%. During the same time period, the percentage literate in Mamaindê has decreased from 75% to approximately 3%. This estimate comes from data provided by SIL teams, as well as present research.

This lack of interest has not been due to unwillingness on the part of SIL members to try different methods, materials, or ideas. The Eberhards have spent a large amount of their time between 1994 and 2002 in a variety of literacy activities. They have taught literacy in the government school, in their own home, and in the Mamaindê community house. They have taught classes for children, men, and women. They have used both traditional and nontraditional literacy methods. When they started out, they were using the Kingston's primers, which mostly followed the Gudchinsky method. Since these proved too hard for many beginning readers, the Eberhards developed easier pre-literacy materials, such as an alphabet book and motor-skill activity sheets. They started a "Journal do Mato" (something Kingston had done back in the 1970s), encouraging the Mamaindê to write their own news stories. Later, when the Mamaindê complained about their alphabet, they were taken seriously. The Eberhards spent a summer with Dr. Pat Davis at the University of North Dakota coming up with a new orthography and a whole new series of six primers, as well as a transitional primer from Portuguese back to Mamaindê. This new set of primers was a combination of the syllable-approach literacy and the more global whole-word approach. In order to meet the needs of different types of learners, they used a different story as the text for each primer. The new primers were also carefully designed around culturally-exciting topics in order to further aid in literacy motivation. Every tribe trip consisted of constant attempts to promote vernacular literacy. The end result, however, has been a continual disinterest in mother-tongue literacy and a growing interest in Portuguese literacy.

Negarotê

The Negarotê mentioned that the village is presently without a Brazilian teacher. The Negarotê who was hired to teach in the language never followed through. At least one Negarotê studies in Vilhena, and at least three more study in a nearby Brazilian school.

All Negarotê we interviewed admitted they hadn't read any Mamaindê in the last year. Just as in Capitão Pedro, there were no children who could read in their language. The primers were all in the schoolhouse, and no one volunteered to go get them. In summary, mother-tongue literacy rates among the Negarotê seemed to be even lower than among the Mamaindê.

Latundê

There is a Portuguese language school halfway between Gleba and Barroso which serves Aikanã, Kwazá, and Latundê students. As a result, the Latundê children are able to read passably in the national language. When given the Mamaindê primer, they were also able to sound out the words, but had little understanding of what they were reading.

Initially, the Mamaindê teacher was very excited about the prospect of teaching mother-tongue literacy to the Latundê. He had been told that if he didn't go and teach there, they would give up their language. Shortly after arriving in Barroso, he decided it would not work for him to teach in that village, because the languages aren't close enough.

Southern Nambikuara

When I asked the Southern Nambikuara the questions regarding literacy that I had asked the Mamaindê, I got the same answers. I noted all the Nambikuaras we tested were able to read Portuguese much better than their own language.

7. Intelligibility

In order to determine how well the Negarotê and Latundê understood Mamaindê, we devised a Recorded Text Test (RTT). This test consisted of a couple of Mamaindê stories, followed by a series of questions. The first story was about an airplane ride, and the second story was about a snake bite. We tested these RTT's the following way: we put headphones on a Mamaindê speaker and played the first story without stopping the first time. Then we played the story again, this time stopping at appropriate spots and asking the questions. We kept the questions the Mamaindê were able to answer without difficulty. We repeated the process with the second story. We ended up with two stories, with questions the Mamaindê were able to easily score 100%. The first story had four questions and the second story had nineteen.

Next, we put the headphones on three Latundê of varying ages, played the same stories and asked them the questions. Most seemed unfamiliar with the concept of answering content questions and scored very poorly on the first story. This being the case, we decided to use the first story for practice and only used the second story for scoring. Our third stop was at the Negarotê village, where we put the headphones on two people of different ages, and repeated the process.

The percentage scored gave us an indication of the intelligibility levels between the languages. The results with the Latundê were that they understood from 50% to 84% of the Mamaindê. The results with the Negarotê were that they understood from 84% to 95% of the Mamaindê. The lower scores may indicate the person didn't really understand the concept of testing. The higher scores may indicate the person had learned some Mamaindê. In rough terms, we could surmise the tests showed 67% intelligibility between Latundê and Mamaindê and 90% intelligibility between Negarotê and Mamaindê.

A wordlist count shows Latundê and Mamaindê to be closer. A comparison of 111 lexical items in the two languages revealed 89% lexical similarity between Latundê and Mamaindê (see appendix G). With such a high percentage, one might expect that intelligibility would be greater than it actually is – but there are at least two things not being taken into consideration in the wordlist comparison.

1. Different phonology systems:

From the phonological analysis found in Telles, it is clear that some of the complex phonology present in Mamaindê is absent in Latundê, thereby creating a considerable difference in pronunciation between the two. This would hinder intelligibility even though the forms appear to be cognate.

2. Roots vs affixes:

There were very few verbal affixes in the list of lexical items – it consisted mostly of roots. In these languages, the verbal affixes can often constitute the majority of the morphemes in a sentence. So we aren't getting a clear picture of how cognate the affixes are between them, and in my short exposure to Latundê, it seemed that it was in the verbal morphology that the languages differed the most, thus making comprehension more difficult. Of course, we would have to actually do a formal comparison of only the affixes across the two languages in order to get a clear indication of the distance between them at the affix level.

The Mamaindê teachers' informal estimate of intelligibility was on the lower end of the spectrum. Before visiting the Latundê village, he had wanted to work there, and said he wanted to tell them, "We both speak the same." After being there a couple of days, he didn't feel there was much similarity. He told us he could understand 60% of what the Latundê spoke. He noted they spoke much more quickly than the Mamaindê, and that they left off the endings.

Stella Telles' research led her to the conclusion that there were two branches of Northern Nambikuara. The first branch includes Latundê, Lakonde, and Tawande (the last two having one speaker each); the second branch includes Mamaindê and Negarotê (2002:28). Our data would support her hypothesis.

Dave Eberhard had previously recorded that the younger Mamaindê speak a different dialect than the older generation. After reading Stella Telles' grammar, Dave believed that what the Mamaindê call "new speech" was actually Mamaindê verb roots with Latundê verb endings. This led him to the hypothesis that the Latundê should be able to understand this "new speech" better than traditional Mamaindê. To test this hypothesis, we used two texts. The first text, the airplane story, was in new speech; and the second text, the snake-bite story, was in the older language. Contrary to what we thought would be the case, the Latundê actually understood the older language better than the new one.

8. Literary development

There are two sets of six primers (an old set and a new set) in the Mamaindê language, as well as a transitional primer and an alphabet book. Several small reading booklets to accompany the primers were produced on various topics, such as popular legends, soccer, math, and colors.

A census book was published in 1997.

A book (accompanied by a cassette tape), comparing Mamaindê legends to the Gospel, was completed in 1995.

Mark and Acts were published in book form by Kingston in the 1970s. Luke is in the final stages of production. The first eleven chapters of Genesis, as well as portions of other books of the Bible, have been translated into the language and put into booklet form.

One book, called a “New Believers” book, included over 125 different passages from various books of the Bible.

About eight years ago, the *Jesus* film was dubbed in Mamaindê. A short booklet of selections from the Jesus film, along with pictures and song lyrics to go along with each story, was also published. This booklet was accompanied by a cassette tape recording.

9. Interaction with Brazilians

The Mamaindê own a truck, and many of them frequently drive to Vilhena or Comodoro.

The Negarotê are very close to town. Although they don't own a truck, they travel to Comodoro by a city bus which passes daily. If they don't have money for the bus, they go by bicycle or motorcycle.

The Latundê likely have the least interaction with Brazilians, but they are often found in the village of Gleba, where they communicate in Portuguese.

We did hear a negative comment regarding settlers encroaching on the edges of the Mamaindê reserve. On the whole, however, all groups appeared to have favourable attitudes towards outsiders.

10. Interaction between the indigenous groups

During the first decades of the 1900s, the population of all of the groups in the area dwindled to the point where they were not able to continue existing as independent tribes. To find marriage partners, they had to look outside their own group. The current Mamaindê are actually the result of the collapse of a number of different Northern Nambikuara sub-groups, namely the Tawanxtxu, Taxwensitxu, Mamainsitxu, and Taxmainitxu. Because of this, there is quite a bit of language variation among the older generation, as they speak in the dialect of their respective groups. The young people are less aware of these differences.

They generally simply consider themselves Mamaindê, and speak the dialect of the more prestigious Mamaindê group. There are also a handful of people in Capitão Pedro and the village of Negarotê, of Southern Nambikuara and Parecis descent, all married into the Mamaindê.

In the Negarotê village, out of nineteen couples, there were six mixed marriages – four with Mamaindê, and two with Southern Nambikuaram spouses.

Although the Latundê have almost no contact with the Mamaindê, there is quite a bit of mutual interest. Several factors point to this. Stella Telles says the Latundê are terrified of the Mamaindê. If anyone dies mysteriously, or anything unexplainable happens, they always blame the Mamaindê (personal communication). On the positive side, the Mamaindê teacher was warmly welcomed to the village. A couple of the Latundê told us they understood and could speak Mamaindê, and they seemed to take pleasure in showing it off to us. They were very interested in our recording of the old Mamaindê songs. One of the older ones sang us his songs, which sounded very similar to the Mamaindê ones. One woman told us the present Mamaindê chief wanted to marry her. They also told us the late Capitão Pedro, a famous chief, was actually a Latundê who was captured as an eight-year-old child in a raid by the Mamaindê. They said that Capitão Pedro had visited the Latundê, and had cried from homesickness, and made plans to return and live among them. We talked to several older people among the Mamaindê, and they all confirmed that the famous chief was born Mamaindê.

The Latundê interact frequently with the Aikanã of Gleba village. We witnessed that many sacks of food made their way from Barroso to Gleba. The Latundê are industrious farmers and hunters, while the people in Gleba do not hunt or make *roças* ‘garden’. They live mainly off the cash income from their teachers and old-age pensions (Cirilo, personal communication).

Several observations point to the fact that there is a class distinction between the Latundê and the Aikanã. In Gleba, I was told the people in Barroso were primitive and slept on the floor. Goods seem to flow mainly from Latundê to Gleba. Furthermore, the Latundê frequently visit the Aikanã, but almost never vice versa. The oldest Latundê woman lives with her daughter, who is married to an Aikanã in Gleba village. The Mamaindê teacher noticed that the Latundê copied the Aikanã a lot. One observation was that they have their ovens up on a table covered in clay, like the Aikanã do. Finally, there are fewer Latundê than Aikanã. All these factors indicate that Gleba is the prestige village. In fact, anthropologist Jane Galvao observed that the Aikanã saw themselves as civilizing the Latundê.

Interestingly, Manoel, the chief of the Latundê, is not Latundê. He was actually born into the now extinct Yelelihre group, and was raised among the Sabane (Telles, 2002:17–19). Manoel now considers himself Latundê, even though he doesn’t speak the language clearly.

11. Language attitudes

Mamaindê

Although the Mamaindê are not ashamed to speak their language, they have shown disinterest in mother-tongue literacy for at least twenty years. Even though most of the people we interviewed said they thought bilingual education was best, no one seemed to be willing to invest much effort in reading or writing Mamaindê. On the other hand, they were very motivated to read and speak Portuguese. As an example, the Mamaindê teacher told us that when he attempts to teach Mamaindê, the children all lose interest and make comments to the effect that, "Now we're moving backwards." As further evidence, when Dave Eberhard asked Nilo, the Mamaindê with the most Bible training, if it would be worthwhile to keep on translating, he said it wouldn't. Dave has to pay anyone to help him with translation. These attitudes are probably due to several reasons.

The most important factor is likely that the Mamaindê do not see any pressing advantage in writing their language. They gave us only two reasons for learning to read Mamaindê. One was that if they didn't learn to write the language down, they would end up shifting to Portuguese like the Sabane. Then, when outsiders came to visit, they would be embarrassed in the presence of their visitors because they wouldn't be able to speak their language anymore. Another reason we heard was that Brazilian educators expected them to be able to read in the vernacular. These two reasons for writing Mamaindê do not appear to be very strong motivators.

Their language attitudes seem to be similar to their cultural attitudes. Basically, few of the young people are interested in living the traditional Mamaindê way, by hunting and farming. The old people complain that when they tell their stories, the youth simply stand up and walk off.

The Mamaindê are attempting to transition from being self-sufficient farmers into being members of the Brazilian cash-based economy. One way to do this is to write proposals and submit them to funding agencies. Other ways include working for wages or selling their products. In short, it appears that almost all the Mamaindê's goals can only be attained via Portuguese.

Ironically, the most successful at motivating them to practice their culture are the Brazilians. For example, the one time the young people get really excited about their culture is during the "Indigenous Olympics" put on every year since 1994 by the Ministry of Sports and Tourism (*Fernando Fedola L. B. Vianna, novembro/ 2000, in <http://www.socioambiental.org/pib/portugues/indenos/jogos.shtm#t2>*). Over twenty Mamaindê went to the gathering last year, which was held in the state of Bahia. Before the Olympics, there was much practicing of dances and other traditional activities. The Mamaindê told us with pride that they won the award for being the most traditional indigenous people in Brazil. These gatherings are largely a show funded by the Brazilian government and organized for the entertainment of nonindigenous people.

Negarotê

The attitudes in Negarotê seemed to be very similar to those of the Mamaindê. They said they wanted bilingual education so the children wouldn't forget their mother tongue. However, no one was making any attempt to read and write the former. They admitted that in the future, Portuguese would dominate in the village.

One product in the Negarotê language interested them. It was a tape recording Dave made of Portuguese choruses he had translated into Mamaindê. Several Negarotê asked Dave for more copies of this "new music".

Latundê

The Latundê listened intently to the Mamaindê teacher and Dave Eberhard speaking Mamaindê. Even though the two languages are not identical, one elderly Latundê was moved to tears when he heard the Mamaindê speak. They were also interested in the old Mamaindê songs, and to a lesser extent, the new Mamaindê choruses translated from Portuguese.

Probably the most dramatic reaction came when we showed them the Mamaindê primers. Some of the children began to read them out loud and most of the village crowded around to hear. After Dave read a longer piece about a puberty festival, one lady became so excited, she stood up and wandered around aimlessly repeating, "You can even write stories!" Stan Anonby was lying in a hammock when a teenage Latundê girl ran into the house, jumping up and down, and said to her sister, "Maria, here are some books which teach us to write our own language! We've got to learn to read and write our language!" They also seemed interested when Dave showed them how, by changing the Mamaindê spelling a little, they could write in Latundê.

Telles records that the Latundê's attitude toward Portuguese is even more positive. The children told her they consider the national language "easier" and "prettier" (2002:24).

12. Language vitality

During the chaotic time when Brazilians first began to settle in the area, some Northern Nambikuara groups lost their identity and language. In some cases, they spoke a pidgin as an intermediate step before shifting to Portuguese. The ones who were able to maintain their group identity were also able to keep their language.

Mamaindê

Only the very old adults and very young children are monolingual in Mamaindê. The young men speak the best Portuguese. Some of them regularly dress, groom, and even put on perfume like Brazilians. At times, the Mamaindê men get together to have meetings about their school, association, current project, or some other matter relating to the outside world. These meetings are held in Portuguese. We did not hear any Mamaindê speaking

Portuguese to each other in casual conversation. All Mamaindê speak their own language best.

Negarotê

The native language vitality situation among the Negarotê is slightly weaker, likely because they are closer to town. Although they too spoke their own language best, at times they use Portuguese to speak to each other.

Latundê

From 1997 to 2000, Stella Telles visited the Latundê to gather linguistic data. She counted twelve people that could speak the language (2002:29). She noted that most people in Barroso were bilingual, but that Latundê predominated (2002:23). Our brief visit indicated how swiftly the Latundê are shifting to Portuguese. Five years later, when we visited the tribe, we observed that Portuguese had become the primary language spoken by all the Latundê, even in their own village.

The reason the Mamaindê teacher was approached to teach in Latundê was to help stop this language shift. When he realized how far gone the Latundê language was, he didn't think he could be successful in helping them retain their language.

The Portuguese they speak is so heavily inflected with Latundê tone and phonology, it is very difficult to understand. The youngest person we heard speaking Latundê was a seventeen-year-old girl, speaking to the oldest Latundê man. It is mainly people over fifty that use Latundê. There is just one couple, in their fifties, who speak Latundê to each other. The accurate way to describe the speech of Barroso village is that it is full of code switching between Latundê and Portuguese, with the latter language predominating.

The Latundê have only been in contact with Portuguese since 1977, but they use their language far less than that of the other two villages. This is undoubtedly due to their low population. In their case, twenty people doesn't seem to be enough of a critical mass to keep the language alive. Due to their low numbers, they must relate a lot to two non-Nambikuara tribes, the Aikanã and the Kwazá. At present, the Latundê frequently visit the Aikanã and spend time with their relatives who live there. After the older generation dies, it seems likely that those who remain in Barroso will move to Gleba permanently. The language spoken with the Aikanã and Kwazá is Portuguese. Like the Latundê, the people from Gleba speak among themselves mostly in Portuguese.

13. Cultural/anthropological observations

Mamaindê

The Mamaindê today are a melding of several Northern Nambikuara groups. The groups are generally patrilineal (Kingston, personal communication).

The Mamaindê and the Negarote have their village on a beautiful escarpment, so they can take advantage of two ecosystems – the high scub forest and the valley jungle. The highland where the village is located is free of malaria. There are trails down to the jungle lowland, where the soil is better for growing certain kinds of crops.

Negarotê

The Negarotê seemed quite desperate for material goods. While we were in the village, a couple of government agents showed up in the village, the Negarotê leaders ran over to him and demanded a list of things from town. They have a lot of necklaces stored up for the day Julie Eberhard gets back so they can use her as the middleman again to sell their jewelry.

Latundê

The Latundê appear very industrious. They seemed to always be hunting, fishing, tending their gardens, or making artifacts. There were items of Mamaindê culture which seemed to be lacking among the Latundê. For example, Dave played a Mamaindê nose flute, which the Latundê had never seen before.

One of the outstanding things of the Latundê village was the number of wild animals they kept as pets. One of the older men had fifty-two birds, which he looked after as carefully as babies.

14. Conclusions

One factor to evaluate is how the tribes which border on the Mamaindê have responded to vernacular literature. There are two nearby tribes, the Parecis and the (Southern) Nambikuaras, with whom SIL has worked for many decades in translation and literacy. For the last few years, both of these tribes have had the entire New Testament in their language, along with assorted other booklets SIL has published. As with the Mamaindê, the language vitality among the Parecis and Nambikuaras is high. Each of the tribes has a population approximately ten times larger than the Mamaindê.

Among the Parecis, there is a thriving church. When the missionary visits, prizes are given out to Parecis who memorize Scripture in their language. Yet when left to themselves, there is no evidence of anyone using the Parecis New Testament. Even though they are more comfortable speaking in Parecis, it is their Portuguese Bibles that are well worn. Stan has participated in their services, and noted that everything except the reading was in Parecis. They preferred to read the Bible in Portuguese, and to translate “on the fly” into their language.

If anything, the language-development efforts among the Nambikuara have been even more strenuous, including ongoing literacy classes and prizes for Scripture memorization. Nevertheless, the church among the Nambikuaras is weak. Despite years of literacy efforts in Nambikuara, the situation is similar to the surrounding tribes. We received no indication that the Christians read in Nambikuara when the missionaries are absent. The Nambikuaras themselves have made it known that they do not want any indigenous teachers on their

reserve. According to ALEM missionary Osmaura Araujo dos Santos, who works with the Nambikuara, they have asked the municipalities to only send Brazilian teachers (personal communication). A growing number of Nambikuaras have relocated to the edge of Comodoro, so their children can attend regular Brazilian schools.

If the Mamaindê were to receive the New Testament, or any other vernacular literacy materials in their language within the next few years, it is likely they will react as the Parecis and Nambikuaras. If anything, their response might be even more tepid, because there are no Mamaindê believers who meet regularly.

When Peter Kingston left the tribe in 1977, he did not feel there was a need for more translation at that time. Instead, he felt the need was mainly in the area of literacy development. He says, "At the time I left I felt the need at this stage was to get the Mamaindê fully literate, rather than to do too much more translation translation should, I thought, probably mostly await demand" (Kingston, personal communication).

This survey seems to indicate that the Mamaindê interest in mother-tongue literacy and translation is decreasing. On the other hand, over the last thirty years, Mamaindê interest in Portuguese literacy has continued to increase. Clearly, the community vision is for education in Portuguese. SIL literacy specialist Steve Barber's opinion is that, "If by this time, the Mamaindê have not recognized a value in Mamaindê literacy, it's probably wasted effort to try to create that" (personal communication).

This assessment for the Mamaindê holds true for the Negarotê as well. Since their village is smaller, literacy efforts would be even more difficult.

The Latundê language is different enough from Mamaindê to warrant separate literature. However, given their small numbers and rapid language shift, we would not recommend a separate program among the Latundê at this time.

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