

# **Language Use on the Tubarão-Latundê Reserve, Rondônia, Brazil**

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## Abstract

This survey report presents an overview of the findings of a sociolinguistic survey conducted by Stan Anonby and Jose Alcantara in April 2004 among several language groups living on the Tubarão-Latundê Reserve, Rondônia, Brazil. Data was collected in two villages: Gleba and Rio do Ouro.

## 1 Introduction and purpose

This survey report presents the results of a study of language use on the Tubarão-Latundê Indian Reserve in southern Rondônia, Brazil. The main purpose of this study was to investigate the potential for the literary development of these languages. This study reveals that all three of the following groups are losing their language in some domains and shifting to the use of Portuguese.

The Tubarão-Latundê Indian Reserve is inhabited by people from several tribes; the three main linguistically-unrelated ones are:

- 1) Aikanã [tba]; also known as Tubarão, Massaká, Cassupá, Kasupá, Kukupa, Corumbiara, Kolumbiara, Mundé, Winzankyi, Huari, Uari, and Wari (Gordon 2005, Rodrigues 1986). Often called Tubarão, for the Aikanã, this is the name for the people who live in Gleba village.
- 2) Kwazá [xwa]; also known as Koaiá, Koaya, Coaiá, Quaia, Arara, Tsãrã csinuténaheré, Tsãrã csuhuinaheré, and Tainakãw. Kwazá is an unclassified language.
- 3) Latundê [mbg]; also known as Yalapmunxte or Lacondê. Latundê is considered a dialect of Northern Nambikuara, also called Mamainde.

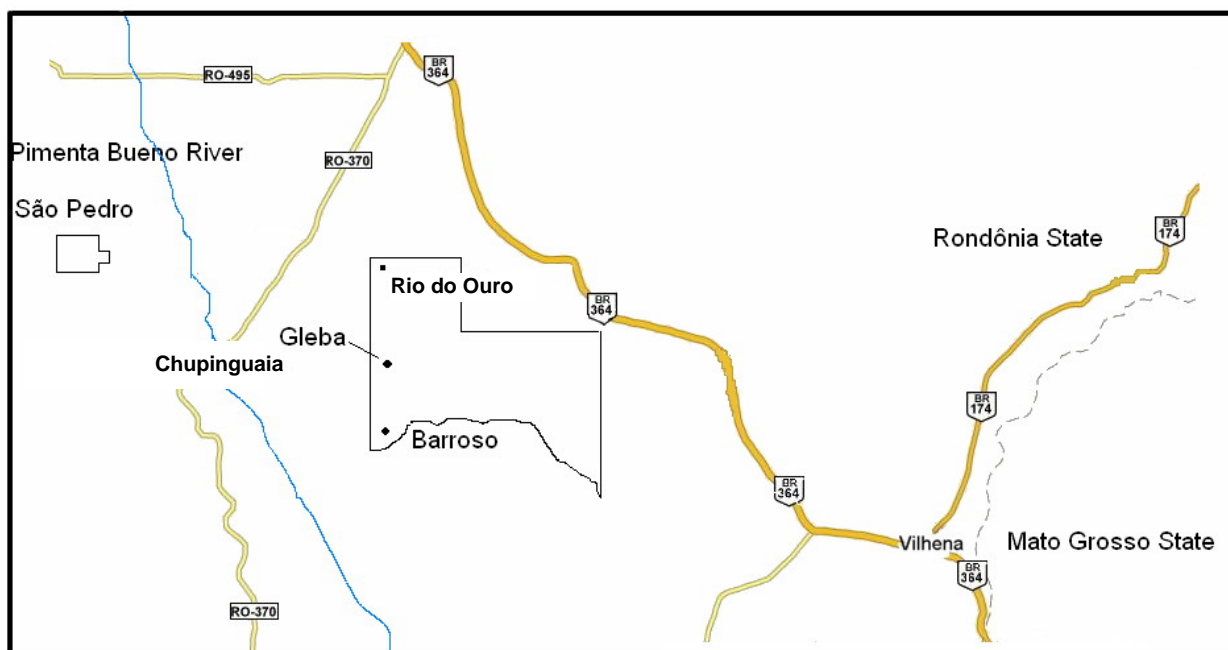
Since the overwhelming majority of the population is Aikanã, and since some of the Kwazá consider themselves Aikanã (van der Voort 1998), the term in popular usage is extended to all Indians living on this reserve. This paper will follow this practice, so the term “Aikanã” may also be taken as referring to Kwazá, Latundê, or any other Indian living on the Tubarão-Latundê Reserve.

Most scholars classify Aikanã as a language isolate. Ethnologue (2005) and Voegelin and Voegelin (1977) follow Mason (1950), who considered ‘Masaca’ an Arawakan language. Kwazá is also a language isolate. Latundê, a variety of Northern Nambikuára, is part of a larger Nambiquaran language family.

There are two highly intelligible dialects of Aikanã spoken in Rio do Ouro and Gleba, respectively. The Rio do Ouro dialect is known as Massaká, and the Gleba dialect as Tubarão (Clementino, personal communication). Tubarão may be more conservative, retaining vowel initial fricatives like *v* and *h* (Cirilo, personal communication). Tubarão is definitely higher status, and people from Gleba do not accept the dialect of Rio do Ouro. When pressed to make a distinction, people will use the terms Massaká and Tubarão. However, most people from both villages usually refer to the language they speak as Aikanã.

## 2 Geographic location

Originally, most of the Indians discussed in this report lived west of the Pimenta Bueno River in Rondônia state, an area of rich forests (Price 1981:36). There is still a small village near this area called São Pedro, inhabited by Aikanã and Kwazá, but most of the Indians now live east of the Pimento Bueno on the Tubarão-Latundê Indian Reserve. This reserve is located west of the city of Vilhena, near the Cuiabá-Porto Velho highway. There are three villages on the reserve: Rio do Ouro, Gleba (also known as Tubarão), and Barroso (see map 1). Of the three, Gleba has the most mixed population. It is easily accessible, with the small city of Chupinguaia only 19 kilometers away on a fairly good road. Rio do Ouro village has the largest population, is almost exclusively Aikanã, and is 20 kilometers from Gleba by poor road. Barroso village has the smallest population, most of which are Latundê, and it is 25 kilometers from Gleba on a road that is usually passable only by motorcycle.



Map 1. Geographic location of villages and areas mentioned in this report.

### 3 Population distribution

The Indian population discussed in this paper are living in the following locations:

Rio do Ouro village	67
Gleba village	48
Barroso village	34
São Pedro village	18
Vilhena city	15
Chupinguaia city	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>189</b>

(Personal communication with teachers; Povos Indigenas, 2000:589.)

If the population were to be broken up into ethnic groups, the divisions would be roughly as follows:

Aikanã	175
Kwazá	25
Latundê	19
<b>Total</b>	<b>219</b>

This second chart does not give as accurate a picture as the first one, because of the number of mixed marriages. For example, the number of pure Kwazá would be closer to eight (Cirilo, personal communication), and the number of Kwazá speakers would be closer to seven (<http://nativenet.uthscsa.edu/archive/ng/94/0331.html>). The reason for the higher total population may be because some Indians, whose parents are from separate tribes, were counted twice.

There are fifteen Aikanã living in the city of Vilhena, and seven Kwazá living in the town of Chupinguaia. David Price (1981:37) mentioned there were some Aikanã near the city of Porto Velho. There are also a few Kwazá in Porto Velho and Pimenta Bueno (van der Voort, 1998). A few Aikanã also live in the Rio Guaporé Indian Reserve, where they share the land with nine other Indian tribes (Povos Indigenas, 2000:590). The indigenous population outside of the reserve is increasing. The net result is that a larger and larger percentage of them prefer to speak Portuguese.

### 4 Previous scholarship

The Indians mentioned in this report have not been studied extensively. In 1916, Marechal Rondon passed through the area, as he was installing the telegraph line, and made some observations. The famed anthropologist, Levi-Strauss, made a trip to study the Indians in southern Rondônia in the 1930s. In 1942, Lieutenant Zack, of the Indian Protection Service, mentioned the Kwazá. Anthropologists Melatti and Price looked at the area in the 1970s. In 1984, American linguist Harvey Carlson visited the Tubarão-Latundê Reserve and took some notes on 'Koaiá' and Aikanã. Ione Vasconcelos, from the Universidade de Brasília, did research

among the Aikanã, which was published in 1993 and 1996. Hein van der Voort lived with the Aikanã and Kwazá for a period of 14 months, between 1995 and 1998, and is working on a description of the Kwazá language and Kwazá text transcriptions (van der Voort, 1998). In 2002, Stella Telles wrote a dissertation on the phonology and grammar of Latundê/Lacondê.

## 5 History of people

For many years, the Aikanã, Kwazá, and Latundê lived in contact with various neighboring tribes, including the Kanoê, Mekens/Sakirap, Tuparí, Salamã, and other groups that have now been absorbed into the local population. Although the languages they spoke were not mutually intelligible, they fought, forged alliances, had joint festivals, and intermarried. Because of these exchanges, their cultures became quite similar, to the point that they are lumped together and called the “Marico Complex” by anthropologist Denise Maldi (1991). Some of the common cultural traits include their baskets of marico fiber, hive-shaped homes for approximately ten families, fermented corn drink, cannibalism, and clan divisions (van der Voort, 1998).

In 1940, the Indian Protection Service opened a post on the Igarape Cascata, and tributary of the Pimenta Bueno. Aikanã, Kanoê, probably Monde, and possibly other Indians were brought together on this post. Measles and flu epidemics decimated the population and, by 1956, the Indians had scattered into the forest. Some of these are likely still living without contact with Brazilian society (Price 1981:36), and others (about 25 Aikanã and Kwazá) still live in these original lands west of the Pimenta Bueno River at São Pedro Reserve. In 1973, most were moved east to poorer land at their present location, the Tubarão-Latundê Reserve. In 1977, a small Latundê village was discovered on the reserve but, in early 1980, they contracted measles and most of them died (Price 1981:37). The fewer than twenty Latundê, who remain, live in Barroso village in the Tubarão-Latundê Reserve.

## 6 Evidence of use and maintenance of Aikanã

Rio do Ouro is the village where Aikanã is spoken the most. The adults talk in Aikanã with one another, children talk to parents in Aikanã and vice versa. The children speak both languages when playing, but Aikanã is dominant. The total number of families in Rio do Ouro is over fifteen. We were informed that leadership meetings are in Aikanã, with a quick explanation in Portuguese for those who don't understand. At their Indian *festas* (traditional gatherings which they have been trying to revive lately), both languages are used. We spent one morning hauling a tapir out of the jungle with several Aikanã, ages eleven to seventy. All discussion was 100% in Portuguese; from the time they came to our house to ask for help, to the time we were butchering it in the village. As a counter example, when a group of young men were working at getting the truck out of a mud hole, they spoke a lot of Aikanã to each other.

In Rio do Ouro, subsistence agriculture is a mainstay of the economy. Although the soil is sandy in Rio do Ouro, they seem to grow a wide variety of crops. They also do a lot of hunting. They told us they kill an average of one tapir a week. These traditional pursuits are more likely to remain domains in which Aikanã is used.

Generally, there seems to be a very positive attitude toward speaking Aikanã, but that is not extended to reading the language. Many expressed preference for speaking Aikanã, and some

parents said that they didn't want their children to lose the language. One mother in Gleba, who is monolingual in Portuguese, claimed to be making an effort to teach Aikanã to her boys.

## **7 Evidence of shift to Portuguese**

### **7.1 Economy**

In the 1930s, rubber extraction was a large part of the economy in southern Rondônia. In its heyday, the Aikanã and Kwazá worked rubber tapping for rubber barons and were paid in coffee, sugar, and firearms. By the 1970s, the Indians had become more independent, and were selling their own rubber in the surrounding cities (van der Voort 1998). The indigenous languages were used most likely in the actual tapping and processing of the rubber in the reserves. When selling the product on the outside or interacting with rubber barons, Portuguese was used. The houses in the village of Rio do Ouro are still spread out to coincide with the rubber tap lines and the trees are still scarred from the rubber tapping, but rubber has ceased to play an economic role in the area today.

Traditional lifestyle plays a role in keeping Portuguese at bay, but in Gleba, at least, there is little of this. There are very few subsistence agriculture plots. The people in Gleba either buy their food in the city or receive it from their relatives living in Rio do Ouro. Reasons given include the land being poorer, more retirement money coming into the village, and the people's lack of enthusiasm for fieldwork (Cirilio, personal communication).

The main sources of cash in both villages, like most villages in Brazil, are retirement remittances for the elders and the sale of Indian handicrafts. These, as well as almost all cash-related activities, are conducted in Portuguese. Involvement in the market economy is increasing in importance in lockstep with the Portuguese language.

Logging is a part of the economy in the Tubarão-Latundê Indian Reserve. The dealings with the loggers are conducted in Portuguese. Only a few leaders receive any money from the logging, but there are other benefits, such as being able to use equipment to fix up the roads. We personally benefited when a logger took his bulldozer and pulled our vehicle out of a mud hole.

There have been Aikanã engaged in mining on the Cinta Larga Reserve, where they communicate in Portuguese. Some have made a lot of money, while others have made next to nothing and complained of being treated like slaves.

About 10% of the people have moved away from the villages permanently, and are integrated into the economy of the local towns. We were told there were fifteen Aikanã living in Vilhena and seven Kwazá living in Chupinguaia. These people speak Portuguese almost exclusively.

### **7.2 Religion**

UNIEDAS missionaries (Indians from the Terena tribe) began working in the area in 1980 and, as a result, most people living in the Tubarão-Latundê Indians reserve today would consider themselves Protestants. The Terenas ministered exclusively in Portuguese. Keyla, the daughter of the first missionary, still lives in Gleba and is a spiritual leader there.

A Protestant missionary family, belonging to the ALEM mission, live in Rio do Ouro village, where the husband, Warrisson, is a schoolteacher and his wife, Ana, is a church leader. They have worked in the reserve for twelve years, and speak only Portuguese.

Church in Rio do Ouro is well attended, with almost the entire village showing up for both Thursday and Sunday services. The young people are the most enthusiastic, and some walk from as far away as 5 kilometers. The services are in Portuguese. After Sunday morning church, the people usually play volleyball while Ana prepares a meal for the whole village. Afterward, during the informal recreational time, quite a bit of Aikanã is used.

In Gleba and Rio do Ouro, church services have been in Portuguese for over twenty-four years. The Indians have rebuffed efforts by the ALEM missionaries (who remain monolingual in Portuguese) to use Aikanã in church. When Ana first came to Gleba twelve years ago, the people told her they wanted church in Portuguese and not in Aikanã. They specifically said, “We don’t want a linguist. We want someone who will do church in Portuguese.” Ana has worked on composing some songs in Aikanã, but when she sang them to the Indians, they said they sounded ugly. Ana has asked people to pray in Aikanã, but they always refuse.

In a service we attended in Rio do Ouro, Ana chose five people at random to read portions of the Bible (the older Portuguese version). All were read fluently and without stumbling. Ana told us that, to this day, the Indians have never asked for anything in Aikanã – they seem to feel that church must be in Portuguese.

### 7.3 Education and literacy

School is taught up to grade four in all the villages and the majority of Aikanã and Kwazá are literate in Portuguese. In Rio do Ouro, there are two teachers, a Brazilian who teaches in Portuguese, and a bilingual teacher who explains the subjects in Aikanã to the fourteen or so children. Three villagers are finishing high school; two from Gleba, and one from Rio do Ouro.

To see how well they could read and write Aikanã, I asked a group of young people from Rio do Ouro to write two sentences in their language. After considerable deliberation, one of them finally wrote something four lines long with no punctuation. I asked someone else, the one who seemed most interested, to read it, but he wasn’t able to. This was in sharp contrast with the fluency the Aikanã showed when reading difficult Portuguese from the Bible. Everyone we spoke to agreed they are much more literate in Portuguese than in Aikanã.

### 7.4 Attitudes toward language and literacy

The Aikanã seemed to be a very positive about Portuguese. Several talked to us about how necessary it was for them to improve their language skills in order to interact with whites. In Gleba, the Indian teacher’s assistant, hired to teach Aikanã, admits he only teaches in Portuguese because that is what his students want (Cirilio, personal communication).

Most Aikanã have copies of the Almeida Bible (an older Portuguese translation). Although many admitted they did not understand much of it (one Indian teacher said she understood 20%), they seem satisfied with the version they have. The Aikanã we talked to did not express interest in

having Scripture in their language. They were noncommittal about working together on translation, and were much more enthusiastic talking about the village soccer team.

The only people we met who seemed interested in any Aikanã language development were ALEM missionaries, Warresson and Ana Cirilio. They expressed a desire to learn to speak Aikanã because they were embarrassed to have to admit to their peers that they only spoke Portuguese. Finally, they pointed out that they didn't think the Aikanã understood the Portuguese Scripture they had available, and felt they would understand it better if they could read it in Aikanã.

### 7.5 Interaction with Brazilians

People from Rio do Ouro travel to town about once a month to shop or get medical attention. By contrast, in Gleba, people travel to town daily. Trips to Vilhena are more difficult to arrange than those to Chupinguaia, because it is harder to arrange the overnight lodging they need. The Aikanã usually wind up staying at a logger's home or at the "Casa do Indio," a place outside of town that provides lodging for sick Indians.

The Indians are well liked by the Brazilians living in town. Communication with Brazilians is always in Portuguese. The two groups regularly compete against each other in soccer games and there are even some Aikanã who play on Brazilian teams. Several people pointed out to us that there were very few Aikanã girls of marriageable age. They volunteered that the only way for the young men to find wives would be to marry white girls. The problem they could see was that white Brazilian girls would not want to live in an Indian village.

There are many mixed marriages in Gleba, but none in Rio do Ouro. Invariably, the language used in the home is Portuguese, and the children do not speak Aikanã.

### 7.6 Interaction with other Indians

Research by anthropologist Price showed that the Indians of southern Rondônia have customarily married across language barriers easily. Caspar remarks, "Intermarriage between friendly tribes seems to be an old usage" (1953:243), and wordlists show an impressive degree of linguistic borrowing. Intermarriage probably became even more common during the rubber boom, as depopulation made it necessary for people to find spouses wherever they could (Price 1981:36).

In Gleba today, about half of the marriages are mixed, either white/Indian, or two Indians from different tribes. Though those from Gleba discriminate against people from Rio do Ouro, there are many marriages between young people from the two villages. With only one exception, all marriages in Rio do Ouro are between Aikanã.

The Latundê Indians of Barroso village have the lowest prestige, and are somewhat culturally and economically subjugated by the Aikanã and the Kwazá. Due to the tiny populations of Kwazá and Latundê, it is next to impossible for them to marry within their tribe. Thus, the survival of these languages, and even the people as a distinct group, is very tenuous.

## 7.7 Language vitality

Although the indigenous language is strongest in Rio do Ouro, it is not a stable diglossic situation. There is no specific domain for each language, but rather, Portuguese and Aikanã seem to mix rather freely.

Neither the missionaries nor their children living in the village speak Aikanã. The health worker in Rio do Ouro is a Rikbaktsa Indian married to an Aikanã. Neither she nor their children can speak Aikanã, so all health services are in Portuguese. Several people predicted that mixed marriages would be common in the future, because there are very few Aikanã girls.

Today, Rio do Ouro village has difficult access to the city, but there are plans for a highway to pass within three kilometers of Rio do Ouro. We saw the surveyors working on that road and, as of 2007, we heard it is mostly paved. Presently, the people at Rio do Ouro have a lot more contact with Portuguese speakers, and their Aikanã vitality will likely decrease.

The fact that missionaries have been able to live in Rio do Ouro for so long without learning Aikanã is an indication of their high level of bilingualism. We met only one older man, around 70 years old, who seemed to understand very little Portuguese, but we were able to communicate in Portuguese with others of that age bracket.

Language vitality is weaker in Gleba. Of the fifteen family units in the village, only seven of them are pure Aikanã who don't speak Portuguese in the home. The rest of the households are mixed: three Aikanã/Sabane, one Aikanã/Brazilian, one Aikanã/Latundê, one Aikanã/Terena, one Aikanã/Negarote, and one Aikanã/Kwazá. The Aikanã/Kwazá family speaks Aikanã in the home, but the rest of the families speak only Portuguese. In Gleba, community meetings are bilingual, because about half of the community doesn't understand Aikanã.

Estimates as to the number of Kwazá speakers vary from seven to twenty five. In São Pedro Indian Reserve, there is only one Kwazá speaker (van der Voort 1998). Very few children speak the language. There may be one monolingual Kwazá elder living in Chupinguaia (Cirilio, personal communication). A handful of Kwazá are trilingual in Aikanã and Portuguese.

In Barroso village, there is one Aikanã/Kwazá family that speaks Portuguese and one Kwazá family that, in all probability, speaks their own language. The rest of the population primarily speaks Portuguese.

It seems likely that the Aikanã and Kwazá, who live in the cities of Vilhena, Chupinguaia, Porto Velho, and Pimenta Bueno, speak more Portuguese than Aikanã.

## 7.8 Dress

The Aikanã men and women we observed were all well dressed, much like the Brazilians in the surrounding towns. One missionary said he had stopped bringing in bags of used clothes to Gleba about six years ago, because the Aikanã had complained that they were all out of style. This is an example of how far the people in Gleba have acculturated to the wider Brazilian culture.

## 8 Conclusions

This survey has shown that the Aikanã are losing their language in some domains and are gaining bilingualism in Portuguese. Given the direction of language shift and the low level of interest in indigenous literacy, it would be unwise to embark on a language-development project at this stage. The Aikanã would likely view any such endeavor solely as the responsibility of outsiders.

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