

An Endangered Language in Portugal

Location

Minderico, also known as *Piação* and *Piação dos Charales do Ninhou*, is an Ibero-Romance language spoken in Minde. Minde is a 900-year-old village that belongs to the municipality of Alcanena, district of Santarém, in Portugal, and lies 115 km north of Lisbon and 240 km south of Oporto. It is geographically isolated: it lies in a close depression between the plateau of Santo António (on the south) and the plateau of São Mamede (on the north), and is surrounded on its west side by a polje (a large flat plain in karst territory that inundates during rainy winters and spring seasons).



Music pavilion at the center of Minde, a main meeting point in the village (Photo by Vera Ferreira, 2009)

Background Information

Minde is essentially an industrial village with an almost monoindustry of textiles and wool artefacts. From the 16th century on, the blankets of Minde became famous all over the country. Due to this popularity, the wool carders and merchants of Minde began to use Minderico in order to protect their products from "intruders" and to earn more profit in their commercialization.

Later, what emerged as a sociolect based mainly on Old Portuguese rapidly expanded its vocabulary (in a tight relation to the social-cultural experiences of the Mindericos - inhabitants of Minde) and extended to all social and professional groups in Minde, becoming a full-fledged language (with a complex morphosyntax, different from Portuguese) and the main means of communication in the village.



Elias Raposo explaining traditional blanket production (Photo by Vera Ferreira, 2009)



View of Minde from the plateau of Santo António (Photo by Vera Ferreira, 2009)

Endangerment

The number of speakers of Minderico declined drastically in the past years. Today, only half of the population of Minde, which decreased from 7000 inhabitants in 1970 to 3200 in 2011, knows Minderico. There are approximately 1000 passive speakers and around 150 active speakers, but only 25 of them are fluent speakers. All speakers of Minderico are bilingual: they speak Portuguese along with Minderico. While Portuguese is the language of administration and school system, Minderico remains now almost restricted to the family. But even in this private context there is a clear pressure from Portuguese. Minderico is no longer taught to children.



Vera Ferreira interacting with the Minderico community at the beginning of the documentation project (Photo by Peter Bouda, fieldwork assistant, 2009)

Aims of the project

- » Creation of a Minderico corpus, containing: (a) transcribed and annotated recordings of oral performances (language of everyday communication, textile production and trade, religious and public events); (b) written and visual material; (c) information on fauna and flora; (d) sociolinguistic, historical and cultural information. For that, old data collected from 2001 to 2008 by Vera Ferreira were processed and new data have been collected during several field trips and direct work with the language community.
- » Development of the first Minderico (multimedia) lexicon, incorporating in it a maximum of cultural information.
- » Elaboration of a sketch grammar.

The Mindericos and the Project

The Minderico community is very engaged in the preservation of their language and collaborated with the documentation team from the beginning of the project, helping in the collection and processing of data. The young generation was particularly interested in video documentation and the work with LEXUS. In addition, the material collected and transcribed in the project was used for several revitalization activities developed by the community, for instance in the locally organized Minderico lessons that were indirectly stimulated by the documentation project and in the development of an interactive bilingual map of Minde, which is being used for several public events that take place in Minde.

The Team

- » **PD Dr. phil. habil. Annette Endruschat**, University of Regensburg - Project coordinator
- » **Vera Ferreira**, University of Regensburg - Research assistant, responsible for the documentation of Minderico



Peter Bouda (fieldwork assistant) preparing the hardware for a video recording in a local tavern (Photo by Vera Ferreira, 2009)

CONTACT ADDRESS

Vera Ferreira
Centro Interdisciplinar de Documentação
Linguística e Social
Rua Dr. António da Silva Ferreira Totta 29
2395-182 Minde, Portugal

vferreira@cidles.eu