Awetí is a Tupian language spoken by an indigenous community in the multilingual environment of the Upper Xingu, Central Brazil. The Awetí community is currently (2012) made up of 95, 65 and 30 persons, respectively. After the first contact (end of 19th century), the Awetí estimated population of 400 was reduced by very few older specifically trained story-tellers. Preservation of the latter precious tradition is of utmost importance for the project. Thus, in 2003 the chief Yakumin was invited to Europe in order to provide a better understanding of the project’s institutional background and working procedures.

During the project, the researchers have started to train the two Awetí teachers and other young men and women to record audio and video data in order to continue the documentation on their own in the future, and to write their language, also to help with the time consuming data-transcription.

There have been several follow-ups growing out of the DOBES project on Awetí. Sabine Reiter has completed a PhD thesis about ideophones in Awetí, and Sebastian Drude has held a Dilthey-Fellowship with support from the VolkswagenStiftung, also dedicated to the study of Awetí. He is now head of The Language Archive, at the Max-Planck-Institute for Psycholinguistics in Nijmegen, which has as one of its roots the technical work for DOBES. Most importantly, a local Archive on Amazonian Languages has been established at the Museu Goeldi in Belém, Pará, which was also largely motivated by the several DOBES project based at Museu Goeldi. Sebastian Drude was involved in this, and also in the establishing of another Archive at the Museu do Indio in Rio de Janeiro.

The Awetí Project participated in the DOBES-programme from November 2000 until March 2006, under the responsibility of Prof. Dr. Hans-Heinrich Lieb and with Sebastian Drude as its principal researcher and Sabine Reiter as a second researcher. The project worked in close co-operation with two other DOBES-projects on Kuikuro and Trumai, situated in the same geographic and cultural area.

Although all the children born in the major villages still acquire Awetí as their first language, young people, which form the lion’s share of the population, are particularly open-minded to Brazilian language and culture which is reinforced by mass media (television / radio broadcast). One consequence of this is the decreasing interest in learning the rich oral literature, still known by very few older specifically trained story-tellers. Preservation of the latter precious tradition is most important to the Awetí, thus much data of this type was collected.

In addition to the work directly related to the documentation itself, the Awetí project has made some valuable methodological and technical contributions within the context of DOBES as one of the pioneer attempts to unify language documentation on a larger scale. The maximal linguistic annotation system of Advanced Glossing has been proposed by Lieb and Drude in 2001, and Drude has developed a Shoebox-Set-up, based on Advanced Glossing, for interlinearising and annotating texts with linguistic data of a broad range of systematic types, from phonetic/phonological, morphological and syntactic to semantic.

A fair and respectful cooperation between the Awetí and the documentation team was of utmost importance for the project. Thus, in 2003 the chief Yakumin was invited to Europe in order to provide a better understanding of the project’s institutional background and working procedures.

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Sebastian Drude with the father of the chief and main informant, recording narratives (2002)