



The ethnolinguistic composition of southeastern Rondônia

Documenting two endangered language isolates

This project focuses on the documentation of Aikanã and Kwaza, two highly endangered languages (170 and 25 speakers, respectively) spoken in southeastern Rondônia, Brazil. Like Basque in Europe, both languages are genetic isolates, having no known relatives. In addition to language documentation, the project will gather information on the history and culture of the Aikanã and Kwazá, including their relationships with neighbouring peoples and with the ecological context. The project will result in a wealth of data for additional descriptive, typological, and historical-comparative studies, besides fulfilling the wishes of the Aikanã and Kwaza communities to have their languages documented (and hopefully strengthened).



Marilza, Maria Tadeu and Josélia Aikanã grinding boiled manioc for chicha (2011)



Sr. Pe'i Aikanã, the last player of the sacred *purikai* flute, in a legendary Aikanã cavern (2009)

Endangered land, endangered cultures

Rondônia is one of the most linguistically diverse parts of South America. The state, about the size of the U.K., is home to approximately 25 languages, divided into five linguistic families and three language isolates. Much of such diversity is concentrated in southeastern Rondônia (see map), which is one of the most degraded parts of the Amazon region today. The indigenous populations have dwindled in numbers due to introduced diseases, violence and forced resettlement. Portuguese is almost everywhere the lingua franca and is gradually also acquiring the function of a first language. Given such context of rapid environmental and social decline, the comprehensive documentation of the region's linguistic and cultural heritage is a matter of extreme urgency.



The Aikanã girls Xiripi (Flávia) and Inüte Dadü (Neuza), after initiation (2011)



In the numbered reserves on the map the following indigenous languages nowadays are spoken: 1 - Akuntsun (Tupari), Kanoê (isolate); 2 - Aikanã (isolate), Kwaza (isolate); 3 - Mekens (Tupari), 4 - unknown (unclassified); 5 - Djeoromitxi (Macro-Jê), Tupari (Tupari), Makuráp (Tupari), Aruá (Mondé); 6 - Arikapú (Macro-Jê), Djeoromitxi, Tupari (Tupari), Makuráp, Wayoro (Tupari), Kanoê; 7 - Latundê (Nambikwara), Salamã (Mondé), Aikanã, Kwaza. The Aikanã and Kwaza languages, which represent the central focus of the documentation activities in the present project, are spoken in reserves number 2 and 7.

Who we are

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Luiz Aikanã, Xibi Kwazá and Pe'i Aikanã, preparing for the girls' initiation festivities (2011)

Data in the Archive

This project will result in an extensive archive of transcribed, translated and annotated audio and video recordings of linguistic, cultural, ethnobiological, archaeological and historical importance in the Aikanã language and/or concerning the Aikanã people. In addition, the existing archive of Kwaza documentation, which resulted from an earlier project by the team leader, will be incorporated and will be complemented by the same modern systematic documentation

efforts as for Aikanã. Finally, the project will include an ethnohistorical study of the Aikanã and Kwaza peoples based on field recordings and existing documents.



Sr. Pe'i Aikanã, having cut bamboo for flutes, showing a seed pod the Aikanã call *hürüzau* (2009)



Maize chicha prepared in the traditional way by Marlene Aikanã (1996)

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