

Linguistic vitality in the Awetí indigenous community

A case study from the Upper Xingu multilingual area

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Abstract

Awetí faces pressure from two languages: Kamaiúra (a related language), and Portuguese. Kamaiúra and Portuguese have different domains of use, and different bilingualism patterns.

Introduction

Upper Xingu: ARAWAK: Mehinaku, Waura, Yawalapiti
 CARIB: Kuikuru, Kalapalo, Nahukwa, Matipuhy
 TUPI: Kamaiúra, Awetí
 ISOLATE: Trumai

Awetí village A: Old, central village, predominantly Awetí, 92 people, 8 houses

Awetí village B: Begun 2002, Awetí-Kamaiúra, 67 people, 5 houses, 5 km from Posto Leonardo.

Data for the Study

- 1) Census data 1998-2007
- 2) Sociolinguistic questionnaire of 30 Awetí youths (16 male, 14 female in Village A). It was not politically expedient to work with both villages.
- 3) Unstructured interviews
- 4) Observation (2002-2005)

Ethnographic Information

1924 – 80

1954 – 23 (measles)

2007 – 160

-Cross-cousin marriages preferred (children of siblings of opposite sex).

-10 Awetí married to Kamaiúra.

-Patrilocal. Wives move in with their husbands.

-Growing influence of tvs radios, DVD players, generators, motor boats, Toyotas.

-Associação

-2 teachers; 2 health assistants (per village?)

These positions are very prestigious and therefore given to male group members of higher rank.

-Major source of income is selling artifacts?

Lexical Influences from Other Languages

- A) Genderlect – Enumania and Aweti. Aweti were all killed by Tonoloy, leaving the Enumania (and their Aweti wives, since they are patrilocal). So, the women speak more like Aweti, and the men more like Enumania.
- B) Amplifying from Kamaiura (use both Aweti and Kamaiura words).
Code mixing from Kamaiura (wapuka, K; vs. tywamunuryt, A)
- C) Young people use proper names and *apelidos* instead of kinship terms preferred by elders.
- D) Fish, insects, plants, geographical places, are restricted to older speakers.
- E) Portuguese loanwords – with Aweti phonology in older people; with Portuguese phonology in younger speakers.
- F) Positive attitudes to Portuguese.
- G) Full proficiency in Aweti is only reached at an advanced age, if at all.
- H) People with strong tendency toward Portuguese loanwords are considered non-proficient in Aweti, and ridiculed.
- I) Younger community members ... could generally be observed to be more indifferent towards indigenous tradition.
- J) Revised orthography
- K) Kamaiura is not more prestigious

Individual Linguistic Competences

In village A:

- Of the 30 interviewed, only 1 had 4 Aweti grandparents. The rest were mixed, mostly with Kamaiura.
- 7 of the 30 had Kamaiura as their first language.
- Only 5 had no knowledge of Kamaiura.
- All 14 men spoke Portuguese; 7 women spoke Portuguese
- Most young men were highly motivated to speak Portuguese.

• Patterns and Domains of language use

- The traditional language policy of the Upper Xinguanos: Adults from other communities who come to live in the Aweti village are not entitled to speak Aweti.
- Mixed couples speak their own language, and passively understand their spouse's (unless she is Aweti-Kamaiura)
- Mixed marriage children are bilingual in the house, and Aweti speaking outside.
- Recent influx of Kamaiura wives to both villages.
- In 2008, 25% of village A left to form their own village (Village C?). Everyone who left was Kamaiura dominant. Will the village be Kamaiura or Aweti?
- In village B, 46% of the population is Kamaiura dominant.
- In both villages, the language of school is Portuguese
- Village B is particularly good in Portuguese (Closer to Posto Leonardo, more Kamaiura)

- “The material in Aweti [DoBeS corpus] may counterbalance the Portuguese bias in literacy”
- Each evening, the inhabitants of all houses were watching *novellas* and news and action movies (occasional DVD’s of Xinguano festivities).
- Loss of interest in Aweti oral tradition. There are 2 competent Aweti storytellers. Among adolescents and young adults there was not much interest in continuing this tradition.
- Hopes they’ll listen to these traditional stories on computer now.
- Some young men have email addresses.

Conclusion and Future Prospects

- Not too threatened.
- This attitude [toward Portuguese] expressed by young male Aweti may turn out to be the incipient stage of language shift to Portuguese.
- This may be counteracted by DoBeS.

Factors Favouring Maintenance

Documentation video
 Upper Xingu policy
 Many kids monolingual in Aweti
 Aweti schoolteacher
 Village A is poor and far from Posto
 Code mixing is unacceptable
 Documentation project
 Creation of regular income sources

Factors Favouring Shift

Low Population
 Recent splits in community
 Bilingualism in Kamaiura
 Bilingualism in Portuguese
 Village B is close to Posto
 Reduced lexicon
 Young people indifferent toward culture