

Languages in brazil



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The Portuguese spoken in Brazil is similar to, but not the same, as the Portuguese spoken in Portugal. It has been influenced over the centuries by indigenous, Amerindian languages. It has the same alphabet as the English language (Latin) with the addition of accent marks over some letters in certain words.

Number of Brazilian Languages

According to Ethnologue. com, the most widely consulted inventory of the world's languages used today, there are 238 listed individual languages and dialects listed for Brazil. However, only 218 of these are living and 20 do not longer exist. Of the living languages, 202 are indigenous and 16 are non-indigenous. In addition, 7 are institutional, 30 are developing, 27 are strong, 57 are in trouble, and 97 are dying.

Brazil's language diversity is very surprising and interesting. There are several indigenous communities and individuals who are able to speak or understand more than one language. Also, it is common to find complete communities speaking several languages. Some of the principal indigenous languages are Guarani, Arara, Bororo, Canella, Kaingang, Terena, Tucano and Nheengatu. Getting to know this variety of languages represents a real challenge for many linguists. The objective for many projects of indigenous school education is to keep these languages alive.

The official language policy

Portuguese is the official and widely spoken language by 99% of the Brazilian population, more than 211million speakers (based on the latest United

Nations estimates, January 2019). Since Portuguese is the official language, government departments, businesses, schools, and the media use it every day.

As Cabral, de Araujo, and Da Silva (2016) claim, programs to indigenous teachers at the high school level are being offered by every Department of Education in the states with indigenous populations. Some public universities, in those states, have also intercultural indigenous programs. There are states that have more than one intercultural program, particularly those with large numbers of indigenous peoples, as is the case for the States of Mato Grosso, Amazonas, and Pará. It is expected that this degree program can admit graduates of the High School Teacher Training (High School Magisterium).

The dominant language groups and their attitudes towards the linguistic minorities

Massini-Cagliari (2004) claims that the majority of Portuguese speakers marginalize language minorities in Brazil. She believes that language minorities in Brazil have never been recognized as legitimate or even as existing by the media. She affirms that the main TV channels always take into consideration the opinions of the majority of people in their programs. In this sense, linguistic minorities in Brazil are ‘statistically non-significant’ for them. Their choice is not only economic, but also ideological. The media (including TV, radio, and newspapers) have always embraced the idea of Brazil being a linguistically homogeneous giant.” (p. 4)

The status of the linguistic minorities

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Minority languages of Brazil are made up of immigrant and indigenous languages. The most widespread immigrant languages include those from Asia and Europe. Some Asian languages spoken in Brazil are: Japanese, Mandarin, Cantonese, and Macanese (a Chinese-Portuguese creole language). European languages spoken in Brazil include: German, Italian, Spanish, Ukrainian, Polish, and Pomeranian. Most of the indigenous languages of Brazil are concentrated in the northern regions of the country. The most widely spoken of these (with more than 10, 000 speakers) include: Kaingang, Ticuna, Kaiwa Guarani, and Macushi.

The actual extent and degree of bilingualism

As stated by the site *Povos Indígenas no Brasil*, it is common to find indigenous peoples or individuals in situations of bilingualism, trilingualism or even multilingualism. In the same communities, it is possible to come across individuals who speak only the indigenous language, others who speak just Portuguese and others still who are bilingual or multilingual. Among the people of the Negro River basin, men often speak between three and five languages, or even more – some of them speak eight or ten. Additionally, languages, for them, are elements that constitute their personal identity. A man must, for example, speak the same language as his father, that is, share with him the same ‘linguistic group’. However, he has to marry a woman who speaks a different language, in other words, who belongs to a different ‘linguistic group’.

The language of education

The language of instruction in schools and universities is Portuguese. However, Indigenous peoples have the challenge to learn Portuguese if they want to defend their social, economic, and political rights. Silva (2009) considers that the Brazilian government is trying to impose all language minorities an official language: Portuguese. According to him, “ the reduction of the number of indigenous languages in Brazil was the result of physical extermination and of linguistic plans and policies carried to these peoples, which were made concrete in formal school education.” (p. 4)

Linguistic problems faced by the country

According to Vitorelli’s 2014 study, the number of languages by the time Portuguese sailors’ arrival in Brazil was estimated at around 1, 200 different languages. So many languages have been lost since the beginning of colonization. Besides, some of the existing languages are getting extinct or are under serious threat of disappearing in the short run. There are few policies to preserve those endangered languages

In addition, Vitorelli (2014) explains that although the indigenous languages in Brazil are protected, they are limited to their own communities. He adds that Brazil has adopted laws that would enable effective protection of the Indians and their culture. However, the strict interpretation of these laws, adopted by Brazilian Courts, is resulting in restrictions of the rights of the Indians, among them, the right to express themselves in their own language. Jalil and Moura (2011) state that some important linguistic challenges that Brazil faces are poor quality and little access to bilingual education to children and language minority communities, little teacher education with

regard to bilingualism and bilingual education, and lack of curriculums, methodologies, and materials for bilingual education.

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