**Local Ecologies of Language Endangerment: The Differential Evolution of the Línguas Gerais in Brazil**

Aline Cruz (Instituto Takinahaky/UFG)

Mufwene (2025) argues that although language endangerment and loss (LEL) is driven by globalization, it is also shaped by local ecological factors that vary across colonization styles. The evolution of Brazil's *línguas gerais* offers a natural case study for testing this hypothesis. Following Rodrigues (1996), the term *língua geral* refers to languages that emerged from the coastal expansion of Tupi-Guarani and were used in the colonization and catechization of diverse Indigenous peoples. Two main varieties developed: (1) São Paulo's Língua Geral (LGP), extinct by the late 18th century, and (2) the Amazonian Língua Geral, which evolved into Nheengatu. The latter has since diverged into three distinct languages (Silva, Cruz & Lima-Schwade 2025): Nheengatu of the Solimões River (Silva 2020), of the Middle Amazon (Lima-Schwade 2021), and of the Upper Rio Negro (Cruz 2011; Moore 2014).

Upper Rio Negro Nheengatu, spoken by over 5,000 people, has itself split into three dialects: (a) the Içana-Negro variety, spoken by Baniwa and Baré peoples (Arawakan) alongside Portuguese; (b) the Xié variety, spoken as a first language by the predominantly monolingual Warekena (Arawakan); and (c) the variety used by the Dâw (Nadahup) as a lingua franca among elders, now in advanced obsolescence as Portuguese has displaced it.

By cross-referencing historical and geographical data on the spread of the *línguas gerais* with data on the languages they replaced, we show that each *língua geral*'s trajectory is conditioned by specific local factors: (a) the Indigenous groups previously present in each region, and (b) the forces driving the language's spread — commerce along the Solimões, interethnic marriage in the Upper Rio Negro and Middle Amazon, or Portuguese territorial expansion in the case of LGP. These factors explain both LEL patterns and structural divergence across the varieties, including: (1) phonological variation in vowel inventories and stress patterns; (2) divergent developments of the active–stative system (Cruz, Silva & Lima-Schwade 2021), conservative in the Middle Amazon and innovative in the Upper Rio Negro and Solimões; and (3) the emergence of plural agreement in Upper Rio Negro Nheengatu under Arawak influence (Cruz 2015).

Our analysis draws on: (a) historical documents recording pre-contact languages in each region, following Nimuendaju (1940); (b) oral history from Yudja, Ngôkrejê, and Tentehar communities; (c) scholarship by Indigenous researchers such as Soares Guajajara (2014) and Silva & Vaz Filho (2019); and (d) linguistic data from the project *Variedades do Nheengatu no Amazonas* (CNPq), analyzed through a functional-typological framework.

This paper offers a Brazilian contribution to LEL research, demonstrating how different ecological settings led to the extinction of LGP, the endangerment of Solimões and Dâw-spoken Nheengatu, and, conversely, the maintenance and spread of Upper Rio Negro Nheengatu among the Baré, Baniwa, and Warekena. A detailed history of the *línguas gerais* is, we argue, a prerequisite for understanding the endangerment of Indigenous languages in Brazil before Portuguese became the region's dominant force.