



**PORTUGUESE LANGUAGE EXPANSION IN SÃO TOMÉ AND  
PRÍNCIPE: AN OVERVIEW**  
*UM PANORAMA DA EXPANSÃO DA LÍNGUA PORTUGUESA EM SÃO TOMÉ  
E PRÍNCIPE*

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**Abstract**

This paper describes how the Portuguese language came to be widely spoken in the Republic of São Tomé and Príncipe and demonstrates how the spread of Portuguese language can be associated with the endangerment of other languages in the archipelago. A country that has been multilingual since its formation has moved towards monolingualism, marginalizing native languages or pushing them into obsolescence in the process. Based on a literature review, we suggest that the spread of Portuguese and its consolidation as the dominant language are associated with a complex socio-historical process, including urbanization, mass schooling, media and the desire of local elites to remain connected to an imperial language and the benefits of such a connection. The choice of the ruling elite to adopt Portuguese as the official language in the young republic in 1975 effectively created the mechanisms for the diffusion of Portuguese and set the stage for the endangerment of other local languages.

**Keywords:** Portuguese, language endangerment, multilingualism, language shift, São Tomé and Príncipe.

**Resumo**

Neste texto, descrevemos como a língua portuguesa se tornou amplamente falada na República de São Tomé e Príncipe e demonstramos como a expansão do português pode ser associada a uma situação de ameaça das demais línguas faladas no arquipélago. Assim, um país que tem sido multilíngue desde sua formação no final do século XV caminha em direção ao monolinguismo, marginalizando as suas línguas nacionais e relegando-as à obsolescência. Sugerimos aqui, baseados em uma revisão da literatura, que a difusão do português e sua consolidação como língua dominante estão associadas a um complexo processo sócio-histórico que inclui urbanização, escolarização em massa, mídia, e o desejo das elites locais de permanecerem ligadas a uma língua imperial e aos benefícios dessa conexão. A escolha da elite dominante ao adotar o português como língua oficial na independência da jovem república em 1975 efetivamente criou os mecanismos para a difusão da língua portuguesa e criou o cenário de ameaça às demais línguas faladas no território.

**Palavras-chave:** Português, multilinguismo, línguas ameaçadas, mudança linguística, São Tomé e Príncipe.

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## Introduction

In this overview, based on a literature review, we describe how Portuguese came to be the major language in the Republic of São Tomé and Príncipe (STP) and suggest that its expansion has imperilled other languages spoken in the archipelago. STP, a multilingual country since its formation in the late fifteenth century, it is now moving towards monolingualism, marginalizing native languages or pushing them into the process of extinction. The spread and dominance of the Portuguese language in STP are the result of sociolinguistic dynamics within the multilingual context of the country. However, the present circumstances cannot be described solely to the language policies pursued by the government. Instead, the current reach of the Portuguese language in STP is associated with a complex socio-historical process comprising urbanization, mass schooling, media, the dominant characteristics intrinsic to imperial languages, and a diffuse desire among the local elites to remain connected to the imperial language and to the benefits (real or imagined) associated with that connection. This desire of the elites has adversely affected local linguistic diversity and influenced the sociolinguistic fabric of the archipelago. These aforementioned factors have led to the erasure of other languages (both indigenous and transplanted) spoken in the territory. Notably, the coexistence of languages spoken in STP, including Portuguese, can be attributed to socio-historical processes of domination by groups in and out of authority. STP has, however, demonstrated a very weak ability to promote linguistic planning to facilitate the survival of its national languages.

The initial colonization of STP favoured the emergence of a Creole language: the Portuguese-based proto-creole of the Gulf of Guinea (FERRAZ, 1979; BANDEIRA, 2016; BANDEIRA; ARAUJO; FINBOW, 2019). Factors such as isolation, the removal of certain groups of speakers from the islands, linguistic contributions of African languages, creative performances of local speakers and constant influx of new actors promoted the speciation of proto-creole. Throughout the sixteenth century, Santome (ISO code 639-3: CRI) developed in the urban and rural colonial centres of São Tomé Island, while Angolar (ISO 639-3: AOA) is the language of the descendants of slaves who escaped from the sugar mills and formed maroon communities. Proto-creole speakers were transferred to the islands of Príncipe and Ano Bom, where local conditions contributed to diversification, resulting in the emergence of Lung'le (ISO 639-3: PRI) and Fa d'Ambô<sup>2</sup> (ISO 639-3: FAB), respectively. Following the collapse of the sugar industry in the first half of the seventeenth century, STP was relatively isolated from global routes until the development of coffee and cocoa agribusinesses in the second half of the nineteenth century. These industries attracted investment from Portugal and intensive labour, mainly from Portugal's colonies in Africa.

In the twentieth century, the multilingual environment in STP consisted of the following

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<sup>2</sup> Fa d'Ambô is spoken on the island of Ano Bom, which belonged to Portugal from its discovery until 1778, to Spain from 1778 until 1968, and thereafter to the Republic of Equatorial Guinea (ARAUJO *et al.*, 2013).

actors. The ethnic group *Forro*, whose language is Santome or Forro, which is the most widely spoken creole in the archipelago. The ethnic group *Kabuverdianu*, descendants of Cape Verdean contract workers, spoke their language mainly on farms (locally called ‘*roças*’) until 1975, when the speakers spread to towns. The ethnic group *Principense* were speakers of Lung’Ie or Principense. The number of Principense speakers stood at less than 200 by the second half of the twentieth century (VALKHOFF, 1966; GÜNTHER, 1973, MAURER, 2009; AGOSTINHO, 2016)<sup>3</sup>. The ethnic group *Angolar*, speakers of the Angolar language (or *Lingua Ngolá*), lived in relatively isolated areas of major towns with little outside contact (SEIBERT, 2007). Finally, the ethnic group *Tonga*, comprising contract workers and their descendants, were confined to rural properties until at least the 1960s and speaking a language described as the *Portuguese of the Tongas*<sup>4</sup> (ROUGÉ, 1992; BAXTER, 2018), in addition to European Portuguese inhabitants and a small local urban elite speaking, respectively, European Portuguese and a local variety of Portuguese, with typical linguistic features of second-language learning (see BOUCHARD 2017).

In this paper, we address how Portuguese came to be the major language in STP (see Table 1). In addition, we investigate which, if any, language policies in the archipelago promote or were put in place to promote the Portuguese language to the point of it being the main spoken language, as well as a threat to all other languages spoken in STP. To answer these questions, we analyse a series of factors, such as the process of colonization in the archipelago during the two primary economic waves (in the sixteenth and twentieth centuries), importation of labour to meet the demands of agribusinesses in these waves, process of urbanization since the 1950s, implementation of a school system, diffusion of Portuguese-language media over the last forty years, and sanitary improvements that have increased life expectancy and reduced child mortality.

Table 1. Languages spoken in STP (1981–2012). Data from the national censuses of 1981 and 2012; adapted from INE (2016).

Year	Population Total	Portuguese	Santome	Lung’Ie	Angolar	Kabuverdianu
1981	96,661	60,519 (62.61%)	54,387 (56.27%)	1,533 (1.59%)	—	—
2012	187,356	170,309 (90.9%)	62,889 (33.57%)	4,224 (2.25%)	11,413 (6.09%)	14,725 (7.86%)

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. In section 2, we describe aspects of STP colonization and the role of imported labour in the construction of the local social and

<sup>3</sup> The number of speakers of Lung’Ie varies according to the source. Here, we are assuming Maurer’s (2009) and Agostinho’s (2016) data as accurate.

<sup>4</sup> The term ‘Tonga’ currently refers to anyone whose parents are from different ethnic groups (BOUCHARD, 2017, p. 214), and therefore does not necessarily refer to the Tonga ethnic group as described by Rougé (1992) and Baxter (2002).

linguistic fabrics. Section 3 describes how the urbanization process (beginning in the 1950s), mass schooling in the late colonial period and popularization of media after independence (1975) promoted the idea of political-social unification through the adoption of Portuguese, a language with a high linguistic capital to the detriment and marginalization of other languages. In section 4, we analyse the population census data of STP to show how language substitution for Portuguese became unchallenged in the twenty-first century based on data about the language skills of various age groups in the population. The final section presents a few concluding remarks.

### **Colonization of São Tomé and Príncipe and the role of its language groups**

Portugal set up a colony in STP in the sixteenth century, supported initially by a sugar-dominated agro-industrial economy and STP being an entrepot for the shipment of slaves between West Africa and the Americas. Later, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, coffee and cocoa were the main drivers of the economy. However, Portugal failed to ensure the presence of a large contingent of Portuguese speakers in the archipelago during colonial era (NEGREIROS, 1895; TENREIRO, 1961; GARFIELD, 1992). The Portuguese language was present in STP during the period of colonization, when the islands were uninhabited, during the rise of sugarcane culture (decreasing to a minimum when the sugar industry collapsed in the seventeenth century), during the second agro-industrial surge of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and at the time of independence in 1975, when the local elite elected it as the official language of the young republic. Language policies implemented since independence have promoted the Portuguese language in the islands and, in doing so, alienated other local languages and threatened the archipelago's multilingual status. To understand the diffusion of the Portuguese language in STP in the last quarter of the twentieth century and the early part of the twenty-first century, one must consider the existence of multiple sociolinguistic norms, social and linguistic historical processes and complex coexistence between local and ethnic groups and their languages.

The *de facto* colonization of STP was related to sugar production, which began in 1517 with the construction of two sugarcane mills (GARFIELD, 1992). The number of mills in the heyday of sugarcane cultivation is not precisely known. Eyzaguirre (1986, p. 60) suggested that there were about 200 mills, while Serafim (2000, p. 258) suggested that there were 120 mills in 1620. If we consider that each mill employed an average of fifty slaves (EYZAGUIRE, 1986, p. 60), the population of African workers in the mills ranged from 6,000 to 10,000. Garfield (1992) estimated that between 9,000 and 12,000 slaves lived on the islands around the year 1580 at the height of sugar production. Apart from Africans, there was a small population of Portuguese speakers. Seibert (2015, p. 105-6) argued that “often, only the owner or, in his absence, the overseer was European or half-breed. The caretaker, who ran the farm staff, could be white or half-breed, but it was also often a freed black slave”. Thus, the Portuguese

population during the Sugar Age on São Tomé Island was fairly small compared to the enslaved or freed population. In addition, Seibert (2015, p. 108) stated “With the loss of the archipelago’s economic relevance, the presence of whites became insignificant. In 1758, out of a population of 12,672 on both islands, there were 53 whites (0.4%) and 8,880 slaves (70%), including those for re-exportation”.

The data presented in Table 2 indicate a limited presence of the Portuguese in STP between 1807 and 1950, and they did not exceed 3% of the population until 1950. Even the relative economic boom in the economy of São Tomé in the first half of the twentieth century did not attract a significant contingent of Portuguese people to the colony. At least until 1950, there appeared to be no demographically relevant European population to spread the language and serve as a model for a linguistic norm.

Table 2. Population of São Tomé (1807–1950); adapted from Nascimento (2000, 2008).

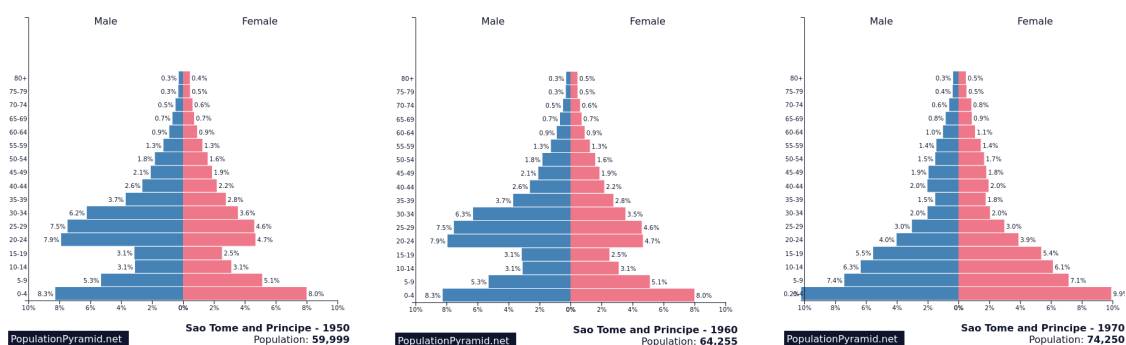
Year	Native	Portuguese	‘Hired’ workers	Total
1807	11,636	121 (1.03%)	—	11,767
1827	—	—	—	12,713
1843	12,568	185 (1.45%)	—	12,753
1860	10,282	151 (1.45%)	—	10,433
1870	17,568	449 (2.49%)	—	18,017
1875	?	741 (2.52%)	?	29,441
1900	18,128	1,012 (2.40%)	18,033 (42.83%)	42,103
1921	19,196	998 (1.69%)	38,697 (65.53%)	59,055
1940	31,036	995 (1.64%)	28,459 (47.05%)	60,490
1950	34,947	1,152 (1.91%)	24,060 (39.99%)	60,159

Despite the successful commercial exploitation of cocoa in the last third of the nineteenth century, STP remained unattractive to Portuguese immigrants. However, after the formal abolition of slavery in 1875, a new element was added to the local ecolinguistic system: the ‘hired’ worker. Hired workers (or ‘*serviçaes*’ in the terminology of the time) were mainly individuals from Portuguese colonies, such as Cape Verde, Angola, and Mozambique. They were generally confined to commercial farms (*roças*) on the islands and had little contact with local townspeople. Often, the working conditions of hired workers were analogous to those of slaves, prompting many protests from the international community (NEVINSON, 1906; CADBURY; BURTT; HORTON, 1910). Nevinson (1906, p. 191) presented data suggesting that the mortality rate among hired workers’ offspring born on STP islands was 25% while that among adults service workers on Príncipe Island was 20.67% annually. Throughout his account, Nevinson (1906, p. 190) described hired workers as ‘slaves’ and presented reports of corporal punishment, private imprisonment, little empathy on the part of employers regarding living conditions, neglect of reports of conscription and little effort to ensure the safe return

of hired workers to their countries of origin. Even though slavery was nominally abolished in the nineteenth century, the workers lived in dire conditions until STP gained independence. In addition, they were barred from socialising with the local society, which, in turn, considered hired workers socially inferior (BOUCHARD, 2017).

Age-separated population data (records available from 1950; see Fig. 1) reveal that in the demographic pyramids of the 1950s and 1960s, the presence of hired workers distorted the number of STP inhabitants in the age group of 20–40 years because male service workers accounted for approximately a quarter of the total population in this period.

Fig. 1. Population pyramids of São Tomé and Príncipe in 1950, 1960 and 1970.



Source: PopulationPyramid.net based on World Bank data.

The infant mortality rate in that period was high as well, reaching 37% among children of ages less than 5 years in the 1960s (WORLD BANK, 2019). A slight improvement in sanitary conditions driven by the urbanization of several areas of STP between 1950 and 1970 under the Estado Novo government (MILHEIRO, 2012) and the explosion in fertility rates (peaking at 6.53 children per woman in 1975) led to an increase in the number of people under the age of 20 years, as can be inferred from the 1970 population pyramid (WORLD BANK, 2019). As a result of the emigration of many hired workers between 1961 and 1965 owing to a decrease in cocoa cultivation, the adult population (20–40 years) decreased significantly compared to that in the 1950 and 1960 pyramids (see population pyramid for 1970, which shows a radical change in the demographic profile). However, this emigration did not radically change the profile of the Portuguese-speaking population in the archipelago because these workers were not necessarily monolingual Portuguese speakers; the permanence of their descendants did affect the promotion of the Portuguese language in the last decades of the twentieth century, as will be shown below. Despite their high representation in the total population of STP between 1900 and 1960, as shown in Figure 1, the linguistic influences of hired workers had little impact on the promotion of the Portuguese language in the archipelago during the first half of the twentieth century.

Furthermore, Seibert showed the presence of a mestizo population in São Tomé. However, this population, amounting to 7.1% of the total population in 1950, was ‘re-Africanized [sic]



over the centuries, and its European genetic heritage diluted in successive generations' (2014, p. 58-9). Conversely, Tenreiro (1961) stated that at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the preponderant element of the population was the mestizo, but Seibert (2014, p. 59-60) showed this information to be historically false and refuted by genetic studies of local populations (see THOMAS *et al.*, 2002, p. 408). This distinguished São Tomé from Cape Verde, where, at the same time, "the majority of the population was mestizo and the elite was mulatto and white" (SEIBERT, 2014, p. 59). In addition, when addressing the situation in Cape Verde, Carreira (2000, p.25) postulated that a society had formed there fundamentally with "Portuguese customs, habits, behaviour and language", but "in S. Tomé, it seems, the results of racial and cultural contacts can be considered insignificant if we compare them with those affected in that archipelago [Cape Verde]". Therefore, although the population of mestizos was small, their access to certain privileges, commonly intended only for those born in Europe, ensured that the group was relatively powerful. On the one hand, if the documentation does not clarify exactly which language was spoken by the mestizo population of São Tomé, on the other hand, it is reasonable to assume by observing similar situations in the Portuguese Atlantic (cf. LUCCHESI; BAXTER; RIBEIRO, 2009) that this class of mestizos effectively spoke a restructured Portuguese alongside one or more local languages. We understand 'restructured Portuguese' as a language arising from a situation of limited access to input and little normative pressure from European Portuguese, which can be associated with changes attributable to the influences of multilingual environments and the learning as a second language by speakers of other languages, which included Santome and Kabuverdianu (ISO 639-3: KEA). The influence and prestige associated with speaking the language of the group to which the mestizos aspired to belong cannot be disregarded either. Thus, given that the native mestizo Portuguese-speaking population remained at 8% and the European Portuguese population at 2%, until the middle of the twentieth century, approximately 10% of the population potentially spoke Portuguese in a multilingual environment (CARREIRA 2000; SEIBERT, 2014).

However, STP's declaration of political independence in 1975, the decree by the new socialist regime to collectivize the fields and the consequent increase in migration from farms to towns created opportunities for mestizo and Tonga descendants to spread Portuguese. These opportunities can only be understood with the help of data on urbanization processes in STP.

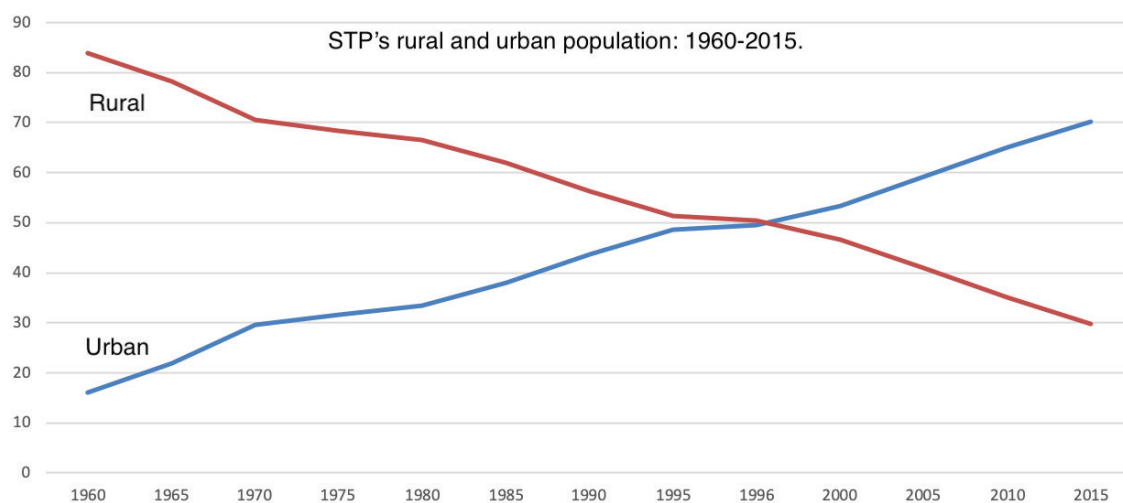
## **Urbanization, schooling, media and the role of elites**

### **Urbanization**

In 1960, STP was mainly a rural country, with 83.93% of its population living in the countryside. By 1975, the situation had changed somewhat, but 68.36% of the population still lived outside of the towns. The factors responsible for this increase in urban population included improved living conditions and the attractiveness of the largest towns of São Tomé

and Príncipe (MILHEIRO, 2012, p. 87-115). However, as Milheiro (2012) pointed out, the Estado Novo government began promoting its São Tomé Urbanization Plan since 1951, which involved the installation of a series of urban facilities, such as primary and secondary schools, residential neighbourhoods for civil servants, a central hospital and technical offices (port captaincy, customs, jail, government palace, etc.). The construction of these facilities attracted rural labour and improved the quality of life in the towns. The D. João II National Lyceum (now the Patrice Lumumba National Lyceum) and the Customs Building (both from 1952) kickstarted this phase of development. In 1954, the Government Palace, which is the current seat of the Presidency, was expanded. In 1957, the building of the Santomean Communications Company (Companhia Sãotomense de Comunicações) was erected. The current Ministry of Defence building was constructed in 1958 to house the International Police and State Defence (MILHEIRO, 2012, p. 101). The collectivization of the fields soon promoted the collapse of the San Tomean agro-industrial system. Besides, a failed land reform forced farmers to migrate to the towns, increasing the rate of urbanization (or rural exodus) to approximately 4.5% per year on average throughout the 1980s. Finally, in 1996, at the time of democratization, the urban population (50.55%) surpassed the rural population, and it stood at 70.17% in 2015.

Fig 2. Urban and rural populations of STP. Source: World Bank (2019) based on United Nations data Population Division. World Urbanization Prospects, 2018 Revision.



The importance of cocoa culture in the context of migration from the countryside to towns is crucial: post-war exports peaked at 12,172 metric tons in 1972 (KIESOW, 2017, p. 68). In 1975, STP exported 5,200<sup>5</sup> metric tons of cocoa, which was almost half the 10,000 metric tons exported in the year before independence. In 1975, approximately 3,000 Portuguese farm workers were forced to leave the country. They took with them the technical knowledge for managing all stages of production (from cocoa seedlings to foreign sales), which had dire consequences for all involved, in addition to strongly affecting cocoa production and the cocoa marketing network (KIESOW, 2017). In 1975, the government nationalized the cocoa fields.

<sup>5</sup> Cocoa export data are from Kiesow (2017).



Despite the initial success, production decreased to 3,750 tons in 1983 and stabilized in that range. Finally, although the land reform of the 1990s ensured the distribution of land among farmers, it did not provide the farmers (Tongas, Forros, and Cape Verdean descendants) with sufficient credit, training and equipment, which led to land abandonment and increased rural exodus. The failure of agrarian reform and the abandonment of rural properties brought to the towns the third generation of Tongas, who were once confined to the fields. Thus, the typical characteristics of the Tongas' Portuguese may have influenced the urban Portuguese vernacular in STP (see BAXTER, 2002; BOUCHARD, 2017). However, the historically low social status of the Tongas may have prevented them from exerting any influence on urban Portuguese.

## Schooling

Given that schools constitute one of the main vehicles for the promotion of an official language, the STP state endorsed Portuguese through schooling. Santome, Lung'le and Angolar are recognized as 'national languages' but not as official languages. In this sense, the construction of schools supported the diffusion of only the Portuguese language in STP (PONTÍFICE, 2007). Although the national school system faces the problems that are typical of developing countries, the state invested 4.86% and 5.08% of the GDP in education in 2016 and 2017, respectively. Because Portuguese is the only official language, it is used in all public communications. By electing Portuguese as the official language, the state of São Tomé has helped promote a linguistic substitution over the past 45 years, which has had profound effects on the São Tomean society.

Formal education, one of the main vehicles supporting any imperial language, faced its own expansion dilemmas in Portugal. These dilemmas were accentuated after the 1960s, when the idea of democratization of education began to take hold (see SEBASTIÃO; CORREIA, 2007), universalizing *de facto* only after the fall of the dictatorship of Oliveira Salazar. For instance, in 1960, the illiteracy rate in Portugal was 40% (NUNES, 2003, p 198). If education was not universalized even in Portugal, the interest in promoting schooling at the periphery of the Empire was even more challenging. At the end of the colonial period in STP, approximately 95% of the population was illiterate (SEIBERT, 2012; WORLD BANK, 2019). However, a small group of people in São Tomé had access to education. The enrichment of some Santomeans in the golden age of the cacao industry can be noted in the presence of black and mestizo students in Lisbon and Coimbra<sup>6</sup>. However, this was not indicative of a strong education policy in STP. For example, the construction of the D. João II National Lyceum building commenced in 1952 and was completed in 1954. Subsequently, the Silva e Cunha Technical School, built in 1969, was reclassified and renamed the National Lyceum, and it was the only secondary school in STP until 2011. Thus, the first lyceum in STP appeared after more than 450 years of Portuguese

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6 In 1957/58, the STP had 17 university students in Portugal (SEIBERT, 2012, p. 285).

colonization. The National Lyceum was built to house 600 students. In 2010, it housed 5,200 students according to Seibert (2012, p. 287). This symbolizes the precariousness of secondary education in São Tomé at the beginning of the twenty-first century. According to Seibert (2012), in 2001, only 3.6% of Santomeans had completed secondary education. However, current data reveal a change in the São Tomé school paradigm. In 2001, 37.07% of school-age children attended high school. By contrast, after 2011, 50.02% of school-age children enrolled in high school, meaning that for the first time in history, more than half of the school-age children were in school at the ideal age. In 2017, 89.71% of school-age children were enrolled in school, thus revealing a more consistent pattern of the relevance of secondary education in STP in the twenty-first century (WORD BANK, 2019).

The school system in STP generally faces problems related to teacher training and average teacher/student ratios. Moreover, the retention rate (no promotion to the next year) and dropout rate (children leaving schools) among students are high. According to INE data (2016, p. 5-53), only 19.7% of all teachers were trained in the area of pedagogy, and the teacher/student ratio in pre-school education stood at 1/80 during 2014-2016. In basic education (first to sixth grades), 29.2% of the teachers had adequate training, and the student/teacher ratio was 1/34. In secondary education (from the seventh year of schooling onwards in STP), 44% of the teachers were trained to teach, and the average teacher/student ratio was 1/50 per class. The range of classes was disparate as well: three schools offered classes only up to the seventh grade, while seven schools offered classes from the seventh grade to the ninth grade, eight schools from the seventh grade to the eighth grade, three schools from the seventh grade to the eleventh grade, and one school offered the twelfth grade. Retention rates were in the double digits: 29% in the first four years of schooling. In the ninth grade, the retention rate was 39%, with a dropout rate of 19%. Approximately 47.9% of the students reached the twelfth grade. Moreover, university education in STP is limited in scope. The first higher education institution (the STP Polytechnic Institute) was established in 1997. For this reason, many students travel abroad for higher education. The main destinations are Portugal, Brazil, Angola, Morocco, Cuba and France.

The Ministry of Education currently uses teaching materials produced in partnership with the Camões Institute and the Marquês de Valle Flôr Institute (IMVF), but cooperation with these institutions extends beyond the production of teaching materials. The *Escola+* project, for example, which is led by researchers associated with IMVF, sought to restructure secondary education in STP by training senior managers (school principals and school managers) and supervisors, reforming secondary education programmes, producing textbooks and training high school inspectors (BARRETO, 2012). Although the initial plan included the regular production of original teaching materials, financial constraints stalled the task. Moreover, there was no unanimity on the need to produce STP-specific manuals for all disciplines (BARRETO, 2012, p. 512). Divergences arose from the limitations in the theoretical formation of local educators and a lack of reflection of local needs and realities in such manuals. Regarding Portuguese

teachers, for example, several teachers in São Tomé follow a Lusitanizing approach to the language, with a strong attachment to European Portuguese school standards and denial of the existence of a local standard. Although academic studies have revealed the differences between European and Santomean varieties of Portuguese, the arrival and acceptance of these studies (see GONÇALVES, 2010, 2016; BRANDÃO, 2011a, 2011b; BRANDÃO; VIEIRA, 2012; BRAGA, 2017; CHRISTOFOLETTI; ARAUJO, 2018) in the community of local teachers are diffuse and face resistance. Finally, given the small size of the market and the lack of guaranteed profit, commercial publishers prefer to sell products imported from Portugal rather than investing in the local market and relying on payments from the STP government.

The important role of the Camões Institute and the Portuguese Cooperation for the promotion of the Portuguese language in schools at all levels, including the tertiary level, should be mentioned and lauded. The Camões Institute and the Portuguese Cultural Centre operate in an integrated manner in the cities of São Tomé and Santo António do Príncipe, offering libraries with thousands of books and periodicals and hosting broad-spectrum cultural activities in Portuguese. Moreover, the Brazilian Cultural Centre, Brazilian Embassy in São Tomé and Príncipe, and Brazilian Cooperation Agency promote various activities to support the Portuguese language and the educational system in the archipelago.

## Media

The Portuguese-language press in STP started operations on 3 October 1857 with the publication of the *Boletim Oficial do Governo da Província de S. Thomé e Príncipe* (Official Bulletin of the Government of the Province of S. Thomé and Príncipe). The *Bulletin* was initially responsible for publicizing the Crown's legislation and official orders. Subsequently, it started publishing national and international news, as well as cultural content and topics of local interest, such as obituaries, police bulletins and demographic data (FONSECA, 2014).

A privately owned, independent press emerged in 1869 with the publication of *Ecuador*, ushering a period of print material focused on local trade and agriculture issues. Until the fall of the monarchy (1910), the Portuguese-language press did not provide exposure to the racial, ethnic, political and economic conflicts in STP. With the advent of the Republic, little has changed, but the mass arrival of hired workers and land issues exposed the divisions in the São Tomean society. These divisions were shyly represented in the press. The Portuguese-language press in the Portuguese republican period in STP fed on the conflicts and collusions of three dominant groups—sometimes among the groups and sometimes between the colony and the metropolis, that is, the landowners and senior civil servants (Portuguese), elites (black or mestizo) and European traders and employees of commerce and agriculture. Although the press and its target audience were mostly Portuguese by birth or choice, the weekly newspaper *A Liberdade* sparsely published articles in Santome written by Francisco Bomfim de Jesus,

the Faxiku Bêbêzawa (ARAUJO; HAGEMEIJER, 2013, p. 13). In the 1940s, his pamphlets formed a unique case of printed materials circulating in a language other than Portuguese. Additionally, between 1950 and 1966, the first Catholic newspapers—focused on religious and liturgical matters—appeared in STP, diversifying the available printed materials.

In 1977, the government created the São Tomé and Príncipe National Radio and, in the following decade, São Tomé and Príncipe Television. Both official channels broadcast programmes in Portuguese, mainly news, debates, music, soap operas (Portuguese and Brazilian) and variety shows. Most broadcasts are in the Portuguese language, except for a few Santomean folk music shows in Santome or even in Kabuverdianu. Alongside local TV, Portuguese radio and television channels (RTP, RTP Africa and RTPi) and Brazilian broadcasters offer content in Portuguese. Although the local press adopts a Lusophile bias, the transmission of Brazilian soap operas and popular music programmes has spread the Brazilian variant of Portuguese. On paid TV (cable or satellite) or on the Internet, Angolan, Brazilian and Portuguese commercial channels can be accessed by the Santomean public, thus increasing their contact with other varieties of the Portuguese language.

### **The role of local elites**

The actions of the ruling elites and the choice of Portuguese as the official language of STP are similar to the situation prevalent during the decolonization of Portuguese African territories in the Atlantic. Thus, in Guinea-Bissau, Cape Verde and Angola, although Portuguese was in fact a foreign and minority language at the time of decolonization, the ruling elites chose it as their official language (PEREIRA; VITTORIA, 2002, p. 305–6). The arguments commonly used in defence of the choice of Portuguese include the threat of local conflicts and the practicality of using an already internationalized language. The choice of Portuguese could, thus, counteract the problem of having to choose a local language in a multilingual environment, such as Angola, Guinea-Bissau and STP, which could potentially ignite conflicts among the ethnic groups who speak the languages that are not selected<sup>7</sup>. Portuguese was viewed as a desirable choice because it was not the native language of any ethnic group; however, it was, in fact, the language of a particular social group: the ruling elite. Moreover, the choice of Portuguese eliminated the need to translate textbooks, artistic, technical and scientific literature, and allowed the people access to Portuguese language users worldwide (PEREIRA; VITTORIA, 2002). Despite political independence, the elites intended to maintain the best relationship possible with Portugal. However, the elites did not usually mention the fact that Portuguese was already their vehicular language, and it would give them a head start and increase the possibility of perpetuating their power. Both the elites and their descendants had privileged access to education in Portugal and considered themselves superior to their fellow citizens in the intricate

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<sup>7</sup> Cape Verde is not included in this multilingual group because there is only one other language in the territory, Kabuverdianu.

local social fabric, although they themselves were marginalized by the true Portuguese elites pre-independence (BOUCHARD, 2017, 2019). Once in power, the São Tomé elite replicated this pyramidal model, expelling the European Portuguese people from the top and taking their place, while keeping the other groups, namely the monolingual Forros, descendants of hired workers, Angolares, Principenses and speakers of other African languages, at the base of the social pyramid (SEIBERT, 1999, 2001; AFONSO, 2009; BOUCHARD, 2017).

### **Analysis of demographic and linguistic census data**

Documentation related to the nature of STP’s Demographic Census questionnaires is not always available. However, the census surveys conducted in 2011 are the most complete (INE 2016) in terms of the languages spoken in the country. These surveys contained the following question pertaining to the languages spoken in the territory: “What is the mother tongue of the household head”? (INE, 2016, p. 361). Possible answers or those reported by survey respondents interviews were *Portuguese, Forro, Angolar, Linguie [sic], Cape-Verdean* and *other* (with a blank space for the specific census taker). If the census taker strictly followed the survey questions, they could determine whether the interviewee knew the expression ‘mother tongue’ or had to have it explained. Table 3 presents a comparison of the 2011 census survey with the 2001, 1991 and 1981 census surveys. However, in the censuses conducted before 2011, only three possible languages were listed: Portuguese, Santome and Lung’Ie<sup>8</sup>.

Table 3. Data from national censuses reporting the languages spoken in STP (1961–2012); adapted from INE (2016).

<b>Census</b>	<b>Total population</b>	<b>Portuguese</b>	<b>Santome</b>	<b>Lung’Ie</b>	<b>Angolar</b>	<b>Kabuverdianu</b>
1981	96,661	60,519 (62,61%)	54,387 (56.27%)	1,533 (1.59%)	—	—
1991	117,504	94,907 (80.77%)	69,899 (59.49%)	1,558 (1.33%)	—	—
2001	137,599	136,085 (98.9%)	99,621 (72.4%)	3,302 (2.4%)	—	—
2012	187,356	170,309 (90.9%)	62,889 (33.57%)	4,224 (2.25%)	11,413 (6.09%)	14,725 (7.86%)

Given that multiple responses were accepted in the answers, one should consider that in many cases, the answers may have included more than one ‘mother tongue’ for the household head or the census taker was able to add information to the questionnaire that might not have been previously described. Thus, an analysis of the census report (INE, 2016, p. 54) revealed a collection of information that was not limited to the ‘household head’, as there is in the final report accurate information about language speakers by age group. In addition, at least one

<sup>8</sup> This deletion of the country’s linguistic diversity in the previous census will not be analysed here, because it is beyond the scope of this article.

language was assigned to each resident. The data revealed that in fact, more than one answer was possible, such that the census question was understood more or less as ‘what languages do residents speak?’ Table 4 relates the ages of the residents to the languages spoken by each ethnic group, as can be inferred from the data presented in the census (INE, 2016, p. 54), which are divided into seven groups: 1–4 years (born 2007–2011), 5–9 (born 2002–2006), 10–19 (born 1991–2001), 20–29 (born 1980–1990), 30–39 (born 1969–1979), 40–49 (born 1958–1968) and over fifty (born before 1958).

Table 4. Proportion (%) of population of ages one year and more divided into age groups according to the languages spoken by them; adapted from INE data (2016, p. 54).

<b>Born in</b>	<b>STP Population</b>	<b>% STP Population</b>	<b>% Portuguese</b>	<b>% Santome</b>	<b>% Lung’le</b>	<b>% Angolar</b>	<b>% Kabuverdianu</b>
2007–2011	27,810	15.92	91.0	2.6	0.8	0.1	1.3
2002–2006	25,793	14.77	99.8	9.0	1.9	0.1	2.7
1991–2001	39,904	22.85	99.8	25.5	4.4	0.3	5.6
1980–1990	30,228	17.31	99.7	47.3	8.0	1.2	11.4
1969–1979	22,341	12.79	99.6	56.2	10.3	1.7	13.8
1958–1968	12,914	7.39	99.3	63.3	11.7	2.5	16
Before 1958	15,656	8.96	97.8	73.3	13.8	2.7	14.2
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>174,646</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>98.4</b> <b>(171,851)</b>	<b>36.2</b> <b>(63,221)</b>	<b>1</b> <b>(1,746)</b>	<b>6.6</b> <b>(11,526)</b>	<b>8.5</b> <b>(14,844)</b>

Table 4 helps us describe the complex linguistic framework of STP, in which broad knowledge of the Portuguese language across all age ranges can be related to the abandonment of traditional languages, which implies a classic movement of ‘language substitution’. Moreover, we drew four key conclusions based on the in Table 4.

1. There is a decline (considering the total value) in the percentage of people of ages 1–4 years who speak Portuguese. Thus, if 98.4% of the general population speaks or claims to speak Portuguese, it represents a decline of approximately 7.5% within this age range, meaning that 91% of the children in this age range speak Portuguese. It is already significant that nine out of ten individuals in the age range speak Portuguese, which shows the extent of spread of Portuguese among the younger strata. The decline in this age range may be related to the fact that some children from this age range may not speak a language with sufficient proficiency or may not be classified by adults as speakers of a language. Moreover, the decline can possibly be ascribed to the fact that previous censuses did not separate knowledge of language by age group. Thus, the decline may be ascribed to the fact that inhabitants of ages 1–4 years are included in the general population, but it does not necessarily mean that fewer people classify Portuguese as a language they know. Therefore, this decrease has little or no influence on the total number of speakers.



2. Portuguese is spoken by 97.18% of the population of ages less than 20 years (in 2011, totalling 93,507 people, 53.54% of the total). That this language is spoken almost exclusively by this age group (1-20 years) comes from the cross-referencing of data with the languages most commonly spoken by the other groups, that is, 18,024 (19.28%) individuals under the age of 20 years speak languages other than Portuguese, which means that 80% of people under the age of 20 years may speak only Portuguese. One cannot rule out the fact that self-reported data might have led to the underreporting of the use of creole languages, especially among young Santomeans schooled in Portuguese. Gonçalves and Hagemeyer (2015), too, reported a decline in the number of Santome speakers.
3. The Santome, Kabuverdianu, Angolar and Lung'Ie languages have few speakers among the individuals of ages less than 20 years. There were 11,970 individuals (12.8%) who declared or were declared speakers of Santome, 3,293 (3.52%) of Kabuverdianu, 2,487 (2.66%) of Lung'Ie and 274 (0.29%) of Angolar. At first glance, this picture reveals a dire situation for these four languages, especially in the light of the 90,872 (97.18%) people under the age of 20 years who declared themselves Portuguese speakers. However, according to data from previous generations (discussed in the next item), presented in Table 4, the threat is proportional depending on the size of each group of speakers. If there is indeed a decline in the number of speakers of creole languages among children and among individuals of ages less than 20 years, the numbers of Angolar and Lung'Ie speakers, according to the literature, seem to be underestimated and overestimated, respectively. In the case of Angolar, Maurer (1995), Lorenzino (1998), and Araujo and Bandeira (2020) have not mentioned the phenomenon of language substitution by children. At least in villages such as São João dos Angolares, native use of the Angolar language is evident among children, and there are even a few elderly monolingual speakers, but there are thousands of young people with bilingual proficiency in Angolar and Portuguese (LORENZINO, 1998; ARAUJO, BANDEIRA, 2020), which shows that not all languages spoken in STP are affected in the same way by language loss. Eberhard *et al.* (2019) classifies the Angolar language as healthy ('vigorous' in their terminology), which is an adequate description. The Angolar population of 15,000 has not hampered its ethnolinguistic vitality, although its relative isolation from the rest of the island might have contributed to language maintenance.
4. As far as Lung'Ie is concerned, there is much evidence in the literature about the degree of the threat facing it and the small number of speakers under the age of 40 years (see VALKHOFF, 1966; GÜNTHER, 1973; MAURER, 2009; AGOSTINHO, 2016). It is inaccurate to state that the number of Lung'Ie speakers under the age of 40 years exceeds 3,000, as can be inferred from the data in Table 4. One of the reasons for this asymmetry between the census numbers for Angolar and Lung'Ie speakers may be

related to the character of the value assigned to the self-declaration on the census as an element of data collection. Censuses do not require census takers to ask for a formal language proficiency document from the respondents, and self-statements are often taken at face value. Agostinho, Bandeira and Araujo (2016, p. 604) reported the existence of a discourse supporting transmission, language teaching in schools and other opportunities for socialization among the population of the Lung'le ethnic group, as well as a vision for the language as a common element for the ethnic group, that is, an element of linguistic identity. The idea of belonging to the Lung'le language group can be found even in a popular song written by the composer Frutuoso dos Santos Luís Fernandes (Tuta): *‘É pa no sêbê ya lung’le ê bilêê no’* (It is known to all that Lung'le is our identity card; AGOSTINHO, 2014, p. 337-8). In the case of the Angolar people, as well as in the cases of other ethnic groups, language-related stigma, classified as ‘slang’, ‘dialect’ or ‘Creole’ (the three terms are used in a prejudiced manner), have been fed not only by colonial forces but also by other ethnic groups (e.g. BOUCHARD, 2017, p. 195-6 mentioned the peer group’s pejorative linguistic attitudes towards others). Therefore, a distrust of central government actions may have stimulated people within the Angolar group not to declare themselves—in front of a census taker possibly from the Forro ethnic group—as speakers of their own language, when in fact they are. Passel (2001, p. 1603-4) discussed aspects of the complexity of some issues inherent to ethnic self-declaration. In STP, the possibility of affiliation or self-declaration as a member of more than one ethnic group, when, for example, ancestors are of distinct groups, as is the case with many individuals who have Kabuverdianu and Forro ancestry, and the use of one, two or none of the languages associated with one of the ethnic groups, can create conflicts regarding language self-declaration.

5. The numbers of speakers of the Santome, Kabuverdianu, Angolar and Lung'le languages have decreased, which can be inferred from patterns of intergenerational change. This decrease indicates a shift towards a society in which Portuguese is increasingly used as the language by everyone. Moreover, the putative decrease in the number of Creole speakers may reflect a growing number of functional domains for Portuguese, where creoles are used in lesser domains. The economic outlook of São Tomé state, historical constitution of the Portuguese language in the territory, its transmission by L2 speakers in the last quarter of the twentieth century and the existence of multiple sociolinguistic norms (LUCCHESI, 2015) are challenges facing the formulation of language policies that promote national languages in STP. Bouchard (2017, 2019) addressed a few questions about identity and perception towards Portuguese and between Creole speakers.

Finally, another important factor in the diffusion of the Portuguese language in the archipelago is the increase in life expectancy from 50.45 years in 1960 to 66.51 years in 2015, and the decrease in the mortality rate before the age of 5 years from 97.10/1,000 in 1965 to

47.30/1,000 in 2015 (WORLD BANK, 2019). In addition, these two factors have increased the population that is able to use and disseminate the Portuguese language, especially over the last forty years.

## **Conclusion**

Actual acts of language policy implementation by the government are relatively rare in São Tomé and Príncipe because such acts involve the consumption of scarce public resources, in addition to human resources and ‘political will’. For isolated examples of effective language policies, though limited in scope, one can cite the approval of Decree 19/2013 (published on 08/14/2014 in the Official Gazette). In this decree, the government made the Unified Alphabet for Native Languages of São Tomé and Príncipe (ALUSTP) a linguistic instrument with the aim of standardizing the spellings of indigenous languages (see ARAUJO; AGOSTINHO, 2010). Simultaneously, the Government of the Autonomous Region of Príncipe has endeavoured to promote Lung’Ie in schools and to produce teaching materials by offering political support and indirect financial support (AGOSTINHO; BANDEIRA; ARAUJO, 2016).

The nature of the archipelago’s occupation process and its economic cycles, with extensive employment of foreign labour, are the factors that have led to the framework of linguistic diversity in STP. The choice of the ruling elite to adopt Portuguese as the official language in the young republic effectively created the mechanisms for the diffusion of Portuguese and set the stage for the obsolescence of other languages. Alongside twentieth-century phenomena such as urbanization and the diffusion of mass schooling and media—associated with the socioeconomic and political prestige of Portuguese—, there is a framework of abandoning ethnic languages for Portuguese in STP. This is not the same variety as European Portuguese. However, European Portuguese proficiency is the target of the school system and the ruling elites, as can be observed in the didactic and paradigmatic materials. Batibo (2005, p. 81) wrongly stated that “The nationally dominant language is Saotomense, a Portuguese creole, which has become the commonly used language in the country. There is neither a visibly endangered language (...)”.

Economic conditions of the central government (regular deficits, a foreign debt difficult to equalize, dependence on foreign cooperation and tutelage of the International Monetary Fund) limit its ability to implement public policies (IMF, 2018). Thus, all successful initiatives for development in the field of education originate from external cooperation activities. Often, STP is the target of pilot projects and investigations that result in partnerships, which are soon discontinued and replaced with new projects to evaluate what went wrong in the previous projects. The considerably high level of instability of the government does not guarantee the continuity of educational policies. When STP joined the Community of Portuguese-Speaking Countries as a founding member, it did not result in public policies to promote Portuguese by the Government of STP because the costs involved were beyond its financial means. Thus, in

terms of policies to promote the Portuguese language, the state is limited to the financing of the public-school system.

Since re-democratization (1990), Prime Minister Patrice Trovoada's government has been the only one to complete its term (11/25/2014 to 03/12/2018) without being overthrown by Parliament. Therefore, despite the goodwill of its political agents, the Government of STP has limited opportunities to implement language policies because their implementation is a minor concern given all the other problems facing the country.

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