

PORTUGUESE AND LANGUAGE SHIFT IN SÃO TOMÉ AND PRÍNCIPE

PORTUGUÊS E ABANDONO DAS LÍNGUAS NACIONAIS EM SÃO TOMÉ E PRÍNCIPE

Abstract

This paper describes how the Portuguese language became widely spoken in the Republic of São Tomé and Príncipe and demonstrates how language expansion 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. We suggest, based on theoretical approach to language endangerment and death summarized by Sasse (1992), 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 that 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 actual endangerment of other local languages.

Keywords: Portuguese, language shift, language endangerment, multilingualism, 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 na abordagem teórica de ameaça e morte de línguas compilada por Sasse (1992), 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 permanecerem ligadas a uma língua imperial e aos benefícios dessa conexão. A escolha da elite dominante ao adotar o português como língua oficial da 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, mudança linguística, línguas ameaçadas, São Tomé e Príncipe.

1. Introduction

This paper describes how Portuguese became the major language in the Republic of São Tomé and Príncipe (STP) and suggests that its expansion has imperilled other languages spoken in the archipelago, based on theoretical approach to language endangerment and death summarized by Sasse (1992). STP, a country that has been multilingual since its formation in the late fifteenth century, has thus moved towards monolingualism, marginalizing native languages or pushing them into extinction. The spread of Portuguese and its consolidation as the dominant language of STP are the result of sociolinguistic dynamics within the multilingual context of that country, but the situation cannot be associated only with the language policies pursued by the government. The current reach of the Portuguese language in STP is associated with a complex socio-historical process that included urbanization, mass schooling, media, the dominant characteristics intrinsic to imperial languages, and a diffuse desire among local elites

to remain connected to the imperial language and to the benefits (real or imagined) of that connection. This elite desire has silenced local linguistic diversity and influenced the sociolinguistic fabric of the archipelago. All of these factors have led to the erasure of languages (both indigenous and transplanted) spoken in the territory. It should be noted that the coexistence of languages spoken in STP, including Portuguese, arose from socio-historical processes of domination by groups inside and outside of authority. STP has, however, demonstrated very little ability to promote linguistic planning to enable 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 AND FINBOW, 2019). Factors such as isolation, the removal of certain groups of speakers from the islands, the linguistic contributions of African languages, the creative performance of local speakers and the constant influx of new actors promoted proto-creole speciation. 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 taken to the islands of Príncipe and Ano Bom, where local conditions contributed to diversification, giving rise to Lung'le (ISO 639-3: PRI) and Fa d'Ambô¹ (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 the Portuguese African colonies.

In the twentieth century, the multilingual environment in STP had the following actors: the ethnic group *Forro*, whose language is Santome or Forro, the most widely spoken creole in the archipelago; the ethnic group *Kabuverdianu*, descendants of Cape Verdean contract workers who maintained their language, spoken mainly on farms (locally called '*roças*') until 1975, when their speakers spread to towns; the ethnic group *Principense*, Lung'le or Principense speakers, which had already declined to less than 200 speakers by the second half of the twentieth century (VALKHOFF, 1966; GÜNTHER, 1973, MAURER, 2009; AGOSTINHO, 2016); the ethnic group *Angolar*, speaking the Angolar language, living in relatively isolated areas of

¹ 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).

major towns with little outside contact (SEIBERT, 2007); and the ethnic group *Tonga*, comprising contract workers and their descendants confined to rural properties until at least the 1960s, speaking a language described as the *Portuguese of the Tongas*² (ROUGÉ, 1992; BAXTER, 2018), in addition to European Portuguese inhabitants and a small local urban elite speaking, respectively, European Portuguese and a Europeanized variety of Portuguese (with typical linguistic features of second language learning).

Here, we will address how Portuguese became the major language in STP (see Table 1), and what, if any, current language policies exist in the archipelago to promote or that promoted the Portuguese language to the point of its being the main spoken language, as well as a threat to all other languages spoken in STP. To answer these concerns requires the analysis of 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), labour importation to meet the demands of agribusinesses in these phases, the process of urbanization since the 1950s, the implementation of a school system, the diffusion of Portuguese-language media in the last forty years, and sanitary improvements that have increased life expectation and decreased 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'le	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%)

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 linguistic fabric. 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 by the adoption of Portuguese, a language with high linguistic capital to the detriment and marginalization of other languages. In section 4, we analyse the population

²The 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).

census data, showing how language substitution for Portuguese became unchallenged in the twenty-first century, as can be shown from data on the language skills of various age groups in the population. The final section presents some concluding remarks.

2. Colonization of São Tomé and Príncipe and the role of its language groups

Portugal, having set up an exploratory colony in STP, first supported by the sugar agroindustrial economy in the sixteenth century and later by the coffee and cocoa economy in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, failed to promote the presence of a large contingent of Portuguese speakers in the archipelago (NEGREIROS, 1895; TENREIRO, 1961; GARFIELD, 1992). The Portuguese language in STP was thus present at the moment 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 agroindustrial surge of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and at the time of independence in 1975, when the local elite elected it (maintaining the *status quo ante bellum*) as the official language of the young republic. Language policies implemented since independence have promoted the Portuguese language in the islands and, during this process, alienated other local languages and threatened the archipelago's multilingual status. To understand the diffusion of the Portuguese language in the last quarter of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries in STP, one must consider the existence of multiple sociolinguistic norms, social and linguistic historical processes and the 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) suggests that there were about 200 mills, while Serafim (2000, p. 258), in turn, argues for 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) estimates between 9,000 and 12,000 slaves around 1580 at the height of production. Excluding Africans, there was a small population of Portuguese speakers. Seibert (2015, p. 105-6) argues 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.' The Portuguese population during the Sugar Age on São Tomé Island was thus fairly small compared to the enslaved or freed population. Seibert (2015, p. 108) continues: '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.’

Data presented in Table 2 show that the Portuguese presence in STP from 1807 to 1950 was limited, and did not exceed 3% until 1950. Even the relative economic bonanza achieved by the São Tomé economy in the first half of the twentieth century was not enough to attract a significant contingent of Portuguese people to the colony. At least until 1950, there thus appeared to be no demographically relevant European population to spread the language and to 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

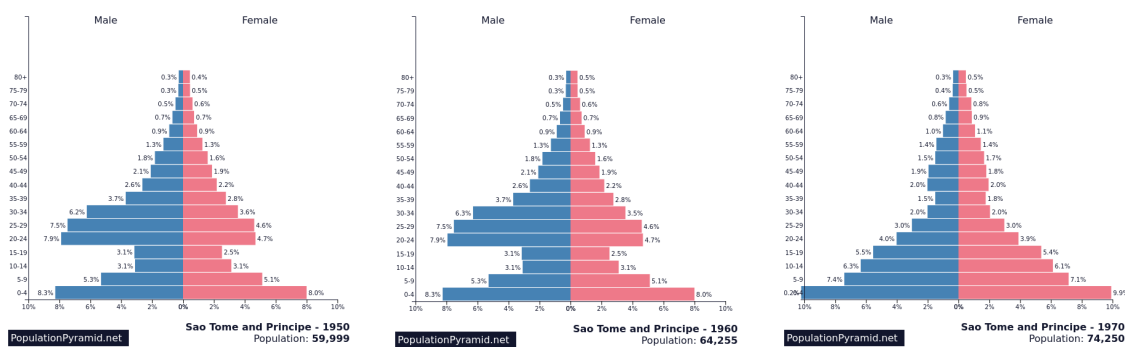
Despite the successful commercial exploitation of cocoa in the last third of the nineteenth century, STP remained unattractive to Portuguese immigrants, although after the formal abolition of slavery in 1875, a new element was added to the local ecolinguistic system: the ‘hired’ worker. Hired workers (or ‘*serviçaes*’, in the terminology of the time) were mainly from Portuguese colonial possessions such as Cape Verde, Angola and Mozambique. They were generally confined to commercial farms (*roças*) on the islands, with little contact with local townspeople. Often, the working conditions of hired workers were analogous to slavery, prompting many protests from the international community (NEVINSON, 1906; CADBURY, BURTT AND HORTON, 1910). Nevinson (1906, p. 191) presents data suggesting that the mortality rate among hired workers’ offspring, born on STP islands, was 25%, and that among adults on Príncipe Island, the mortality rate was 20.67% annually. Throughout his account, Nevinson (1906, p. 190) describes hired workers as ‘slaves’, adding 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. While slavery was nominally abolished in the nineteenth century, the workers nonetheless lived in dire conditions up to independence. At the same time, they were alienated from co-living with the local society, although this society considered these hired workers socially inferior (BOUCHARD, 2017).

Observing age-separated population data (records available from 1950; see Fig. 1) reveals that, in the 1950s and 1960s demographic pyramids, the presence of hired workers created a distortion in the number of STP inhabitants within the range of twenty to forty years of age because the male population of this group alone represented about 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 also high, reaching 37% before the age of five in the 1960s (WORLD BANK, 2019). The slight improvement in sanitary conditions promoted by the urbanization of several areas of STP between 1950 and 1970 by the Estado Novo government (MILHEIRO, 2012) and the explosion in fertility rates (peaking at 6.53 children per woman in 1975) promoted an increase in the population under the age of twenty, which is observable in the 1970 population pyramid (WORLD BANK, 2019). As a result, the emigration of many hired workers between 1961 and 1965 due to the decrease in cocoa cultivation shows a significant decrease among the adult population (20–40 years) compared with the 1950 and 1960 pyramids (see population pyramid for 1970, which already shows a radical change in the demographic profile). The emigration of hired workers did not radically change the panorama of the Portuguese-speaking population in the archipelago, however, as these workers were not

necessarily Portuguese monolingual 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. Even with a high rate of representation among the total population of STP from 1900 to 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.

Seibert has also shown that there was a mestizo population in São Tomé. However, that population, which amounted to 7.1% of the total in 1950, had been ‘re-Africanized [sic] over the centuries, and its European genetic heritage diluted in successive generations’ (2014, p. 58-9). Conversely, Tenreiro (1961) has stated that, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the preponderant element of the population was the mestizo, but Seibert (2014, p. 59-60) has shown that this information was historically false and is refuted by genetic studies of local populations (see THOMAS *ET AL.*, 2002, p. 408), making São Tomé distinct 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, Carreira (2000, p.25), addressing the situation in Cape Verde, postulates 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]’. The population of mestizos therefore seems to have been small, but the access to certain privileges, commonly intended only for those born in Europe, made the mestizo ethnic group relatively powerful. If, on the one hand, there is no evidence to claim that the documentation makes it possible to ascertain exactly what language was spoken by the mestizo population of São Tomé, it is on the other hand reasonable to suppose, by observing similar situations in the Portuguese Atlantic (cf. LUCCHESI, BAXTER AND RIBEIRO, 2009), that this class of mestizos effectively spoke a restructured Portuguese alongside one or more local languages. We understand ‘restructured Portuguese’ as a pidgin arising from a situation of limited access to input and little normative pressure from European Portuguese associated with changes caused by the influences of multilingual environments and their mass learning as a second language by speakers of other languages, among which were Santome and Kabuverdianu (ISO 639-3: KEA). The influence of the prestige of speaking the language of the group to which the mestizo ethnic group wished to belong cannot be disregarded either. Thus, considering that the native mestizo population remained at 8% and the European Portuguese at 2%, until the middle of the twentieth century about 10% of the population potentially spoke Portuguese in a multilingual environment.

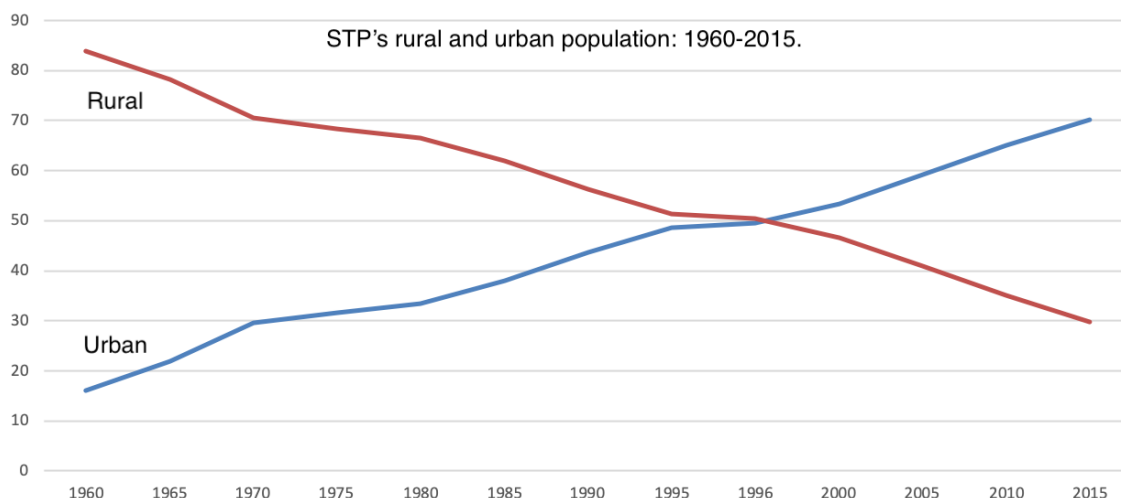
However, STP's declaration of political independence in 1975, the decree by the new socialist regime collectivizing the fields and the consequent increase in field/town migration would save a place for mestizo and Tonga descendants in the promotion of Portuguese. This place can only be understood with the help of data on the urbanization process in STP.

3. Urbanization, schooling, media and the role of elites

3.1 Urbanization

In 1960, STP was mainly a rural country: 83.93% of its population lived in the countryside. By 1975, the situation had changed somewhat, but 68.36% were still rooted outside of the towns. One of the factors responsible for this increase in the urban population was the process of improving living conditions and the attractiveness of the largest towns of São Tomé and Príncipe (MILHEIRO, 2012, p. 87-115). As Milheiro (2012) points out, however, the Estado Novo government began promoting its São Tomé Urbanization Plan from 1951, which meant 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 towns. The D. João II National Lyceum (now the Patrice Lumumba National Lyceum) and the Customs Building (both from 1952) began this phase of development. In 1954, the Government Palace, 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 emigration of thousands of hired workers (associated with the independence process in 1975), the collectivization of the fields, the collapse of the San Tomean agroindustrial system and land reform in the 1990s helped to promote urbanization rates (or rural exodus), ranging from 9.19% per year in 1968 to about 4.5% on average throughout the 1980s. Finally, in 1996, at the time of democratization, the urban population surpassed the rural population (50.55%), reaching 70.17% in 2015.

Fig 2. Data for STP urban and rural population. 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 peak exports were reached in 1972 at 12,172 metric tons (KIESOW, 2017, p. 68). In 1975, in turn, 5,200³ metric tons were exported, almost half of the 10,000 metric tons of the year before independence. In 1975, about 3,000 Portuguese farm workers were forced to leave the country. They brought with them the technical knowledge to manage all stages of production (from cocoa seedlings to foreign sales), a fact that had dire consequences for all involved and strongly affected cocoa production and the marketing network (KIESOW, 2017). In 1975, the government nationalized the fields. Despite initial success, production fell to 3,750 tons in 1983 and stabilized in that range. Finally, the land reform of the 1990s, while distributing land, did not provide farmers 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, once confined to the fields, and thus typical characteristics of the Portuguese of the Tongas may have influenced the urban vernacular of STP (see BAXTER, 2002; BOUCHARD, 2017).

3.2 Schooling

As schools are one of the main vehicles for the promotion of an official language, the STP state endorsed Portuguese through schooling. In this sense, the construction of schools is also a factor that supported the diffusion of the Portuguese language in STP (PONTÍFICE, 2007). Although

³Cocoa export data are from Kiesow (2017).

the national school system faces problems typical of developing countries, the state invested 4.86% and 5.08% of the GDP in education in 2017 and 2016, respectively. Because it is the only official language, Portuguese is used in all public communications. By electing Portuguese as the official language, the São Tomé state has helped to promote a linguistic substitution for the past forty-five years, with profound consequences for the São Tomean society.

Formal education, one of the main vehicles supporting any imperial language, faced its own expansion dilemmas in Portugal, which were accentuated after the 1960s, when the idea of the democratization of education began to take hold (see SEBASTIÃO AND CORREIA, 2007), universalizing *de facto* only after the fall of the dictatorship of Oliveira Salazar. If education was not universalized even in Portugal, on the periphery of the Empire the interest in promoting schooling faced even more challenges. 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 São Tomé people had access to the benefits of education. The enrichment of some Santomeans with the golden age of the cacao industry can also be noted in the presence of black and mestizo students in Lisbon and Coimbra⁴. This did not, however, mean a strong educational policy in STP. For example, the construction of the D. João II National Lyceum building began in 1952 and was completed in 1954. Subsequently, the Silva e Cunha Technical School, built in 1969, was reclassified and renamed the National Lyceum, the only secondary school in STP until 2011. The first lyceum in STP thus appeared more than 450 years after the beginning of Portuguese colonization. The National Lyceum was built to house 600 students; in 2010, it had 5,200 students, according to Seibert (2012, p. 287). This symbolizes the precariousness of São Tomé secondary education at the beginning of the twenty-first century. According to Seibert (2012), the population of Santomeans with complete secondary education in 2001 was only 3.6%, but current data reveal a change in the São Tomé school paradigm: while 37.07% of school-age students attended high school in 2001, 50.02% of them were enrolled after 2011, reaching more than half of the population at the ideal school age for the first time in history. In 2017, in turn, an 89.71% rate was reached, revealing a more consistent pattern for the relevance of secondary education in the twenty-first century (WORD BANK, 2019).

The school system in STP generally faces problems with teacher training and average teacher/student ratios. There is also a high retention rate (no promotion for the next year) and high dropout rate. According to INE data (2016, p. 5-53), only 19.7% of teachers had training in the area of pedagogy, and the teacher/student ratio was one to eighty in pre-school education

⁴ In 1957/58, the STP had 17 university students in Portugal (SEIBERT, 2012, p. 285).

for 2014–2016. In basic education (first to sixth grade), 29.2% of teachers had adequate training, and the student/teacher ratio was one to thirty-four. Regarding secondary education (in STP, from the seventh year of schooling onwards), 44% of teachers had training to teach, and the average teacher/student ratio was fifty per class. The range of classes is also disparate: three schools offered classes only up to the seventh grade, while seven schools taught from the seventh to the ninth grade, eight schools from the seventh to the eighth grade, three schools from the seventh to the eleventh grade, and one school offered the twelfth grade. Retention rates remained in the double digits: 29% in the first cycle, and 39% in the ninth grade, with a 19% dropout rate. About 47.9% of students reached the twelfth grade. University education, in turn, was also limited in scope. The first higher education institution (the STP Polytechnic Institute) was created in 1997. For this reason, many students go abroad to obtain 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 goes beyond this. The *Escola+* project, for example, led by researchers associated with the IMVF, sought to promote a restructuring of secondary education in STP by training senior managers (school principals and school managers) and supervisors, reform secondary education programmes, prepare textbooks and train high school inspectors (Barreto 2012). Although the initial plan included the regular production of original teaching material, financial constraints made the task unfeasible. There was no unanimity, however, about the need to produce STP-specific manuals in all disciplines (BARRETO, 2012, p. 512). Divergences arose from the limitation in the theoretical formation of local educators and the lack of reflection about local needs and reality. Regarding Portuguese teachers, for example, it is not uncommon to find teachers in São Tomé using 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 varieties, the arrival and acceptance of these studies (see GONÇALVES, 2010, 2016; BRANDÃO, 2011a, 2011b; BRANDÃO AND VIEIRA, 2012; BRAGA, 2017; CHRISTOFOLETTI AND ARAUJO, 2018) in the community of local teachers are diffuse and face resistance among the conservative class. The lack of human capital capable of accomplishing the task has proven to be a difficult barrier. 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, should also be mentioned and praised. The Camões Institute and the Portuguese Cultural Centre operate in an integrated manner in the city of São Tomé and Santo António do Príncipe, offering libraries with thousands of books and periodicals and broad-spectrum cultural activities in Portuguese. The Brazilian Cultural Centre, the Brazilian Embassy in São Tomé and Príncipe and the Brazilian Cooperation Agency also promote various activities to support the Portuguese language and the educational system in the archipelago.

3.3 Media

The Portuguese-language press in STP began 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 also began to publish 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*, beginning a period of print material focusing on local trade and agriculture issues. Until the fall of the monarchy (1910), the Portuguese-language press avoided exposing STP's racial, ethnic, political and economic conflicts. With the advent of the Republic, little has changed, but the mass arrival of hired workers and land issues have exposed the divisions in 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 between them and sometimes between the colony and the metropolis: the landowners and senior civil servants (Portuguese), the elite (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* even 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 material circulating in a language other than Portuguese. Additionally, between 1950 and 1966, the first Catholic newspapers – focused on religious and liturgical issues – 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, debate, music, soap operas (Portuguese and Brazilian) and variety shows. The Portuguese language is used in most broadcasts, with the exception of a few Santomean folk music shows in Santome or even in Kabuverdianu. Alongside the local TV, Portuguese Radio and Television channels (RTP, RTP Africa and RTPi) and shows from 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 also spread the Brazilian variant. On paid TV (cable or satellite) or on the Internet, Angolan, Brazilian and Portuguese commercial channels can also be accessed by the Santomean public, thus increasing contact with other varieties of the Portuguese language.

3.4 The role of local elites

The action of the ruling elites and the choice of Portuguese as the official language of STP was similar to the situation found during decolonization of the 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 the Portuguese language combine the threat of local conflicts with 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 lead to conflicts with the ethnic groups speaking the languages not chosen⁵. Portuguese was viewed as a desirable choice because it was not the language of any specific ethnic group, although it was, in fact, the language of a particular social group: the ruling elite. The choice of Portuguese could also eliminate the need to translate textbooks, artistic, technical and scientific literature, and would allow access to Portuguese language users worldwide (PEREIRA; VITTORIA, 2002). Despite political independence, it was the intention of the elites to maintain the best relationship possible with Portugal. Elites, however, did not usually mention the fact that Portuguese was already the vehicular language of its members, and this would give such groups a head start and increase

⁵Cape Verde is not included in this multilingual group because there is only one other language in the territory, Kabuverdianu.

the possibility of perpetuating their power. Both the elites and their descendants had privileged access to education in Portugal and thought themselves superior to their fellow citizens in the intricate local social fabric, although they had been marginalized by the true Portuguese pre-independence elite (BOUCHARD, 2017, 2019). One in power, the São Tomé elite replicated this pyramidal model, expelling the European Portuguese people from the top and taking its place, but retaining the position of the other groups, the monolingual Forros, the descendants of hired workers, the Angolares, the Principenses and the speakers of other African languages at the base of the social pyramid (SEIBERT, 1999, 2001; AFONSO, 2009; BOUCHARD, 2017).

4. Analysis of demographic and linguistic census data

Documentation of the nature of STP’s Demographic Census questionnaires is not always available. The census documents conducted in 2011, however, are the most complete (INE 2016) about the languages spoken in the country. There was a question about the languages spoken in the territory on that census, formulated as follows: ‘What is the mother tongue of the household head?’ (INE, 2016, p. 361). Possible answers or those reported by interviews were *Portuguese, Forro, Angolar, Linguie* [sic], *Cape-Verdean* and *other* (with a blank space for the specific census taker). If the census taker followed his script strictly, it would imply that the interviewee knew the expression ‘mother tongue’ or had to have it explained. The 2011 census results as compared to those of 2001, 1991 and 1981 are shown in Table 3. However, in the censuses prior to 2011, only three possible languages were listed: Portuguese, Santome and Lung’Ie⁶.

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

Census	Total population	Portuguese	Santome	Lung’Ie	Angolar	Kabuverdianu
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%)

⁶This 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.

Given that multiple answers were accepted, one needs to consider that in many cases the answer obtained may include 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, by analysing the census report (INE, 2016, p. 54), one can see that there was a collection of information that was not limited to the ‘household head’, as there is in the final report accurate information about language speakers broken down by age group. In addition, at least one language was assigned to each resident. The data reveal that, in fact, more than one answer was possible, such that the census question was more or less understood as ‘what languages do residents speak?’ Table 4 also shows that the data collected specified the age of the resident, as well as the use of languages used by each resident, as can be inferred from the data presented in the census (INE, 2016, p. 54) and reproduced in Table 4. The ages were divided into seven groups: one to four years (born 2007–2011), five to nine (born 2002–2006), ten to nineteen (born 1991–2001), twenty to twenty-nine (born 1980–1990), thirty to thirty-nine (born 1969–1979), forty to forty-nine (born 1958–1968) and over fifty (born before 1958).

Table 4. Proportion (%) of population one year old and over by spoken language divided into age groups; adapted from data from INE (2016, p. 54).

Born between	STP Population	% STP Population	% Portuguese	% Santome	% Lung'Ie	% Angolar	% Kabuverdianu
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
TOTAL	174,646	100%	98.4 (171,851)	36.2 (63,221)	1 (1,746)	6.6 (11,526)	8.5 (14,844)

Table 4 allows us to describe the complex linguistic framework of STP, in which a broad knowledge of the Portuguese language in all age ranges can be related to an abandonment of

traditional languages, which implies a classic movement of ‘language substitution’. The data from Table 4 also allow us to draw four key conclusions.

- (1) There is a decrease (considering the total value) in the percentage of people aged between one and four years who speak Portuguese. Thus, if 98.4% of the general population speaks or claims to speak Portuguese within this range, there is a decrease of approximately 7.5%, reaching 91% of children. It is already significant that nine out of ten people speak Portuguese, which shows the extent of this language among the younger strata. The decrease in this range may be related to the fact that some children aged between one and four years may not speak a language with a sufficient proficiency or may not be classified by adults as speakers of a language. The decrease may also have occurred because previous censuses did not separate language knowledge by age group. The decrease may thus appear because inhabitants aged between one and four years have entered the general number, but it does not necessarily mean that fewer people classify Portuguese as a language of they know. Therefore, this decrease thus has little or no influence on the total number of speakers.
- (2) Portuguese is spoken by the main age group in STP almost absolutely (97.18%): the population under twenty years old (in 2011, totalling 93,507 people, 53.54% of the total). That this language is spoken almost exclusively by this group comes from the cross-referencing of data with the languages most commonly spoken by the other groups, that is, the 18,024 (19.28%) individuals under twenty also speak languages other than Portuguese, so 80% of people under twenty may speak only Portuguese.
- (3) The Santome, Kabuverdianu, Angolar and Lung’Ie languages have few speakers among people under twenty. 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 light of the 90,872 (97.18%) people who declared themselves Portuguese speakers under the age of twenty. The threat is proportional, however, depending on the size of each group of speakers, according to data from previous generations (discussed in the next item) also presented in Table 4. If there is indeed a decline in the number of speakers of creole languages among children and those under the age of twenty, the numbers for Angolar and Lung’Ie speakers, according to the literature, seem to be underestimated and overestimated, respectively. In the case of Angolar, Maurer (1995) and Araujo and Bandeira (2020) do not mention the phenomenon of language

substitution by children. At least in villages such as São João dos Angolares, the 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 bilingual in Angolar and Portuguese (ARAÚJO, BANDEIRA, 2020). Eberhard *et al.* (2019) classify the Angolar language as healthy ('vigorous' in their terminology), which is an adequate description, although the population of the Angolar ethnic group does not exceed 15,000 speakers and the younger ones have many occasions that invite the linguistic substitution of Portuguese. As far as Lung'le is concerned, there is much evidence in the literature on the degree of the threat facing it and the small number of speakers under the age of forty (see VALKHOFF, 1966; GÜNTHER, 1973; MAURER, 2009; AGOSTINHO, 2016). It seems inaccurate to state that the number of Lung'le speakers under the age of forty 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'le speakers may be related to the character of the value given to the self-declaration on the census as an element of data collection. Censuses do not require a formal language proficiency document from the census taker, and the (self)statement is often taken at face value. Agostinho, Bandeira and Araujo (2016, p. 604) have reported that there is, in fact, a discourse supporting transmission, language teaching in schools and other opportunities for socializing among the population of the Lung'le ethnic group, as well as a vision for the language as a common element to the ethnic group – that is, an element of linguistic identity. The idea of belonging to the language group can also be found even in a popular song 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, but also extending to other ethnic groups, language-related stigma, classified as 'slang', 'dialect' or 'Creole' (the three terms are used in a prejudiced manner), were fed not only by colonial forces but also by other ethnic groups (e.g. BOUCHARD, 2017, p. 195-6 mentions the peer group's pejorative linguistic attitudes towards others) and this, coupled with 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 of the Forro ethnic group – speakers of their own language, when in fact they are. Passel (2001, p. 1603-4) discusses aspects of the complexity of some issues inherent in 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 making use of one, two or none of the languages

associated with one of the ethnic groups, can also create a conflict regarding language self-declaration.

- (4) There has been a decrease in the number of speakers of the Santome, Kabuverdianu, Angolar and Lung'le languages, which can be observed with a pattern of intergenerational change. This decrease indicates a shift towards a society in which Portuguese is increasingly used as the language by everyone. The material conditions of the Sao Tome state, the historical constitution of the Portuguese language in the territory, its massive transmission by L2 speakers in the last quarter of the twentieth century and the existence of multiple sociolinguistic norms (LUCCHESI, 2015) are challenges to language policies that promote national languages in STP.

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 age five from 97.10/1,000 in 1965 to 47.30/1,000 in 2015 (WORLD BANK, 2019). These two factors also increased the population able to use and disseminate the Portuguese language, especially in the last forty years.

4. 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 and also require human resources and 'political will' to be implemented. For isolated examples of effective language policies, though limited in scope, one can cite the approval of the Decree 19/2013 (published on 08/14/2014 in the Official Gazette), in which the government made the Unified Alphabet for Native Languages of São Tomé and Príncipe (ALUSTP) a linguistic instrument with the aim of standardizing the spelling of indigenous languages (see ARAUJO; AGOSTINHO, 2010). At the same time, the Government of the Autonomous Region of Principe has endeavoured, with political support and indirect financial support, to promote Lung'le in schools and to produce teaching materials (AGOSTINHO; BANDEIRA; ARAUJO, 2016).

The nature of the archipelago's occupation process and its economic cycles, with extensive employment of foreign labour, are underlying factors that 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, although such is the target of schooling and the ruling elites, as can be observed in the didactic and paradigmatic materials. Batibo (2005, p. 81) wrongly states 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 for the central government (regular deficits, a foreign debt difficult to equalize, dependence on foreign cooperation and the tutelage of the International Monetary Fund) limit its ability to carry out public policies (IMF, 2018). Thus, all successful initiatives for development in the field of education come from external cooperation activities. It is thus not uncommon for STP to be the target of pilot projects and investigations that result in partnerships, which are soon discontinued and replaced by new projects to evaluate what went wrong in previous projects. The very instability of the government does not guarantee the continuity of educational policies. The joining, as a founding member, of the Community of Portuguese-Speaking Countries did not result in public policies to promote Portuguese by the Government of STP, as the costs involved would be 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 end its term (11/25/2014 to 03/12/2018) without being overthrown by Parliament. The Government of STP, despite the goodwill of its political agents, therefore has limited opportunities to implement language policies, as this is a minor concern given all of the other problems the country faces.

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