

ACTIONS OF THREE INDIGENOUS WOMEN FROM PATAXÓ, KOKAMA AND KAINGANG ETHNICITIES IN THE INTERNATIONAL DECADE OF INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES

AÇÕES DE TRÊS MULHERES INDÍGENAS DAS ETNIAS PATAXÓ, KOKAMA E KAINGANG NA DÉCADA INTERNACIONAL DAS LÍNGUAS INDÍGENAS

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses how three Brazilian indigenous women from Pataxó, Kaingang and Kokama ethnicities are thinking and acting in the International Decade of Indigenous Languages, declared by UNESCO to be celebrated between the years 2022 to 2032, aiming to draw attention to the resumption, revitalization, preservation and dissemination of indigenous languages which are at risk of extinction. The text provides a brief history of the indigenous languages existing in Brazil, as well as reports on the work of Anari Braz Bomfim (on the resumption of the Pataxó language), Altaci Corrêa Rubim (on the creation of places where the languages of the peoples of the Amazon can be studied and vitalized) and Márcia Nascimento Kaingang (about the revitalization of the Kaingang language). The methodology for writing the text was that of bibliographical research in print, digital and audiovisual media, where deeds and thoughts of each indigenous leader were collected. Finally, considerations are made about what is being done and planned in favor of the indigenous languages of Brazil and what is expected from the future.

KEYWORDS: Indigenous languages. IDIL. Revitalization. Resumption of languages. Pataxó. Kaingang.

RESUMO

O presente artigo discorre sobre como três mulheres indígenas brasileiras estão pensando e atuando na Década Internacional das Línguas Indígenas, declarada pela UNESCO para ser celebrada entre os anos de 2022 a 2032, visando chamar a atenção sobre a retomada, revitalização, preservação e divulgação de línguas indígenas que correm o risco de extinção. No texto foi feito um pequeno histórico sobre as línguas indígenas existentes no Brasil, incluindo a reflexão de Anari Braz Bomfim (sobre a retomada da Língua Pataxó), Altaci Corrêa Rubim (sobre a criação de lugares onde as línguas de povos da Amazônia possam ser estudadas e vitalizadas) e Márcia Nascimento Kaingang (sobre a revitalização da língua Kaingang). A metodologia para a feitura do texto foi a de pesquisas bibliográficas nos meios impressos, digitais e audiovisuais, onde ações e pensamentos de cada liderança indígena foram coletados. Por fim, aponta-se considerações sobre o que está sendo feito e planejado em prol das línguas indígenas do Brasil e o que se espera do futuro.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Línguas indígenas. DILI. Revitalização. Retomada de línguas. Pataxó, Kaingang.

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1. Introduction

From the arrival of Christopher Columbus to Abya Yalla³, it was immediately noticed that the territory was inhabited by native peoples who spoke in languages that until then the Europeans did not know of the existence. As Sérgio Meira pointed out, the first contact of Europeans with indigenous peoples was with those who spoke languages from the Arawak and Cariban linguistic trunks. “At the time of discovery, languages from the Kariban family were among the first to be encountered by Europeans (along with languages from the Arawak family, which were also spoken on the Karibbean islands)” (2006, p. 162). In Brazil, today, several languages of these linguistic trunks are still spoken by several indigenous peoples.

History shows us that the contact of native peoples with the Spanish, Portuguese and later with the French, English and Dutch meant a series of problems that culminated in the genocide of those native people along with the languages that many spoke and that were replaced by the languages of the colonizers, Spanish, English, Portuguese, French and Dutch ended up being spread to a greater or lesser extent in place of indigenous languages. Today those that survive are spoken by very few people, with many of these languages at risk of becoming extinct in the coming years, as was the case with the Yagán language, when its last speaker died in 2022⁴.

In the specific case of the Brazilian context, indigenous peoples were massacred in true genocides brought by the European invader, their languages were treated as a problem to be solved, that is, it would be better if they did not exist, as the immense number of native languages generated administrative problems for the Portuguese metropolis. At first, the several hundred indigenous languages existing in the colony were replaced by only one (Tupinambá, later named in the north by “nheengatu”), which was later replaced by Portuguese language, after the genocide of the indigenous peoples of our country that, in the words de Garcia (2020, s/p) “began with the Portuguese colonization of the Americas, when Pedro Álvares Cabral arrived in what is now Brazil, in 1500”.

³ Gonçalves (2009) explains the meaning of Abya Yala, in the following terms: Abya Yala, in the language of the Kuna people, means mature land, living land or flourishing land and is synonymous with America. The Kuna people originate from the Sierra Nevada, in northern Colombia, having inhabited the region of the Gulf of Urabá and the Darien Mountains and currently live on the Caribbean coast of Panama in the Comarca of Kuna Yala (San Blas). Abya Yala has been used as a self-designation of the continent’s native peoples as a counterpoint to America. The expression was used for the first time in 1507, but it was only consecrated between the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century, through the Creole elites, to assert themselves in the process of independence, in contrast to the European conquerors. Although the different original peoples that inhabit the continent attributed names to the regions they occupied – Tawantinsuyu, Anahuac, Pindorama – the expression Abya Yala has been increasingly used by the original peoples of the continent in order to build a sense of unity and belonging.

⁴ In February and March 2022, several newspapers reported the death of Cristina Calderón, the last indigenous woman who spoke the Yagán language. The digital magazine Galileu reported: “Known by locals as “Abuela Cristina” (“Grandma Cristina” in Spanish), Calderón became the last guardian of the lost language in 2003, the year her sister died. She was the only female speaker of Yagán, as the language originally has no written form. Born in 1928, on another Chilean island, Isla Navarino, “abuela” lived her life in the community of Villa Ukika, always maintaining traditional beliefs of the culture of the Yagán peoples, which is very rich. For 6 thousand years, they traveled by canoe through remote channels of the Tierra del Fuego archipelago, in the extreme south of Patagonia. Before Argentina and Chile’s exploration of the region in the late 19th century, there were between 3,000 to 10,000 and the population began to collapse due to disease and relocation, leaving just 70 individuals in 1930.

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In this way, with the disappearance of indigenous languages that were replaced by just one, Portugal had a little more control to administer Brazil and made us arrive today in a continental country speaking a dominant language at the level of hundreds of millions of speakers. That occupies spaces of indigenous languages spoken by a few tens of thousands of people, languages that are facing difficulties to be revitalized.

We do not even know for sure how many languages disappeared in our country, as there are no exact data on how many were spoken when the Portuguese arrived in Pindorama (which was quickly renamed “Ilha de Vera Cruz”, since native nomenclatures were often disregarded by the Europeans). What exists regarding the number of languages spoken in the newly discovered sites are estimates by modern scholars. Loukotka (1968, apud Freire, 2011, p. 52) estimated 718 indigenous languages spoken in what is now Brazil, while Rodrigues (1993, p. 91) estimated approximately 1,175 languages and demonstrated mathematically⁵ how he arrived at such a figure.

If we cannot know exactly the number of languages that existed in Brazil five centuries ago, we have a current figure of 274 spoken in our country by 305 indigenous ethnic groups⁶. The aforementioned 2010 Census also revealed that a total of 37.4% of indigenous people aged 5 years or more spoke an indigenous language at home and this percentage increases to 57.3% when considering only those who lived within Indigenous Lands.

Indigenous leaders in Brazil and abroad have begun in recent decades to question this situation of the decline and disappearance of their languages, putting pressure on the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), which through the “Los Pinos Declaration” (Chapoltepek), defined the “International Year of Indigenous Languages” in 2019 and the “International Decade of Indigenous Languages”, aiming to draw the attention of the entire planet to the critical situation for many indigenous languages and fight for their recovery, revitalization, preservation, and dissemination. The UN approved in the General Assembly that such a decade would be celebrated between the years 2022 to 2032.

This article aims to address how this International Decade of Indigenous Languages is being experienced and thought about in Brazil from the perspective of indigenous leaders. And as in this text it would be impossible to put the point of view of all leaders, we chose four leaders who have worked in the field of indigenous languages. With this we hope to show, in a qualitative way, a little

⁵ Rodrigues stated to demonstrate how he calculated the number of languages spoken in Brazil: “We are going to work with the hypothesis that this would reduce by 25% the number of languages in relation to the number of peoples and we are going to use the number of 45 languages for the projection over the entire Brazilian territory. The area between the Tapajós and Madeira is approximately 300,000 km² and the surface of Brazil is 28.3 times larger, proportionally, the Brazilian territory would support 1,273 languages. It would be desirable to make other projections, from other geographic areas at times when European interference had not yet been so great. For the time being, we will limit ourselves to these two, that of Brazil East of Cardim and that of the Tapajós-Madeira interfluvium, which represent very different regions and different situations of European penetration, and we will use their arithmetic average, which is 1,175 languages, to Brazil at the beginning of colonization. (Rodrigues, 1993, p. 91).

⁶ According to data from the last Demographic Census carried out by the IBGE in 2010, Brazil recorded the existence of 274 indigenous languages in the country, where 817,963 indigenous people of 305 different ethnic groups lived.

of what has been worked on the area of language policies, inside and outside the native communities by the indigenous people themselves.

2. Methodology

The methodology of this article focused on searches for texts that represent the work of indigenous leaders who work in the protection, dissemination, revitalization, and recovery of native languages in Brazil. The method for searching these texts started with keywords in the Google search engine. And then, we selected several documents and chose those from reliable sources such as, *for example*, scientific journals, sites of Brazilian universities on the world wide web, articles in traditional periodicals, etc., where we collected several names of important indigenous personalities who are acting in favor of many communities throughout Brazil.

Then we apprehended the reports which scope was linked to what we were looking for, that is, those reports referring to indigenous leaders with work specifically linked or with greater emphasis on indigenous languages. As a logical consequence, the texts and videos that dealt with the work of many other important Brazilian indigenous leaders, but that did not refer to the object of this article, were discarded, however some names of these important bulwarks of indigenous causes in Brazil were mentioned in the body of the article so that we could contextualize how important everyone is to their communities and show that, among the leaders, there are those who work with indigenous languages and who were the object of our appreciation.

In this way, in the so-called International Decade of Indigenous Languages (IDIL) our attention is focused on what is effectively being done in Brazil by those who are most interested in the subject and, therefore, our methodological focus was to research the indigenous leaders who are publishing or leaving something recorded on the internet about that topic.

In addition to publications, our search method was also audiovisual research, notably in videos available on Youtube, also using Youtube's own search tool. The researched videos served as a complement to our searches for printed or written material available on the World Wide Web. Such videos, as they are publicly disclosed material, have a certain dynamism and practicality, being pertinent both the analysis of the material and of the people who produced it, since the thinking of some indigenous leaders can become easily disseminated. And so they manage to show their works just by talking about them in interviews without the need to publish them in traditional written media.

It is also important to point out that the virtual environment is a space with decentralized media where there is – as long as the sources sought are serious – a propitious space for the search for information.

Since we focused on those indigenous people who also have academic activities, our methodological procedure was to consult the Lattes Curriculum available on the CNPQ platform and which was transcribed in footnotes of each leadership we dealt with, so that the reader can more easily access with accuracy of the academic biography of all.

In short, so that we could have data collected in such a way as to analyze the material within the

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scope of writing this article, our methodological work was based on bibliographical research in print, digital, and audiovisual media.

3. Three indigenous women representing their peoples and languages

It urges to point out that in recent decades, Brazilian indigenous peoples have been fighting for their rights after several centuries of abuse suffered by them in Brazil.

This article deals with indigenous leaders who act primarily in the sphere of language policies of native peoples, as we want to know what is being done and thought in our country in this International Decade of Indigenous Languages. We chose, for this purpose, to analyze a little of the performance of 3 indigenous women: Anari Braz Bomfim (Pataxó people), Altaci Corrêa Rubim (Kokama people) and Márcia Nascimento (Kaingang people)

All are recognized as important leaders in the defense of education, indigenous cultures, and their languages. To write a little about the work of each one of them is to experience how they relate to the Brazilian indigenous languages and their insertion in the context of the decade of dissemination, preservation, revitalization, and resumption of native speech.

3.1. Anari Braz Bomfim

Anari Braz Bomfim⁷ is indigenous from the Pataxó ethnic group, with a very noticeable leadership role, as she is tireless in the work towards which she directed her life. She is the author of articles that deal with indigenous issues, including one that specifically talks about the International Decade of Indigenous Languages in Brazil, however, another text of her authorship is something worthy of mention and to be studied in earnest. It is her beautiful article entitled Patxohã: the resumption of the language of the Pataxó people, which was published in *Revista Linguística*⁸, in the year 2017.

Her article is an important reference at this time when we celebrate the decade of indigenous languages. Anari Bomfim deals with the subject of the resumption of the Pataxó language and goes into depth on this issue, bringing enriching reports.

It is not superfluous to remember that a language can be revitalized, but what is rarer is that it is resumed, that is, when it is reborn after being extinct. The specialized literature cites the example of

⁷ Anari Braz Bomfim's resume available on the CNPQ platform informs that she has a degree in Vernacular Letters with a Foreign Language / Degree from the Federal University of Bahia (UFBA) (2009). Master in Ethnic and African Studies from the Federal University of Bahia (2012). She is currently a PhD student in Social Anthropology at the Graduate Program in Social Anthropology at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro. Between 2010-2012 she participated as a researcher in the Program of the Observatory of Indigenous School Education of Bahia-Núcleo Yby Yara, she is currently a member of the Pataxó-Atxohã Research Group. She has experience in the area of indigenous school education, policy for indigenous education, indigenous languages, production of didactic material for indigenous schools. She works mainly on the following topics: resumption or revitalization of the Pataxó language, indigenous school education, Identity and language policy.

⁸ Magazine belonging to the Graduate Program in Linguistics at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro. The article can be found on pages 303 and following of volume 13, n. 1, jan. 2017.

the recovery of the Miami language in the United States of America⁹, pointed out by Leanne Hinton (2007, p. 27).

What is difficult to know in these cases of recovery is how it happens. Behold, cases of resumption are very rare and when reported, it comes to light in reports that are not very detailed. The theme, as we can see, is very interesting, because if there are thousands of extinct indigenous languages, reports like the one by Anari Bomfim show how we can bring some of these languages back to life.

We know that the Pataxó people were the first ones to have contact with the Portuguese when they arrived in what is now Bahia, in the year 1500. The Pataxó people lived in the region where Monte Pascoal is located and, after contact with the invader, they were practically decimated.

Those that survived had to adapt to the new times that began in the 16th century. They lost their lands, suffered all kinds of violence and their language ceased to be spoken. According to Bomfim (2017, p. 4) “In 1938, the German ethnologist Curt Nimuendaju found 16 Pataxós in the Caramuru Paraguaçu Reserve, among whom there were speakers of the language who did not communicate in Portuguese.”¹⁰ Bomfim also added that “Bahetá, one of the last speakers of the language of those groups mentioned by Curt Nimuendaju, the so-called Northern Pataxó (Pataxó Hãhãhãe), died in 1992.”¹¹ (2017, p. 4).

We can conclude, therefore, that the language of this people ceased to be spoken around the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century, but what draws our attention to this story is that the Pataxó continued to live in the same region where they had been for centuries and so they decided to revive their language, that is, they decided to resume using it in the same place.

The indigenous leader remembers these facts (and this is the beauty and great importance of her work that we can now remember in the International Decade of Indigenous Languages) right at the beginning of her account, where Anari explains the linguistic situation of the Pataxó people in the following terms:

In everyday life, the Pataxó people use Portuguese, which today is their first language; However, through the process of resuming the original language, which began in 1998, the Pataxó are becoming stronger and are relearning again, as a result of a collective mobilization movement for the appreciation of their culture and the affirmation of their ‘Pataxó’ identity. (Bomfim, 2017, p. 2) (our English translation).¹²

⁹ Leanne Hinton, professor of linguistics at UC Berkeley, cites the case of Daryl Baldwin of the Miami people. The language was extinct and Daryl Baldwin learned it, taught it to his family, turned it into the language used in his home and even taught it in courses and camps without any payment.

¹⁰ The original text Bomfim wrote in the Portuguese Language is: “Em 1938, o etnólogo alemão Curt Nimuendaju encontrou na Reserva Caramuru Paraguaçu 16 pataxós, entre os quais havia falantes da língua e que não se comunicavam em português.”

¹¹ In Portuguese: “Bahetá, uma das últimas falantes da língua desses grupos mencionados por Curt Nimuendaju, dos chamados Pataxó setentrionais (Pataxó Hãhãhãe), faleceu em 1992.”

¹² The original text Bomfim wrote in the Portuguese Language is: “No cotidiano, o povo Pataxó usa o português, que, hoje, é a sua primeira língua; entretanto, através do processo de retomada da língua originária, que começou em 1998, os Pataxó

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An aspect also worthy of note is that Anari Bomfim understands that the resumption of a language also depends on it being linked to the land of the people who speak it. To her, there is no retaking of the language without retaking the land. In this regard, she added:

It is not possible to talk about the resumption of the language without talking about the struggle for land. The Pataxó of the extreme south of Bahia, like other indigenous peoples in Brazil, continue to defend their survival and their territory. The first Pataxó Land was demarcated, as a permanent possession, by the Brazilian federal government, only in 1982, after conflicts and massacres that took place after the creation of the Monte Pascoal National Park, in 1943, on traditional Pataxó lands. Today, the Pataxó have been fighting for the expansion of the Pataxó Barra Velha Indigenous Land since 1999, awaiting the issuance of a declaratory ordinance. (Bomfim, 2017, p. 2) (our English translation).¹³

Analyzing such notes we learn that the recovery of an already extinct language is not an easy task. The first aspect, obviously, is to acquire the vocabulary, which is why, in the case in question, the indigenous leaders moved on to the research phase. Thus Bomfim reported:

So far, the oldest known document with linguistic data is the vocabulary collected by the German Prince Maximilian of Wied-Neuwied during an expedition to Brazil, between 1815-1817. In addition to the Pataxó language, he recorded lists of words from other peoples, such as Botocudos, Machacaris, Malalis, Maconis, Camacãs de Belmonte, Camacãs or Mongoiós from the Captaincy of Bahia. The registered words were written in the way Maximiliano understood their pronunciation, to give an idea of the sound, according to the writing of that German (Bomfim, 2017, p. 5) (our English translation).¹⁴

Ninety words were remembered in their vocabulary, and after many bibliographic searches, new words were found and incorporated into the vocabulary that was being carried out by the indigenous leaders. Bomfim also recalls that “in 1970, Pedro Agostinho compiled another lexical list among the Pataxó of the extreme south, with 171 words, in Aldeia Barra Velha, with the main informants being Vicentina and Tururim Pataxó”. (2017, p. 6). She also added that Greg Urban and Aracy Lopes also collected words with the last speaker of Pataxó language (Baheté).

se fortalecem e estão reaprendendo, novamente, resultado de um movimento coletivo de mobilização pela valorização da sua cultura e pela afirmação de sua identidade ‘pataxó’”.

¹³ In the original text: “Não é possível falar da retomada da língua, sem falar da luta pela terra. Os Pataxó do extremo sul da Bahia, assim como os outros povos indígenas no Brasil, continuam defendendo a sua sobrevivência e o seu território. A primeira Terra Pataxó foi demarcada, como posse permanente, pelo governo federal brasileiro, somente em 1982, após conflitos e massacres que aconteceram a partir da criação do Parque Nacional de Monte Pascoal, em 1943, em terras tradicionais Pataxó. Hoje, os Pataxó lutam pela ampliação da Terra Indígena Pataxó Barra Velha, desde 1999, aguardando expedição de portaria declaratória”.

¹⁴ In the original text: “Até o momento, o documento com dados linguísticos mais antigo de que se tem notícia, é o vocabulário coletado pelo príncipe alemão Maximiliano de Wied-Neuwied durante uma expedição ao Brasil, entre 1815-1817. Além da língua pataxó, ele registrou listas de palavras de outros povos, como, Botocudos, Machacaris, Malalis, Maconis, Camacãs de Belmonte, Camacãs ou Mongoiós da Capitania da Bahia. As palavras registradas eram escritas da maneira como Maximiliano entendia a sua pronúncia, para dar ideia do som, conforme a escrita do alemão.”

Getting the vocabulary – as we could see – is something very difficult if there is no material with thousands of lexemes to be researched. It is one thing for someone to want to learn to speak Latin (there are complete dictionaries and books of grammar), it is another thing to look for a vocabulary of a language that was no longer spoken and whose people did not have an alphabetical writing tradition in order to be able to leave a legacy of accurate reports for today’s researchers. Able to understand and study the grammatical structure of the language once used.

Bomfim (2017) showed us that for the resumption of the language, after completing the research phase in written material, the researchers went on to fieldwork and located people who acted as interpreters between Pataxó and non-indigenous people.

By adding the lexemes obtained in the bibliographic research to the fieldwork, a vocabulary was built however, there were different lexical varieties that the communities used, giving them the same meaning. That is why the leaders who worked with the resumption of the language gave new meanings to such lexemes. In this sense, we make use of Bomfim’s statements:

For example, for the meaning referring to the word water, the following forms were found: miãga and unaã (in the vocabulary known by the elders), txonãg (in the vocabulary used by Pataxó de Minas, from Professor Kanatyó’s list), txiãg (in the vocabulary of Nimuendaju, also found in Martius, (1867) and Loukotka (1939)) and nahã (in the vocabulary collected by Antônio Medeiros in 1936 among the Pataxó Hã Hã Hãe). The word miãga had already been spoken by the elders for a long time and all the other three were already being taught in Pataxó schools, miãga and unaã among the Pataxó of Bahia, and txonãg among the Pataxó of Minas. In some cases of written records, the words were re-signified, but without losing the essence of the previous meaning. Thus, txiãg, which originally meant just ‘water’, came to be associated with the meaning ‘rainwater’. Still in order to increase vocabulary, neologisms were created from existing words with different meanings, such as Ipamakã (father) + akâiéko (leader) = ipakâié (teacher) Kijemi (house) + etxawê (teaching) = kijêtxawê (school) (Bomfim, 2017, p. 20) (our English translation).¹⁵

Another aspect of the resumption of a language pointed out by this indigenous leadership is the written language, because when the it began to be taught, those who were working with the resumption needed to agree on what the written form would be like. This was resolved jointly so that there was the uniformity of what was being taught in different places.

¹⁵ The original text Bomfim wrote in Portuguese is: “Por exemplo, para o significado referente à palavra água foram encontradas as seguintes formas: miãga e unaã (no vocabulário conhecido pelos mais velhos), txonãg (no vocabulário usado pelo Pataxó de Minas, da lista do professor Kanatyó), txiãg (no vocabulário de Nimuendaju, também encontrado em Martius, (1867) e Loukotka (1939)) e nahã (no vocabulário coletado por Antônio Medeiros em 1936 entre os Pataxó Hã Hã Hãe). A palavra miãga já era falada pelos mais velhos há muito tempo e todas as outras três já estavam sendo ensinada nas escolas pataxó, miãga, unaã entre os Pataxó da Bahia e txonãg entre os Pataxó de Minas. Em alguns casos de registros escritos, as palavras foram ressignificadas, mas sem perder a essência do significado anterior. Assim, txiãg, que originalmente significava apenas ‘água’, passou a ser associada ao significado ‘água da chuva’. Ainda no sentido de aumentar o vocabulário, foram criados neologismos a partir de palavras existentes e com outro sentido, como: Ipamakã (pai) + akâiéko (líder) = ipakâié (professor) Kijemi (casa) + etxawê (ensino) = kijêtxawê (escola)”

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Obviously, the Pataxó language which has been restored today and which has been revived and brought back to life is not the Pataxó originally spoken, for this reason the language now has another name. It is called “Patxohã” (warrior’s language).

Anari Braz Bomfim showed that it is possible for a people to bring back what is most primordial of their culture, that is, the language. In this International Decade of Indigenous Languages, her work brought to the world details of how to revive a language that is no longer spoken and give it back to its people, restoring for this people something of prime importance that should never have been forgotten.

Finally, and just to record and highlight an important note by Anari Bomfim, when she stated that the language of a people is linked to their land, her point of view is in no way out of reality, behold, if we reflect well on this issue we will see that a language needs a place where it can be with a certain group of people to be born (or reborn) and exist.

This reminds us of the thought of Professor Wilmar da Rocha D’Angelis, who links languages to historical experiences of perception of the world constructed in a defined territory. In this sense D’Angelis states (using our translation from Portuguese to English) that

Each language spoken by a people carries, in itself, an important part of the historical experience of the society in which that language was shaped and constantly updated over the centuries of its existence. Not only does the lexicon of a language reveal the interests and knowledge developed, created, and accumulated throughout the history of the speech community to which that language belongs, but also its semantics (which are not limited to what people commonly understand by “lexicon”, present and expressed in grammatical categories and syntactic possibilities (as well as restrictions), reveal a perception of the world constructed in a defined territory, in a dialectical relationship between human society and the environment. (D’Angelis, 2021) (our English translation).¹⁶

In this International Decade of Indigenous Languages, another figure of strong leadership and reference for the native peoples of our country is Professor Altaci Corrêa Rubim¹⁷. In her native

¹⁶ In the original text: “Cada língua falada por um povo carrega, em si, uma parte importante da experiência histórica da sociedade em que aquela língua foi moldada e diuturnamente atualizada ao longo dos séculos de sua existência. Não apenas o léxico de uma língua revela os interesses e os conhecimentos desenvolvidos, criados e acumulados ao longo da história da comunidade de fala à qual pertence aquele idioma, mas também sua semântica (que não se resume ao que comumente as pessoas entendem por “léxico”), presente e expressa em categorias gramaticais e nas possibilidades (como também nas restrições) sintáticas, revelam uma percepção do mundo construída em um território definido, em uma relação dialética entre sociedade humana e meio ambiente”.

¹⁷ Professor Dr. Altaci Corrêa Rubim’s resume on the CNPQ platform informs she holds a degree in *Normal Superior* from the University of Amazonas, (2005) and Pedagogy from the Leonardo Da Vinci University (2009), Master in Society and Culture in the Amazonas state-PPGSA/UFAM, (2011), PhD in Linguistics from the Postgraduate Studies Program in Linguistics at the University of Brasília, (2016) and Master’s student in the Professional Master’s Degree in Linguistics and Indigenous Languages, PROFLIND/UF RJ (2020). She is a professor and researcher at the Department of Linguistics, Portuguese and Classical Languages (LIP) at the Institute of Letters (IL) at UnB and professor / researcher at the New Social Cartography Project of the Amazon-PNCSA / UEA. She advises masters, scientific initiation and course completion work. She is a member of the International WG for the Decade of Indigenous Languages organized by UNESCO (2020-2023). She has experience in the area of Education, with emphasis on Theories of Instruction and in the field of Anthropology. She works with the following themes: mapping, ethnic identity, Indigenous in the city, Language Policy and, mainly, with the elaboration of didactic material in the indigenous language. Collaborating Professor of the Graduate Program in Letters at the Federal University of Amazonas (2017). She was head of the Indigenous School Education Management at SEMED/Manaus (2017-2018). She has published articles in Brazil and abroad.

language (kokama) her name is Tataia, which is why she is also known as Tataia Kokama.

3.2. Tataia Kokama

Professor Altaci Corrêa Rubim works with training in indigenous rights, health, education and preparation of didactic material for indigenous people. In this Decade of Indigenous Languages, she was elected the representative of the indigenous peoples of Latin America and the Caribbean in the UNESCO World Working Group for the Decade of Indigenous Languages.

Her work on behalf of indigenous people comes at a stage in her life where this is possible since as a child, as an indigenous person, she was discriminated against at the school where she studied, as she was economically poor and not speaking Portuguese because she only used to express herself in the Kokama language.

In an interview given to the newspaper *Correio Brasiliense*, Rubim (2022) stated that “we were very discriminated against. By language, by clothing. At that time, the government did not provide uniforms, and we were unable to buy them”.

Altaci Rubim, in her speeches, makes – many times – a point of showing the indigenous reality well. If the indigenous people speak their language, they are discriminated against, if they live in a place that always belonged to their ancestors, this place – all of a sudden – might no longer belong to them. It was her case. On a beautiful day, her family and all her people received the news that the land where they all lived was not theirs, but the mayor’s. And the mayor turned everyone’s lives into a nightmare. Altaci told this in June 2022, to columnist Mariana Niederauer, from *Correio Brasiliense* newspaper:

He said he was going to bring cattle and would provide a lot of employment for those who lived there. To begin with, he hired everyone, including the children, to plant grass. And all of our fields turned into cattle fields”, she says. “When we finished planting, he called everyone, even the children, to carry sand to asphalt the city”, she adds. Then the mayor did the same, this time giving everyone the task of sweeping the streets they had helped to pave. Altaci always accompanied her mother on services, to guarantee an extra income. “Today I know I was a street sweeper, right? At the time I didn’t even know”. (Niederauer, 2023) (our English translation)¹⁸

Altaci Rubim’s narrative is the repetition of thousands of other stories of indigenous people during the last hundreds of years in Brazil. It is the story of violence where the native is treated as an inferior being and that is not always expressed well in Portuguese, often seen as a social problem since the land where his people live or used to live is almost always claimed or invaded by someone

¹⁸ In the original text: “Ele disse que ia trazer gado e ia dar muito emprego para quem morasse lá. Para começar, ele contratou todo mundo, inclusive as crianças, para plantar capim. E todas as nossas roças viraram campo de boi”, conta. “Quando terminamos de plantar, ele chamou todo mundo, até as crianças, para carregar areia e asfaltar a cidade”, completa. Depois, o prefeito fez o mesmo, dessa vez dando a todos a tarefa de varrer as ruas que haviam ajudado a pavimentar. Altaci sempre acompanhava a mãe nos serviços, para garantir uma renda extra. “Hoje eu sei que era gari, né? Na época eu nem sabia”.

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outside. There, with the use of disproportionate force against an entire people subjugated, everyone has to flee the ancestral lands and, in this escape, the language dies, because those who are forced to venture to other corners are few when compared to the non-indigenous Brazilian population.

The group, once cohesive and united, disperses among hundreds of millions of Portuguese speakers. With the passage of time and generations, nothing (or almost nothing) remains of the people, their history and their language. In fact, Professor Altaci felt this violence firsthand for simply defending the indigenous people. Let's see the continuity of her words transcribed by Niederauer, in *Correio Braziliense* newspaper:

“Twice they tried to kill us when we were in the workshop. Once it was in Santo Antônio, when we talked about GPS for the indigenous people to demarcate their territories”, she says. “They set up an ambush when my friend and I were giving this training”, reports the teacher. “We didn't die because an indigenous person conducted us into another path” (Niederauer, 2023) (our English translation).¹⁹

The life of Altaci Corrêa Rubim or Tataia Kokama is an individual mirror of what happens or happened to an entire people. Her name already indicates this situation because in order to be able to fight for her people and language, her identity “Tataia” in the native language had to become “Altaci” in the language of the (re)colonizer, which was added to a compound surname that sounds good in the non-native language.

Whether Altaci Corrêa Rubim or Tataia Kokama, both names designate a unique being who carries strength, pride and hope in her DNA in the form of a great woman who fights for Brazilian indigenous languages.

In an interview given to a YouTube channel, Altaci Rubim explained that her academic background helped her in the work of strengthening the indigenous languages of our country. In this regard:

[...] it ends up taking my academic training to the very struggle that I took to strengthen the language, research work on indigenous languages with indigenous peoples, taking workshops to map traditional peoples and communities, so my knowledge in the movement [...] (Rubim, 2022, áudio-visual information). (our English translation)²⁰

Logically, for the languages of indigenous peoples to have more life, it is necessary that they be taught, and this also happens within specific schools for these peoples who for centuries were marginalized by public policies.

The indigenous leader in question shows a little of what she helped to conquer, that is, a space

¹⁹ In the original text: “Por duas vezes tentaram nos matar quando estávamos na oficina. Uma vez foi em Santo Antônio, quando falamos de GPS para os indígenas demarcarem seus territórios”, conta. “Fizeram uma emboscada quando estávamos dando essa formação, eu e meu amigo”, relata a professora. “Não morremos porque um indígena nos desviou do caminho”.

²⁰ She said: “acaba levando a minha formação acadêmica à própria luta que eu levava de fortalecimento da língua, do trabalho de pesquisa de línguas indígenas com os povos indígenas, levando oficinas de mapeamento de povos e comunidades tradicionais, então a minha formação no movimento”. Interview available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HHHsb8HoleA> recordings taken from the interview starting at 9min.16sec.

for the languages of native peoples to be studied, vitalized, practiced, and taught. Thus, she stated:

[...] We have today 22 indigenous language places in Manaus for different peoples and 4 indigenous schools in the rural area of Manaus. Our struggle from 2000 to 2005 today resulted in this policy that already has legislation that supports the existence of these schools [...] (Rubim, 2022, áudio-visual information) (our English translation).²¹

Rubim/kokama has a life story that well represents her ancestral people. Her example was a fight that, in her case, against all odds, meant reaping the laurels of victory. She came out of a situation of misfortune experienced by all her people deprived of their lands, but she managed to reach - on her own merit - to be a professor at a renowned public university in the country without ever forgetting to keep her eyes on her roots.

With her performance, she shows that it is possible to work to strengthen indigenous languages by creating schools so that everyone can acquire knowledge inserted within their cultures. A noteworthy fact is that indigenous leaders have historically realized that if they want to do something that can impact the future of communities and their languages, they need to unite. Isolated work, despite being important, does not solve the problem.

In this way, it is with satisfaction that we see indigenous people unite and fight for something in common. “Nothing for us without us”, is the motto of the International Decade of Indigenous Languages. Together they protest, together they are knocking on the door of authorities’ offices, together they talk to the press about their problems, calling attention to facts that need to be ventilated so that they can be discussed and have solutions.

At academic level, the combination of forces is also happening. The indigenous leaders portrayed here (Altaci Rubim and Anari Bomfim) decided - together with Sâmela Meireles - to publicize the International Decade of Indigenous Languages in an interesting article signed by the three where they show the actions that indigenous peoples have been developing to resume or revitalize their languages. The keyword is collaborative work. In this sense, they stated that

It is time to build a collaborative space, connecting, strengthening, revitalization and recovery projects, all of those carried out by the people themselves and those that are built in partnership or directed by non-indigenous organizations. In this sense, during the International Decade of Indigenous Languages (IDIL), we intend to make them visible, support them and find ways to finance them. IDIL is a fundamental moment for the institution of an Indigenous Language Policy. It is the opportunity for indigenous peoples to be protagonists of their history, their policies and effectively participate in decision-making, planning and implementation of policies for their languages. (Rubim; Bomfim; Meireles, 2022, p. 174) (our English translation).²²

²¹ She said: “Nós temos hoje 22 espaços de línguas indígenas lá em Manaus de diferentes povos e 4 escolas indígenas na área rural de Manaus. Nossa luta de 2000 a 2005 resultou hoje nesta política que já tem legislações que amparam a existência destas escolas”. Interview available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HHHsb8HoleA> recordings taken from the interview starting at 12min.40sec.

²² In the original: “É o momento de construirmos um espaço colaborativo, conectar projetos de fortalecimento, revitalização e retomada, tanto aqueles protagonizados pelos próprios povos quanto aqueles que são construídos em parceria ou dirigidos

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Marcia Nascimento²³ also known as Márcia Gojten Nascimento Kaingang (or Márcia Kaingang) is an indigenous woman with a postdoctoral degree and a profound understanding of the Brazilian indigenous linguistic context. She is closely linked to the struggle for indigenous languages in Brazil, and her work focuses on the revitalization of indigenous languages and cultures.

3.3. Márcia Nascimento Kaingang

Márcia Nascimento Kaingang, together with two other researchers²⁴, presented in 2017 an interesting proposal for a project to revitalize the Kaingang language in the Indigenous Land of Nonoai, in the state of Rio Grande do Sul.

The proposal of Nascimento, Maia and Whan's group (2017) was firstly to show Brazilian society "the Maori Language Nest Program", which was developed in New Zealand and can be considered one of the most successful programs in the world in revitalization of a language in danger of extinction" and, once shown, a proposal was presented for the creation of a "nest of Kaingang language and culture".

It is important to argue that the Kaingang language needs to be revitalized. Márcia Nascimento and her colleagues, in this regard, make the following comments:

In terms of linguistic vitality, according to Nascimento (2013), it is quite possible that Kaingang is spoken by about 60% of the current population, that is, at least 18,000 of the 30,000 Kaingang would be speakers of the language. We did not find current and reliable data on the sociolinguistic situation of Kaingang, since no more detailed study has yet been carried out with precise data on the degree of vitality of the language. What we have are only estimated data and, moreover, very old ones, which no longer portray the current reality.

por organizações não indígenas. Nesse sentido, pretendemos, durante a DILI, visibilizá-las, apoiá-las e encontrar meios para financiá-las. A DILI mostra-se um momento fundamental para a instituição de uma Política Linguística Indígena. É a oportunidade de os povos indígenas serem protagonistas de sua história, de suas políticas e participarem efetivamente da tomada de decisão, do planejamento e da implementação de políticas para suas línguas".

²³ Márcia Nascimento's resume on the CNPQ Platform informs she holds a PhD in Linguistics from the Graduate Program in Linguistics at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro - UFRJ, with a CAPES scholarship. She holds a postdoctoral degree in revitalization of indigenous languages and cultures. Since 2017 she has been developing a project in the area of Linguistic Revitalization with the Kaingang people-Kanhgág v mré g jykre p jagfe (Kaingang language and culture nest)-which deals with methodologies for the intergenerational transmission of languages in danger of disappearing. In the second half of 2017 she carried out visits and internships at Massey University and Maori Language Nests in New Zealand. She is a researcher at the Experimental Psycholinguistics Laboratory (LAPEX) at UFRJ. Her main area of interest is the study of Brazilian indigenous languages, especially the Kaingang language of which she is a native speaker, as well as language teaching in the context of Indigenous School Education. She studies acquisition and processing of evidentials in Kaingang. Between 2014 and 2015, she served two semesters as a visiting researcher at the University of Massachusetts-UMASS (Amherst), participated in seminars and meetings of the Language Acquisition Research Center (LARC) presenting data on the Kaingang language. In 2013 she completed her master's degree in Linguistics from UFRJ. She holds a degree in Languages, Arts and Literature from the State University of Mato Grosso, through the 3rd Degree Indigenous Project (2006). She is a member of the IDIL National WG (2022-2032).

²⁴ Dr. Marcus Maia, professor at UFRJ, with experience in Brazilian indigenous languages and bilingual intercultural education; Professor Chang Whan, UNESCO consultant, PhD in Visual Arts (EBA-UFRJ), with research on art and indigenous cultures.

Nascimento (2013) reports, however, that the sociolinguistic situation can vary greatly from community to community: there are communities where the language is very much alive, being acquired by children as a mother tongue, and others where it is seriously threatened, as intergenerational transmission is already seriously compromised, that is, children no longer receive their parents' indigenous language as their first language. Thus, the Kaingang language seems to us to be correctly evaluated as “definitely endangered”, according to the classification proposed by the UNESCO Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger. (Nascimento; Maia; Whan, 2017, p. 373) (our English translation).²⁵.

After learning about the linguistic problem faced by the Kaingang people, the idea of revitalization was the proposal to follow the molds of the original project used for the Maori language in New Zealand. In this way a survey was made, from where the program could be proposed. In this sense, we have the information:

The Kaingang community of Nonoai, where the implementation of a language revitalization program is proposed, based on the successful experience of the Māori Language Nests, is located in the north of the state of Rio Grande do Sul, between the municipalities of Nonoai and Plateau, close to the border with the state of Santa Catarina. The population is about three thousand people, who are distributed in three villages: Pinhalzinho, Posto Sede and Bananeiras. Due to the proximity to the cities in the region, contact with non-indigenous society is very intense, with systematic and constant interaction between the Kaingang and the municipalities surrounding the indigenous land. (Nascimento; Maia; Whan, 2017, p. 373) (our English translation)²⁶

The pilot project design has some interesting aspects. Nascimento, Maia and Whan (2017, p. 377) stated that it was

designed to suit the educational and cultural sociolinguistic reality of the Kaingang people, with the broad participation of teachers, leaders and other members of the Kaingang community of Nonoai. The Ninho de Língua e Cultura will serve preschool-age children of ethnicity, from 1 to 6 years old, who are no longer exposed to the Kaingang language in their

²⁵ In the original: “Em termos de vitalidade linguística, na avaliação de Nascimento (2013), é bem possível que o Kaingang seja falado por cerca de 60 % da população atual, ou seja, pelo menos 18 mil dos 30 mil Kaingang seriam falantes da língua. Não encontramos dados atuais e confiáveis sobre a situação sociolinguística do Kaingang, visto que ainda não foi realizado nenhum estudo mais detalhado com dados precisos acerca do grau de vitalidade da língua. O que se tem são apenas dados estimados e, além disso muito antigos, que já não retratam a realidade atual. Nascimento (2013) relata, no entanto, que a situação sociolinguística pode variar muito de comunidade para comunidade: há comunidades onde a língua está muito viva, sendo adquirida pelas crianças como língua materna e outras em que se encontra seriamente ameaçada, pois a transmissão intergeracional já está seriamente comprometida, ou seja, as crianças já não recebem mais a língua indígena de seus pais, como primeira língua. Desse modo, a língua Kaingang parecemos corretamente avaliada como “definitivamente ameaçada”, segundo a classificação proposta pelo Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger, da UNESCO.”

²⁶ In the original: “A comunidade Kaingang de Nonoai, onde ora se propõe a implantação de um programa de revitalização linguística, com base na experiência bem sucedida dos Ninhos de Línguas Māori, localiza-se no norte do estado do Rio Grande do Sul, entre os municípios de Nonoai e Planalto, próximo da divisa com o estado de Santa Catarina. A população é de cerca de três mil pessoas, que se distribuem em três aldeias: Pinhalzinho, Posto Sede e Bananeiras. Pela proximidade com as cidades da região, o contato com a sociedade não indígena é muito intenso, havendo interação sistemática e constante entre os Kaingang e os municípios do entorno da terra indígena”.

domestic family environment. At first, as fundamental guidelines, the Kaingang Language and Culture Nest should include the following educational aspects:

- 1) In terms of cultural-linguistic immersion, to be a full-time education program;
- 2) To have exclusively the Kaingang language as a teaching language, as well as general communication;
- 3) Ensure the participation of older Kaingang masters as trainers, through paid hiring, due to the importance of the potential they represent in the intergenerational transmission of traditional knowledge and the Kaingang language;
- 4) Have only fluent Kaingang speakers on its staff, from administration, teachers, assistants, entertainers, to kitchen and cleaning staff; (Nascimento; Maia; Whan, 2017, p. 377) (our English translation)²⁷.

According to Nascimento, Maia and Whan (2017), in August of 2016, the project proposal was presented to indigenous leaders and was well received. Later, a delegation of researchers from New Zealand visited the Kaingang to learn about the reality of that Brazilian indigenous people, as well as to show the work of revitalizing the Maori language.

As with the other indigenous people who propose to fight for their peoples, Márcia Nascimento Kaingang did not stop at the project previously presented. She began to publicize what is “the Maori Language Nest Program” which here in Brazil became the “Kaingang Language Nest Program” in academic circles and in the organized indigenous movement. We could see her in action in news such as the one presented by the Federal University of Mato Grosso do Sul Foundation²⁸ in which she is shown as a lecturer at the Brazilian Society for the Progress of Science talking about the project to revitalize the Kaingang language in the Nonoai indigenous land.

Conclusion

The so-called International Decade of Indigenous Languages is being extremely important for the indigenous peoples of Brazil, not because the UN General Assembly decided to do so in a global context, but because the fact itself was born from the bases, because it was a work that came out of communities and local leaders to reach higher levels of the center of discussions in the world and, therefore, has everything to bear fruit over the years.

²⁷ In the original: “concebido de modo a se adequar à realidade sociolinguística educacional e cultural do povo Kaingang, com ampla participação de professores, lideranças e outros membros da comunidade Kaingang de Nonoai. O Ninho de Língua e Cultura deverá atender crianças da etnia em idade pré-escolar, de 1 a 6 anos, que não são mais expostas à língua Kaingang em seu ambiente familiar doméstico. A princípio, como diretrizes fundamentais, o Ninho de Língua e Cultura Kaingang deverá contemplar os seguintes aspectos educacionais:

- 1) Em caráter de imersão linguística cultural, ser um programa de educação operando em horário integral;
- 2) Ter como língua de ensino, bem como de comunicação geral, exclusivamente, a língua Kaingang;
- 3) Garantir a participação dos mestres anciãos Kaingang como formadores, através de contratação remunerada, devido a importância do potencial que estes representam na transmissão intergeracional do conhecimento tradicional e da língua Kaingang;
- 4) Ter em seu quadro de pessoal apenas falantes fluentes de Kaingang, desde a administração, professores, auxiliares, recreadores, até pessoal de cozinha e limpeza;”

²⁸ “Language nests” can help combat the loss of indigenous languages, available at <https://www.ufms.br/ninhos-de-lingua-podem-ajudar-combater-a-perda-das-linguas-indigenas/> accessed on 6/4/2023.

2019 was defined as the international year for indigenous languages and a series of actions demonstrated that it would be worth declaring a decade to intensify this fight. What the UN created was an initial framework where Member States recognize that something must be done, that rights exist, that people speak their languages that need to be respected, valued, revitalized, disseminated and – in specific cases – retaken when possible.

When we talk about indigenous languages, we are discussing the identities of people and their cosmivision, that is, how they face the world from within their linguistic aspect, since the language reflects the traditions of peoples, and their histories linked to the land.

As we could observe when we analyzed in this article the recovery of the Pataxó language, the first struggle of the people was for the land, because it is in a certain territory that the language was born and transmitted. Although apparently there is a contradiction in linking speech (coming from the vocal cords of a biological body) to a delimited geological unit, it is enough to analyze history to realize that without a place there is no cohesion of people and if there is no union, there is no people to which a language can be born and develop.

In this way, in the International Decade of Indigenous Languages, each community that fights for its language is actually fighting for its lives, for its histories, for its own way of interacting and for the construction of a more diverse and just world.

When an indigenous language dies, part of the culture of a people also dies, which obviously can express itself in another language, but the one that died took part of the traditions and part of what they all were, because those that remain are, perhaps, a people different from their ancestors.

The language is so important for the peoples who lose it that sometimes they start to fight for its resumption (as is the case of the Pataxó people) because if the indigenous peoples speak their languages, this reinforces their identity pride.

When someone wants to destroy a people, the most difficult way to do it would be to destroy the language, which is why history shows us that people's self-confidence is first destroyed through repeated violence of all kinds. For those who are left alive, the recipe is the destruction of culture, making them feel ashamed of what they are. Their lands are taken, and the people fall apart, losing cohesion to disperse along with the language that everyone once spoke. However, when the language is defended, when it is vitalized, and even when it is retaken, it becomes a symbol of unity and hope for all.

The actions of Anari Braz Bomfim, Altaci Corrêa Rubim and Márcia Nascimento Kaingang, shown in this article point out that indigenous leaders are committed to their communities. What they do for their ethnic groups is actually a strengthening of awareness of the importance, not only of indigenous languages, but also of the territory and all the culture that each one brings within themselves.

What is expected from all this work that the leaders do is that the generations that follow see the example that is being given and continue in the same way, because only by working incessantly will

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barriers be knocked down and language policies gradually will be implemented. Across the country so that indigenous languages are preserved and strengthened.

Obviously, in Brazil, there are many problems regarding the preservation of native languages, but hope is awakened when we see indigenous leaders and Brazilian communities fighting for their way of speaking.

The International Decade of Indigenous Languages offers our country a unique opportunity to think about promoting cultural and linguistic diversity. If we want a fairer and better society, we must start with respect for our fellow men, and one of the many ways to make this respect exist is to start by building a plural and inclusive society, where everyone has the right and, above all, the conditions to express themselves in their language.

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