

NHEENGATU (LÍNGUA GERAL AMAZÔNICA), ITS HISTORY, AND THE EFFECTS OF LANGUAGE CONTACT

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INTRODUCTION*

One of the most fascinating cases of a language altered by contact with other languages has remained largely unknown to English-speaking linguists--the case of Nheengatu, also called Língua Geral Amazônica. This language was once dominant throughout the settled Brazilian Amazon region and is still spoken in its modern form in some areas, especially in the region of the Upper Rio Negro.

The indigenous language which was the source of Nheengatu, Tupinambá, is known through descriptions written by Jesuit missionaries (for example, Anchieta 1595 and Figueira 1621), sources which provided the basis for the modern analysis of this now extinct language by Rodrigues (1958, 1990). Old documents in Nheengatu survive from each successive century. There are collections of texts and amateur grammatical descriptions (rigidly following European grammatical categories) from the last two centuries (Magalhães 1876, Rodrigues 1890, Silva 1945, Michaele 1951). The few modern linguistic treatments of Nheengatu include Taylor (1985, 1988), Borges (1991), Grenand and Ferreira (1989), and Rodrigues (1986: ch. 10). The latter work deals explicitly and authoritatively with the diachronic evolution of Nheengatu from Tupinambá; the others are more concerned with phonology than with grammar.

Our own research on modern Nheengatu began in Belém, Brazil, in 1987, initially as a means for teaching field methods. Rather unexpectedly, the research continued sporadically for three years, with a total of ten texts transcribed and analyzed. Emphasis was given to the syntax because of its lack of professional description.

On this basis we present a very brief description of some of the main structural features of the contemporary Nheengatu of the upper Rio Negro, noting obvious resemblances to the structure of its indigenous ancestor or to Portuguese. Unfortunately, no information is yet available on the Nheengatu of other regions and so little can be said about the important question of variation within modern Nheengatu--which may be considerable.

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To gain at least a superficial historical perspective on Nheengatu and its evolution, some sources on Tupinambá and on the history of Nheengatu and its relation to socio-political events in Amazonian history were consulted. (Many were not immediately available and could not be consulted.). The linguistically sophisticated work of Freire (1983) was especially useful. On this basis a quick outline of the history of Nheengatu is given, immediately below, focusing on those aspects most relevant for understanding the transmission and the modification of the language during its various phases. After the summary description of the structure of Nheengatu, some final observations are offered about the possible effects of the different types of language contact situations through which Nheengatu passed in different historical periods.

BRIEF HISTORY OF NHEENGATU

In 1500, at the time of the first Portuguese contact with what is now Brazil, the eastern coast from São Paulo to the mouth of the Amazon was occupied by native peoples speaking Tupinambá, one of the languages of the Tupi-Guaranian family (of which twenty or so still survive), the most widespread of the ten families of the Tupi linguistic stock. Since there were relatively few European women among the first colonists, many of the Portuguese men married Tupinambá women. Tupinambá was spoken in the household and the mestizo children spoke it natively (Rodrigues 1986:101).

The initial impression of the Europeans was that all the Brazilian Indians spoke the same language, and they thought that knowledge of the language would facilitate the work of conquest and conversion. The Jesuits were active with the indigenous peoples and languages, producing the descriptions by Anchieta (1595) and Figueira (1621). Figueira referred to the language of the coast as the 'Língua Brasileira'. This name was commonly used to refer to it in the Seventeenth Century, though in the second half of that century the name 'Língua Geral' came into use, and in the latter part of the Nineteenth Century the name 'Nheengatu' became common (Rodrigues 1986: 100-103).

The colonization of the Amazon River and its tributaries lagged behind the colonization of the southern regions, where a *língua franca* with an indigenous base, *Língua Geral Paulista*, developed and then almost completely disappeared by the 18th century (Rodrigues 1986:102). The Luzo Brazilian occupation of the Amazon region began in 1616 with the establishment of Forte do Presépio in the mouth of the Amazon River.

In the Sixteenth Century two expeditions on the Amazon River had been struck by the enormous number of indigenous languages --a very different situation from the coastal uniformity. A Spanish Jesuit who traveled the Amazon River counted more than 150 different languages along the banks of the Amazon and the mouths of its principal tributaries (Acuña 1641:199, cited in Freire 1983: 42).

The European colonists (and the mestizos) depended on Indian labor to extract wealth from Amazônia. A system of slavery and 'aldeias de repartição' (resettlement villages) for 'free' Indians was established. Large numbers of indigenous people from many regions, speaking many different languages, were taken from their homes and resettled as laborers for colonists and missionaries. Língua Geral was spoken by the Europeans and mestizos to these Indian laborers.

The use of Língua Geral as a língua franca was favored by the presence of many languages of the Tupi-Guaranian family in the region and by the colonists' desire for a language to communicate with the captured labor force (as well as with their own Tupinambá allies) and by the widespread fluency in Língua Geral that had already been obtained on the coast.

Three years after the Jesuits gained control over the indigenous population through the Regimento das Missões in 1686, Língua Geral was recognized as the official language of Amazônia by the government in Portugal, which endorsed its spread. The Jesuits increased the time that the indigenous inhabitants of the resettlement villages spent in the villages, reducing the time spent in extractive activities. They systematized more the education in Língua Geral. They also increased the expeditions to subjugate and relocate native peoples from more and more remote villages.

Some census figures help understand the sociolinguistic situation at the end of the Seventeenth and the beginning of the Eighteenth Centuries. According to Baena (1831:247, cited in Freire 1983:50), in the four years 1687-1690, just from areas reached by the Tocantins, Amazon, and Negro Rivers, 184,040 Indians were seized and relocated for King and Church. By comparison, the European population was tiny. The 150 Europeans who arrived in 1616 had only grown to 1,000 by 1720, whereas only in Pará, excluding Maranhão, there were 63 resettlement villages with 54,264 Indians, as well as more than 20,000 Indian slaves and a number of mestizos (Raiol 1900:132, cited in Freire 1983:52).

Two facts are noteworthy here. One is that there were massive numbers of new speakers of Nheengatu during the phase of its expansion in the Seventeenth Century and the first half of the Eighteenth Century. Also, these new speakers were from various tribes and spoke various languages; many of which fell into disuse as the speakers' children learned Nheengatu. The existence of a multiplicity of indigenous languages among the captured Indians would favor the spread of Nheengatu, as they turned to it to communicate with each other, just as many Brazilian Indians today speak to other Indians in Portuguese.

The second fact is that there was a large community of native speakers of Nheengatu. Of the classes of people mentioned in the census of 1720, the Whites born in Brazil, the mestizos, the Indian slaves, and the more acculturated Indians in the resettlement villages spoke Nheengatu. While it was the case that the Jesuits used the language as a means of instruction, it would seem, on general grounds, that language learning in the classroom would have been much less significant as a means of transmission than was informal contact with the many native speakers during work, visiting, or religious activities.

By the middle of the Eighteenth Century Nheengatu was nearly universal in colonized Amazônia, even in the capital Belém. This success brought on its decline. Through their

knowledge of the language and control over the Indians, the Jesuits constituted a political force which rivaled that of the State. In the second half of the Eighteenth century the Jesuits were expelled, the State assumed control over Indians and attempted to introduce Portuguese influence into Amazônia. Nheengatu was persecuted and Portuguese was promoted as the language of instruction.

Instruction in Portuguese was ineffective among the Indians. Catastrophic depopulation was already decimating the resettlement villages. Between 1743 and 1750, 40,000 Indians died from diseases in the villages in Pará alone (Freire 1983: 62). In the hands of the State, the Indians continued to fare poorly. Some Portuguese settlers and African slaves were introduced into eastern Amazônia, altering the population balance somewhat in that area.

Brazil became independent in 1822. There had been native insurrections and rebellions previously, all violently suppressed. But the rebellion called the Cabanagem was a large-scale revolt by Indians, caboclos, and negros against the Europeans that lasted ten years, 1837-47, and cost 40,000 lives. The language of the Cabanos was Nheengatu. After the defeat and decimation of the Cabanos, the predominance of Nheengatu was greatly reduced, though it continued in western Amazônia, which still largely depended on Indian labor. The introduction of settlers from the Northeast in the last decades of the Nineteenth Century during the rubber boom reinforced the use of Portuguese.

Freire (1983:73) notes that Correa de Faria, in the mid-Nineteenth Century, compared the Nheengatu he had learned on the Upper Rio Negro with that of the Seventeenth Century, as described by Figueira (1621), and found it to be very different.

In this century, Portuguese has continued to replace Nheengatu, which survives, however, on the Rio Negro, on the Middle Amazon, and probably on the Solimões River.

PHONOLOGY

There are some modern treatments of the phonology of Nheengatu, especially the sketches in Taylor 1985 and 1988, and the thesis of Borges (1991). Some observations are offered by Grenand and Ferreira (1989: xiv-xvii). However, many aspects of the phonology are still debatable. We will limit ourselves to a brief, tentative characterization of the phonology of Nheengatu, using the above sources as a point of departure and indicating the details which are unresolved.

One complication is the existence of dialect differences. Another is the problem of separating vocabulary items according to their origins, since there are at least two phonological patterns present: words descended from Tupinambá and words borrowed, more or less recently, from Portuguese. The complexity of the question can be seen from the example of *jirimú* 'squash', which is listed as part of the vocabulary of Nheengatu by Grenand and Ferreira (62) and which they would consider to be a borrowing from Portuguese since the initial consonant, a

voiced palatal fricative, only occurs, according to them, in such borrowings. However, the word 'jerimum' is itself of Tupi-Guaranian origin, probably borrowed at an early date into Portuguese and then, apparently, borrowed again later into Nheengatu. It is difficult to recognize such examples or even those from other indigenous languages, for example, *dakirú* 'violin', said by Grenand and Ferreira (xi) to be of Tukanoan origin. The phonological analysis will, of course change greatly as a function of which vocabulary items it covers.

BORROWED VOCABULARY

There are some old borrowings from Portuguese which follow indigenous phonological patterns:

| Nheengatu | Portuguese | English |
|-----------|------------|-----------|
| sorára | 'soldado' | 'soldier' |
| kamižá | 'camisa' | 'shirt' |

At least for bilingual speakers, recent Portuguese borrowings seem to follow the phonological patterns of Portuguese, with all the consonants and the seven vowels of that language:

| Nheengatu | Portuguese | English |
|------------|------------|----------------|
| [hóp^] | 'roupa' | 'clothing' |
| [presízu] | 'preciso' | 'necessary' |
| [uištudái] | 'estuda' | '(he) studies' |

NATIVE VOCABULARY

The surface phonemes of what appear to be non-borrowed words form a more restricted inventory. None of authors cited immediately above agree as to the details of this inventory, though they do agree on its basic components. The analysis adopted here (presented in the table on the left, below) also differs in its details from the others. Marginal or debatable phonemes are enclosed in parentheses. For comparison, the phonemic inventory of Tupinambá, from Lemle 1971 (109), based on Rodrigues 1958, is given below on the right. Some details of the sound system of Nheengatu are discussed and compared with Tupinambá or other languages of the Tupi-Guaranian family.

Modern Nheengatu

| | | | | | |
|-----|----|------|-----|------|-----|
| p | t | (č) | k | (kw) | (?) |
| mb | nd | | ng | | |
| (b) | | | (g) | | |
| | s | š | | | |
| w | r | y, ỹ | | | |
| m | n | | | | |
| i | | u | | | |
| e | | | | | |
| | a | | | | |

' (stress)
 ~ (vowel nasalization)

Tupinambá

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| p | t | k | ? |
| b | | | |
| | s | š | |
| w | r | y | |
| m | n | ŋ | |
| i | i | u | |
| e | | o | |
| | a | | |

' (stress)
 ~ (vowel nasalization)

Most occurrences of the palatal affricate, č, precede i, but a few examples do not:

čá 'no more' č-áku- mā?á 'don't know...'
 not-know-what

While some č before i can optionally be t, indicating a palatalization rule like that of many dialects of Portuguese (eg. kič'i ~ kit'i 'toward'), others cannot (eg. č'í, *t'í 'nose'), and some examples of t before i cannot be palatalized (eg. ratiwa, *račiwa 'uncle'). So, provisionally, č will be considered a phoneme, with some fluctuation with t before i, at the surface level.

The prenasalized voiced stops, mb, nd, ng, are common and recognized by all authors as phonemes. They occur initially and intervocalically, nasalizing the immediately preceding vowel, even across morpheme boundaries. They appear to occur only before oral vowels:

| | | | |
|---------|-------------|----------|----------------|
| mbíra | 'offspring' | sẽ-mbíra | 'my offspring' |
| ã-mba?ú | '(I) eat' | u-sëndú | '(he) hears' |

Since in many Tupi-Guaranian languages (for example, Urubu-Kaapor, Kakumasu 1986: 401), the nasal consonant phonemes have prenasalized voiced oral stops as allophones before oral vowels, one would assume that the nasal series in Tupinambá is the diachronic source of both the nasal series and the prenasalized series in Nheengatu, though it is not clear what the conditioning factor for the split was. Interestingly, the principal informant prefers yané- as the first person plural prefix of the nominal series and yândé as the free pronoun 'we'.

Oral voiced stops, b and g, are relatively scarce and are not recognized as phonemes by Taylor or Borges. However, they do occur in words which are not obvious borrowings, before oral or nasal vowels:

| | | | | |
|-----------------|--|----------------|------------|---------------------|
| búya | 'snake' | se-búya | 'my snake' | (móya in Tupinambá) |
| bũmbáka | 'a palm species' (Grenand and Ferreira: 26) | | | |
| tibiyara | 'a bird species' (Grenand and Ferreira: 166) | | | |
| garapé | 'creek' | | | |
| apigáwa | 'man' | | | |

The nasals *m* and *n* occur before or after oral or nasal vowels.

| | | | |
|--------------|----------|----------------|-------------|
| míra | 'person' | se-míra | 'my person' |
| nāmbí | 'ear' | | |
| amána | 'rain' | | |

The palatal nasal is analyzed here as (the typically Tupian) *ỹ* instead of *ñ* because (1) it is usually a glide phonetically and (2) the vowels on either side are obligatorily nasalized, unlike the case of the nasals *m* and *n*. It occurs intervocally and (rarely) initially.

| | | | |
|-------------|---------|-------------|---------|
| ỹú | 'alone' | āỹú | 'only' |
| ỹã?á | 'that' | kũỹá | 'woman' |

Unlike *ỹ*, the nasal labiovelar glide is rare. Whereas the Tupi-Guaranian languages generally have notable nasalization spreading, this is very marginal in Nheengatu. For example, in *yāndé* 'we', the initial glide is oral, and in *aētá* 'they', an oral vowel precedes a nasal vowel within the same syllable, at least on the surface.

Two oral glides are generally recognized for Nheengatu, *y* and *w*. As analyzed here, these are only slightly reduced high vowels which occur syllable initially and do not carry stress. Examples:

| | | | |
|--------------|----------|--------------|-------------|
| yaučí | 'turtle' | waimĩ | 'old woman' |
| íwa | 'tree' | iwá | 'fruit' |

Unlike Portuguese, Nheengatu, following the indigenous pattern, permits syllables containing two vowels. Note 'turtle' and 'old woman' above and also the following examples:

| | | | | | |
|--------------|---|--------------|----------|--------------|---------------|
| aētá | 'they' | pakúa | 'banana' | múčiu | 'bellybutton' |
| u-ikú | 'he is' (normal pronunciation, secondary stress on the first vowel) | | | | |

To avoid sequences of three vowels in one syllable in the example *apukwái* 'tie', we tentatively recognize a labiovelar stop, *kw*, which is probably derived from underlying *ku*. Some examples of *kw* (eg. *aikwé* 'there is') cannot be *ku*, though this sequence also exists (eg. *iku?éma* 'light-colored').

There are only four vowel phonemes in modern Nheengatu, at least in the dialect studied. Nineteenth Century sources often note a fifth vowel, presumably *i*.

Each Nheengatu morpheme has one primary stress. Within the word, the rightmost stress is maintained and the preceding stresses are successively reduced. Word boundaries can be determined on this basis. Example:

| | | |
|---------------|-----------------------|----------------------|
| ''u-'mu-'kiri | u-mu-kíri | 'he causes to sleep' |
| | 3-transitivizer-sleep | |

In our transcription we indicate the stress of each root morpheme with an acute accent mark, though only the rightmost is unreduced. Affixes, except the diminutive, the augmentative and the plural, are stressed on the syllable adjacent to the stem. Affix stress is not marked here.

The status of the glottal stop is not yet clear. Frequently it can occur optionally at morpheme boundaries intervocalically, even before an unstressed vowel, eg., *se-?iwá* 'my fruit'. It also occurs morpheme internally before stressed vowels, e.g. *ka?á* 'forest'. It may be fully predictable in this position, but for the time being, it will be transcribed when it is possible morpheme medially.

The syllable pattern of (C)V(V) in Nheengatu differs from that of Tupinambá, which permitted syllable final consonants morpheme finally.

In the transition from Tupinambá to Nheengatu, the principal changes in the inventory of segmental phonemes, pointed out by Rodrigues (1986: 104), were the merger of Tupinambá *b* (a bilabial fricative) with *w*, the merger of Tupinambá *o* with *u*, and the disappearance of the velar nasal *ŋ*, with accompanying nasalization of the preceding vowel.

MORPHOLOGY

WORD CLASSES

Nheengatu words fall into eight word classes, approximately equivalent to those of Portuguese: nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, postpositions, pronouns, demonstratives, and particles. Most words in modern Nheengatu texts are of native origin, though there are many borrowings. Almost all borrowings from Portuguese are nouns, verbs, or particles; the other categories seem to be essentially of indigenous origin.

Nouns can be distinguished from adjectives in that the former accept prefixes of the nominal series and the latter do not (though stative verbs homophonous with adjectives do accept these prefixes). Also, adjectives can modify nouns which precede them, but nouns cannot

modify preceding adjectives. Both simple nouns and derived nouns take the same person prefixes, e.g. *se-pú* 'my hand', *se-yasi-wéra* 'my cry-baby'.

Verbs follow a typically Tupi-Guaranian pattern, falling into three mutually exclusive subclasses, intransitive, transitive, and stative. All verbs are obligatorily prefixed for subject. Only verbs can constitute complete one word sentences:

| | | |
|---------------|-------------------------|--------------------|
| intransitive: | a-purakí | 'I work.' |
| transitive: | a-mũyá' (object) | 'I make (object).' |
| stative: | se-rurí | 'I am happy.' |

Note that the stative verbs use prefixes of the nominal series, while the intransitive and transitive verbs use prefixes of the verbal series (which occur with no other class). Borrowings from Portuguese seem to enter only the intransitive and transitive subclasses, not the stative subclass. All stative verbs have corresponding adjectives, for example *se-rurí* 'I am happy' and *suri* 'happy', but the converse is not true.

Adjectives can be either attributive (*maniáka akíra* 'green manioc') or predicative (*maniáka i-akíra* 'the manioc is green'). Some predicate adjectives occur with the invariant prefix *i-*, which is homophonous with the third person of the nominal series. By contrast, stative verbs occur with all the prefixes of the nominal series, showing concordance with the (optional) subject. Adjectives, but not nouns or adverbs, accept the suffix *-to* 'semi' (*purángá-to* 'almost good', **uká-to* 'almost a house'). Adjectives, unlike transitive and intransitive verbs, cannot accept the prefixes of the verbal series.

Adverbs can be distinguished from nouns and verbs by their lack of person prefixes. They differ from adjectives in that they cannot modify preceding nouns. The free movement of adverbs also distinguishes them from particles and other word classes.

The pronouns are either personal or interrogative. The same set of personal pronouns is used as subject or as object of a verb, as in Tupinambá. Most of the Tupinambá pronouns survived into Nheengatu, but the pronominal system was reanalyzed, converging toward Portuguese. As analyzed by Rodrigues (1990: 420), the Tupinambá system functioned in terms of 'parameters of (a) contrast between speaker and hearer and (b) focality of the 3rd person', rather than the person and number system of today.

Nheengatu Personal Pronouns:

| | | | |
|-------------|--------|--------------|----------|
| isé | 1 sing | yãndé | 1 plural |
| ĩndé | 2 sing | pẽyẽ' | 2 plural |
| a?é | 3 sing | aětá | 3 plural |

Nheengatu also has two interrogative pronouns which are used as question words, both from Tupinambá.

| | |
|------|-------------------|
| mā?á | 'what, who, whom' |
| awá | 'who, whom' |

All the postpositions are of indigenous origin, remaining in Nheengatu even though the basic word order changed from SOV to SVO. Postpositions accept prefixes of the nominal series (e.g. *se-irũ* 'with me'), but cannot occur with a free pronoun (**išé irũ* 'with me'). Some of these postpositions are the following:

| | | | |
|------|-----------|------|------|
| rupí | 'through' | upé | 'in' |
| su?í | 'from' | resé | 'in' |
| irũ | 'with' | kití | 'to' |

The Portuguese numerals can be used in modern Nheengatu, though at least the lower numerals still exist: *yepé* 'one', *mukũĩ* 'two', and *musapiri* 'three'. Unlike in Portuguese, numbers, even borrowed ones, can precede (*dózi akayú* 'twelve years') or follow (*akayú dózi*) a noun.

There are two demonstratives (*kwá* 'this' and *ỹã?á* 'that'), which can precede or be the head element in a noun phrase. They cannot occur with pronominal prefixes but can occur with the plural suffix (e.g. *kwá-itá* 'these'). According to Rodrigues (1986: 105) these two elements are the only survivors of the rich Tupinambá system of demonstratives which included forms meaning 'this (close to the speaker)', 'that there (close to the hearer)', 'that over there (visible)', 'that over there (invisible)', 'that physically present', 'that we are talking about', etc.

Particles do not accept inflectional or derivational affixes, though some can form constructions with another free element. Examples:

| | |
|-------------|-------------------------|
| ramẽ | 'when' |
| čí | NEGATIVE |
| nẽĩ ~ nẽ | 'nor' |
| aráma ~ ará | 'for' |
| wa?á | RELATIVIZER |
| aikwé | 'there is' |
| ãyũ | 'just/only' |
| sá | 'if' |
| ki | 'that (COMPLEMENTIZER)' |
| presízo | 'It's necessary' |

Some of the particles are borrowed, such as *presízo* 'it's necessary' and *nẽĩ ~ nẽ* 'nor', *sá* 'if' and *ki* 'that'.

COMPOUNDS

Tupinambá was morphologically complex, with an ample system of incorporation. Examples from Rodrigues (1990: 398-99):¹

ya-y-namí-?ók-ukár
3-relational-ear-take.off-Caus
'CUT THE EAR OFF OF'

ya-y-pó-pwár-atã
3-relational-hand-tie-hard
'TIE UP HIS HANDS TIGHTLY'

Compounding is no longer a very productive process, but a variety of compounds do exist. Examples:

| | | |
|-----------------|------------------------------------|------------------|
| N + N > N | e.g. pí-puã pé foot-nail | 'toe nail' |
| N + N > Adj | e.g. sasi-ára pain-day | 'sad' |
| N + Adj > N | e.g. maniákã-mbéka manioc-soft | 'soft manioc' |
| V + Adv > V | e.g. kwá-katú know-well | 'think, believe' |
| N + N > N | e.g. námbi-púra ear-part.inside | 'earring' |
| Ptc + Ptc > Ptc | e.g. čí-ará ma not-to | 'to not' |

AFFIXES

Affixation, as well as compounding, was reduced during the evolution of Nheengatu. Rodrigues (1986: 105) neatly sums up the grammatical changes, observing that (our translation): 'The greatest alterations suffered by Tupinambá in the process of becoming Língua Geral resulted from a progressive simplification of the grammatical forms, accompanied by reorganization of the construction of sentences'. For example, he points out that the Tupinambá verbal morphology, which included a system of five moods (indicative, imperative, gerund, circumstantial and subjunctive) converged to the indicative mood. The noun morphology, which included a system of conjugations in six grammatical cases (nominative, vocative, attributive and three locative cases) was lost in Nheengatu.

¹ Special abbreviations: Caus = causativizer Cop = copula V' = complex verb
Neg = negative Rel = relative Rlt = relational
Ptc = particle Foc = focus Relz = relativizer
Comp = complement S' = embedded clause Fut = future

The inflectional and derivational affixes of modern Nheengatu are from Tupinambá; that is, there is no borrowing of any Portuguese affixes. Even recent Portuguese borrowings in Nheengatu can accept person prefixes. Some modern affixes seem to be the result of grammaticization of what were formerly lexical items. The plural suffix, *-itá*, a convergence toward Portuguese, was formerly a lexical item, *etá*, meaning 'many' (Rodrigues, personal communication). Some modern affixes:

| INFLECTION | | DERIVATION | |
|---|--------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Verbal Series | | mu- | TRANSITIVIZER |
| a- | 1 sing | yu- | INTRANSITIVIZER /REFLEXIVIZER. |
| re- | 2 sing | -[˘]to | 'semi, almost' |
| u- | 3 | -má[˘]yã | 'someone with tendency for...' |
| ya- | 1 pl | -sára ~ -gára | AGENT |
| pe- | 2 pl | -éra ~ -wéra | 'habitual doer of...' |
| aẽtá-ú- | 3 pl. | -wára | 'characterized by' |
| Nominal Series | | -ĩ ma | 'without' |
| se- | 1 sing | -mirí | DIMINUTIVE |
| ne- | 2 sing | -asú | AUGMENTATIVE |
| i- | 3 | | |
| yané- | 1 pl | | |
| pe- | 2 pl | | |
| aẽtá- | 3 pl | | |
| -itá | PLURAL | | |
| -ã[˘]na ~ -wã[˘]na | PERFECTIVE | | |
| -rẽ[˘] | IMPERFECTIVE | | |

Reduplication to indicate repetitive action has been retained as a morphological process in Nheengatu, for example, *ya-yapí* 'throw or shoot repeatedly', *pi-píka* 'drizzle'. Reduplication was present in Tupinambá, as in most Tupian languages.

SYNTAX

MATRIX CLAUSES

The matrix clauses show very few borrowings of grammatical morphemes. Their syntax shows convergence toward Portuguese in some aspects and preservation of characteristically indigenous features in other aspects.

Sentence Types

There are three sentence types in Nheengatu, in embedded as well as matrix clauses. Verbal sentences consist of an optional subject followed by one or more VP's containing verbs prefixed for subject. These verbs may be intransitive, transitive, or stative. Transitive verbs are optionally followed by an object, as in Portuguese, in contrast to the Object -Verb order of Tupinambá (and of most Tupian languages). (In the examples below, embedded rather than matrix clauses are given as illustrations if the text examples of the latter are lacking or unclear.) Examples of verbal sentences:

[ya-mũyá']_{VTrans} ɕĩmbi?ú [ya-pinaɕíka]_{VIntr} [ya-mũyá']_{VTrans} ka šírí
 1p-make food 1p-fish 1p-make chicha
 'WE MAKE FOOD, WE FISH, WE MAKE CHICHA.'

[yã-mbúri]_{VTrans} maniáka paranã upé [i-měmbéka]_{VStat} arãma
 1pl-put manioc river in 3s-be.soft to
 'WE PUT THE MANIOC IN THE RIVER TO BECOME SOFT.'

There are two verbs which might be considered auxiliaries, which occur after the main verb, contrary to the order in Portuguese: **putái** 'want' and **ikú** 'be'. The former can occur without a subject prefix, forming a complex verb. The latter can be preceded by a verb, an adjective, or a postpositional phrase. Examples:

[a-yuwíri putái]_{V'} se-retãma kiti
 1s-return want 1s-land to
 'I WANT TO RETURN TO MY LAND.'

yãndé [[ya-purĩngitá]_V [ya-ikú]_{Aux} ye?ẽngatú]_{VP}
 we 1p-speak 1p-be Nheengatu
 'WE ARE TALKING NHEENGATU.'

išé [se-rúka upé]_{pp} a-ikú
 I 1s-house in 1s-be
 'I'M IN MY HOUSE.'

The copula sentence type consists of an obligatory subject followed by a predicate noun phrase or adjective phrase. There is no overt copula, unlike in Portuguese. Examples (with inverted order):

rẽ-mbe?ú aẽta-supé [purãnga išé]_{S'Cop}
 2s-tell 3p-for good I
 'TELL THEM THAT I'M FINE.'

The third sentence type consists of a VP with no subject. The VP is composed of a predicative particle followed by a NP or by a clause with an overt subject. These resemble impersonal constructions in Portuguese except that the predicative particle shows no verbal characteristics. At least one of them, *presízu* (< Port.: *É preciso...*) 'It is necessary...' is borrowed, and the first syllable of *aikwé* 'there is' looks like Portuguese 'ai' 'there'. Example:

[*aikwé*]_{ptc} *kašuéira*
 there.be waterfall
 'THERE ARE WATERFALLS.'

[*presízo*]_{ptc} *aětá u-ištudái pohtugěš upé*
 need they 3-study Portuguese in
 'IT'S NECESSARY THAT THEY STUDY IN PORTUGUESE'

Syntactic Processes in Matrix Clauses

The major syntactic processes affecting matrix clauses look more indigenous than European.

Negation. Verb phrases can be individually negated with the particle *ćí*:

ćí [*a-pitá*]_{vp} *a-iwíri kwá-kití*
 not 1s-stay 1s-return this-toward
 'I DON'T STAY, I COME BACK TO BELÉM.'

Note the structural similarity of this to multiple negation in Tupinambá (Rodrigues 1985: 399):

i-sí *n* *i-memír-así-y* *na* *s-uwí-y* *n* *i-mara?ár-i...*
 Rlt-mother not Rlt-son-pain-Neg not Rlt-blood-Neg not Rlt-sick-Neg
 'HIS MOTHER DID NOT FEEL ANY CHILDBIRTH PAIN, DID NOT BLEED, WAS NOT SICK...'

The negative particle can occur in the beginning of the clause, negating all of it. It can also form a negative focus construction with a fronted NP:

[*ćí tapi?íra*]_{FOC} *apigáwa u-yuká*
 not tapir man 3-kill
 'IT WAS NOT THE TAPIR THAT THE MAN KILLED.' (elicited)

Topicalization. Noun phrases can be topicalized, leaving behind third person copies:

[*yā?á yawára*]_{Top} *a?é u-su?ú apigáwa*
 that dog it 3-bite man
 'THAT DOG, IT BIT THE MAN.'

Questions. Polar questions can be formed by intonation.

ĩndé re-murái apekátú kwá-su?í tetãma suí?
you 2s-live far this-from city from
'DO YOU LIVE FAR FROM HERE FROM THIS CITY?'

Interrogative word questions are formed using indigenous interrogative words and the particle *ta?á*.

mã?ã ta?á re-wasẽmu pužuéra?
what Q 2s-find ugly
'WHAT DO YOU FIND UGLY?'

As in Portuguese, the interrogative word need not necessarily be fronted.

taína u-mã?ã mã?ã?
child 3-see what
'THE CHILD SAW WHAT?'

Adverbial movement. Sentence level adverbials can be fronted or placed between phrases.

[kuši?ĩma]_{Adv} aikwé yepé feičíséiro a-koñeséi wa?á
formerly there.be a shaman 1s-know Relz
'FORMERLY, THERE WAS A SHAMAN WHOM I KNEW.'

Some common syntactic processes in Portuguese, such as passives or clefts, do not occur in Nheengatu.

EMBEDDED CLAUSES

Nheengatu embedded clauses are especially noteworthy in that they show three different patterns:

- (1) Subordinate clauses formed on an indigenous pattern
- (2) Subordinate clauses formed on a Portuguese pattern, but using indigenous morphemes
- (3) Frank borrowings from Portuguese, with accompanying Portuguese grammatical morphemes.

In the first pattern, the clause contains a subordinating particle immediately after the head of the VP, that is, after the main verb, after the predicate nominal or adjectival, or after the predicating particle, according to the type of the VP. These particles include *wa?á*

RELATIVIZER, *ramé* TIME, *aráma* PURPOSE and *či-aráma* NEGATIVE PURPOSE.

(This last particle occurs clause initially). The relative clauses can have an external head and a corresponding empty internal extraction site:

a-yururé se-mǎỹǎ u-pitá aráma iane-rëndá upé [se-ratíwa u-šári wa?á yǎndé arǎ]S'Rel
 1s-ask 1s-mother 3-stay Purpose 1p-farm in 1s-grandpa 3-leave Relz us Purpose
 'I ASKED MY MOTHER TO STAY IN OUR FARM THAT MY GRANPA LEFT FOR US'

(Note that the relative clause modifying 'farm'; has been extraposed from inside the postpositional phrase to the end of the sentence.)

Or they may be headless, with one missing argument:

aětá u-kótái [∅ u-akóteséi wa?á garapé apíra kití]S'Rel
 they 3-tell ∅ 3-happened Relz stream headwaters toward
 'THEY WOULD TELL US WHAT HAPPENED ON THE HEADWATERS OF THE STREAM.'

The time, purpose and negative purpose clauses formed by ramě, aráma, and čí-aráma, respectively, distribute like adverbials or adjectivals:

aětá u-pisíka pa?á yǎndé [ya-ú ramě čĩmbi?ú irusǎnga]S'Adv
 they 3p-catch they.say us 1p-eat Time food cold
 'THEY WOULD CATCH US WHEN WE ATE COLD FOOD.'

yǎ-búri maniáka paranǎ upé [i-měmbéka aráma]S'Adv
 1p-put manioc river in 3-be.soft Purpose
 'WE PUT THE MANIOC IN THE RIVER IN ORDER FOR IT TO BECOME SOFT.'

ya-ú čĩmbi?ú sakú [čí-aráma kurupira-itá u-rasú yǎndé]S'Adv
 1p-eat food hot Neg-Purpose kurupira-Pl 3-take us
 'WE WOULD EAT HOT FOOD FOR THE KURUPIRA NOT TO TAKE US AWAY.'

ya-mǎỹǎ čĩmbi?ú [apigáwa u-ú aráma]S'Adj (elicited)
 1p-see food man 3s-eat Purpose
 'WE SAW THE FOOD FOR THE MAN TO EAT.'

In the second pattern, a subset of the Nheengatu WH words (MA words) are used in embedded clauses in a manner similar to that of Portuguese. The MA words are awá 'who(m)', mǎ?ǎ 'which, that', mairamě 'when', maráma 'because', mamě 'where', and mayé 'as'. The relative clauses with awá and mǎ?ǎ cannot have external heads:

[mã?á u-yururé i-tupána u-yũmbu?é tupána supé...]S'Rel
 what 3-asked 3s-god 3-pray god to
 'WHAT HE ASKED (FROM) HIS GOD, PRAYING TO HIS GOD...'

*apigáwa [mã?á u-yururé i-tupána]S'Rel...
 man who 3-asked 3-god
 ('THE MAN WHO/THAT ASKED HIS GOD...')

The clauses formed by the other MA words distribute as adverbials or adjectivals:

aětá u-mã?á úka [mamě a-murái]S'Adj
 they 3-see house where 1s-live
 'THEY SAW THE HOUSE WHERE I LIVE.'

išé cí a-sasá i-puši [mayé aětá ũ-mbe?ú]S'Adv
 I not 1s-pass 3-bad how they 3-say
 'I'M NOT HAVING A BAD TIME LIKE THEY SAY.'

Embedded questions also follow the Portuguese pattern, but using indigenous MA words:

...cí aětá u-kwá [mã?á kurupira-itá u-mũyá yane-irú]S'Q
 not they 3-know what kurupira-Pl 3-do 1p-with
 '...THEY DIDN'T KNOW WHAT THE KURUPIRA DO TO US.'

Some transitive verbs can take unmarked sentential complements:

...ně išé a-māndu?ái [a-mã?á ĩndé]S'Comp
 nor I 1s-think 1s-see you
 '...NOR I THINK OF SEEING YOU.'

In the third pattern, obvious borrowings from Portuguese include:

| function: | Nheengatu | Portuguese | English |
|----------------------|-----------|------------|---------------|
| complementizer | kí | 'que' | 'that' |
| conjunction | i | 'e' | 'and' |
| disjunction | u | 'ou' | 'or' |
| negative disjunction | ně | 'nem' | 'neither/nor' |
| conditional | sá | 'se' | 'if' |

...[re-murái iké]VP u [re-murái ĩterió kičí]VP
 2s-live here or 2s-live interior toward
 '...YOU LIVE HERE OR IN THE INTERIOR...'

PHRASES

The structure of phrases is rather conservative. Two major changes from the indigenous pattern are the order Verb - Object in the VP and the greater elaboration of adjectival and adverbial phrases as incorporation within the verb declined. Noun phrases retain the order Genitive - Noun:

[yane-ye?énga]NP 'OUR LANGUAGE'
1p-language

[kariwa ye?énga]NP 'WHITE MAN'S LANGUAGE'
White.man language

Also the order Noun - Adjective:

[éi ya-pudéi [[[ya-ú [éĩmbi?ú irusánga]NP]VP]S'Comp]VP
not 1p-can 1p-eat food cold
'WE CANNOT EAT COLD FOOD...'

And Demonstrative - NP:

[[ku?á [se-awá-itá puránga]NP]NP...
this 1s-hair-Pl pretty
'THIS PRETTY HAIR OF MINE...'

There is a position after the head of the VP which contains aspectual suffixes, subordinating particles, and auxiliaries:

a-mũyá pãyé mã?á mamé [a-purakí wa?á a-ikú]VP
1s-do all what where 1s-work Relz 1s-be
'I DO EVERYTHING WHERE I'M WORKING.'

[[a-síka ramé]VP]S' sē-mbira-itá [u-kiri-ána u-ikú]VP
1s-arrive Time 1s-child-Pl 3-sleep-already 3-be
'WHEN I ARRIVE, MY CHILDREN ARE ALREADY SLEEPING.'

Nheengatu retains postpositions, in contrast to the prepositions of Portuguese, which occur as the head of postpositional phrases which, as is characteristic of Tupian languages, have a strictly adverbial distribution, never modifying nouns.

a-morái ramé [[se-páya]NP irú]pp...
1s-live Time 1s-father with
'WHEN I LIVED WITH MY FATHER...'

TEXT FRAGMENT OF MODERN NHEENGATU

Conversation in Belém between Two People from the Upper Rio Negro

This is the beginning of a text which was recorded and transcribed in 1988, in the Museu Goeldi in Belém. The two speakers are Lenir da Silva, a young woman in her thirties from the region of the Upper Rio Negro, trilingual in Nheengatu, Portuguese, and Spanish, and Gerson, a somewhat younger man from a Baniwa community who is bilingual in Nheengatu and Portuguese, and who lives in the city of San Gabriel da Cachoeira.

Gerson: __

1. ĩndé mu?í akayú ta?á re-morái iké kwá sidádi upé
you how.many years Q 2s-live here this city in
'FOR HOW LONG HAVE YOU LIVED HERE IN THIS CITY?'

Lenir: __

2. işé akayú nóvi akayú-ana a-yuwíri se-retáma su? í
I year nine year-already 1s-return 1s-city from
'IT HAS BEEN NINE YEARS THAT I LIVE IN THIS CITY.'

3. işé a-yupukwá iké
I 1s-accustom here
'I GOT USED TO THIS PLACE.'

4. işé cí a-māndu?ái a-yuwíri se-família-itá rúka kiti
I not 1s-think 1s-return 1s-family-Pl house to
'I DON'T THINK OF RETURNING TO MY FAMILY'S HOUSE'

5. a-kwakatú işé cí a-yupukwá a-kiti
1s-believe I not 1s-accustom there-to
'I THINK I CANNOT ACCUSTOM MYSELF TO THAT PLACE ANYMORE.'

6. a-pitá kurí iké até kumairamé Tupāna-itá kurí u-kwá
1s-stay Fut here until when God-Pl Fut. 3-know
'ONLY GOD KNOWS HOW LONG I'M GOING TO STAY HERE.'

7. mayé ta?á a-sú āyũ a-watá se-retáma kiti a-mã?ã arã se-anãma-itá
how Q 1s-go only 1s-walk 1s-city to 1s-see Purpose 1-family-Pl
'HOW CAN I GO BACK TO THAT CITY ONLY TO SEE MY FAMILY?'

8. işé čã a-māndu?ái a-yuwíri a-kiti
I not 1s-think 1s-return there-to
'I DON'T THINK OF GOING BACK THERE.'

9. a-yuwíri kúri āyũ a-mã?ã arã se-anãma-itá
 1s-return Fut only 1s-see for 1s-family-Pl
 'I WILL GO BACK THERE JUST TO VISIT MY FAMILY.'

Gerson: __

10. kuši?ĩma re-yúwi ramẽ kwá kiti mayé-ta re-yúwi arã
 formerly 2s-come Time that-to how-Q 2s-come Purpose
 'FORMERLY, WHEN YOU CAME HERE, HOW DID YOU COME?'

11. aikwé áwa u-rúí ãndé o re-yúwi putái te ne-rupí ...
 there.be who 3-bring you or 2s-come want even 2s-by
 'WAS THERE ANYBODY TO BRING YOU OR DID YOU YOURSELF WANT TO COME?'

TEXT FROM THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

This text is from *Poranduba* (Rodrigues, 1890:87-88). It is reproduced as it was written, in a transcription based on the Portuguese orthography, with no morpheme boundaries indicated and prefixes often written separately. This myth is from the Rio Solimões, about the origin of a bird species, Tinkuan (*Cocculus cornutus* L.), held to be an omen. The leaves of the carayuru plant produce a red dye. There are few, if any, Portuguese borrowings in the text. The translation is ours.

UIRA-PAYÉ NHEENGAREÇARA *The Spirit Bird Sings*

Uirá payé paá, mocoín tayra tuichaua aítá cuchiyma maarupiara, arecé
 bird shaman they.say two sons chiefs they formerly happy for.this

cuité aítá tutyra u mutara ima
 therefore them uncle 3 hate

'THEY SAY THAT THE SPIRIT BIRDS WERE, FORMERLY, TWO SONS OF A CHIEF, VERY HAPPY, FOR WHICH AN UNCLE HATED THEM.'

U cenõe, paá, aítá, u ayuri u itêca muirá u munhan arama cupichuaa,
 3 called they.say them 3 invite 3 cut.down trees 3 make to field

u mucáo i cunhambira etá. Aé uana, paá, u iucá.
 3 got.drunk 3 nephew plural Then, they.say 3 killed

'HE CALLED THEM AND INVITED THEM TO CUT TREES, TO MAKE A FIELD AND THEN GOT HIS NEPHEWS DRUNK. THEY SAY THAT THEN HE KILLED THEM.'

Aé uana aítá uiuire i aría pêre, aítá anga iunto ana.
Then they returned 3 grandma with they soul only already

Aítá u purundú imu çupé:
They 3 asked brother to

'THEN THEY RETURNED TO THEIR GRANDMOTHER WHEN THEY WERE ONLY SOULS. ONE BROTHER ASKED THE OTHER.'

-- Mahy taá ne querpe?
How question 2 dream

'WHAT DID YOU DREAM?'

-- Ce querpe racói, cha yá çuca carayuru irumo.
I dreamed in.this.way I we washed carayuru with

'I DREAMED THAT WE WASHED WITH CARAYURU.'

-- Yaué tenhen racói iché ce mu.
that.manner also that.way I my brother

'I DREAMED THE SAME.'

Aintá aría uité u moacó aítá remiú. U neeng cuité aítá:
Their grandma then 3 heated their food 3 speak then they:

'WHEN THEIR GRANDMOTHER HEATED THEIR FOOD THEY SAID:'

-- Ah! ce aría, inti uana yá icó mira arama, yaué anga iunto ana.
Ah! my grandma not already we are people in yes soul only already

'AH! GRANDMOTHER, WE ARE NO LONGER PEOPLE, BUT ONLY SOULS.'

Eré ce aría, cha çu ana ne chii, re cenoe ramé cha neengare,
well my grandma I go already 2 from 2 hear when I sing

cha munhan ramé: "Tincuan! Tincuan!..."
I make when "Tincuan! Tincuan!..."

'SO, GRANDMOTHER, WE WILL LEAVE YOU AND WHEN YOU HEAR ME SING "TINCUAN!
TINCUAN!..."'

re iauáo oca queté, cha neengare ramé cuité "Titi..ti..ti.." aramé re icuáo.
2 flee house for I sing when then "Titi..ti..ti.." then 2 will.recognize

'FLEE FOR YOUR HOUSE, AND WHEN I SING "TITL..TL..TL.." THEN YOU WILL RECOGNIZE ME.'

Nhaan piranga uaá ceçá recó çôui cuêra
That red that eyes in blood past.thing

'THE RED IN THEIR EYES WAS BLOOD.'

NHEENGATU AND THE EFFECTS OF LANGUAGE CONTACT

For an adequate account of the modifications in Nheengatu/Língua Geral induced by language contact over the last half millennium, it would be necessary to have a detailed account of its sociopolitical context in each historical period as well as an analysis of the language structure and lexicon as these evolved. The task is not impossible, since relevant documents do exist. Of course, for each of the linguistic descriptions which have been made, it is not immediately obvious what the relation is between that description and the speech of the community of speakers, given the possibility of regional or social dialects, of a prescriptivist attitude on the part of the person making the description, or of common errors and misinterpretations.

One fact is clear: the language called today Nheengatu has changed at a rapid rate: the contemporary form would not be mutually intelligible with its form of 400 years ago. Other Tupi-Guaranian languages have not shown the same changes or the same rate of change. More than natural language change was at work to produce the changes in Nheengatu. At the same time, Nheengatu is far from mutually intelligible with Portuguese, with which it has coexisted for centuries.

A second fact is that there was always a sizable community which spoke Nheengatu or its precursors as a first language; it was never a pidgin. There is a belief among some traditional authors on the subject that Nheengatu was a product of the Jesuits. Rodrigues (1887: x-xi) goes so far as to say that changes occurred in Língua Geral in the Amazon Valley because (our translation), 'There it was great the number of missionaries, all with different accents, who taught the languages to Nheengaiba [non-Tupi-Guaranian speaking] tribes, planting degenerate seeds in terrains of different natures, which resulted in a general corruption, not only in pronunciation, but also in meaning'. No evidence is given that this was the real cause of change, and the patterning of the changes observed points to other processes.

Assuming that a good-sized native speaker population was the main source of transmission of the language, we may look at the historical phases of Nheengatu development and see if the types of sociolinguistic effects one would predict do, in fact, agree with the linguistic record, in so far as it is known to us.

In the first century of Portuguese contact with the Tupinambá on the coast there would have been few Tupinambá who spoke Portuguese, in relation to the large numbers who did not speak it. But intermarriage would increase the proportion of Europeans who spoke the indigenous language, as well as create a group of mestizos who spoke the indigenous language but did not have an indigenous social identity.

Rodrigues (1887: viii) notes differences between the descriptions of Anchieta (1595), who lived in Bahia and Espírito Santo, and that of Figueira (1621) who lived in Maranhão. According to him, 'Anchieta wrote the speech which he learned from the Guayanazes, Tamoyos, and Tupis; Figueira that of the Tabayaras, Potiguaras, and Tupinambás properly speaking; and Montoya that of the Guaranians, Payaguás, Charruas, etc.' (Rodrigues 1887: ix). In this picture it is difficult to separate language change from dialect differences. There were relatively few borrowings from Portuguese in the early period, which is what would be expected if Portuguese was not much used by the indigenous and mestizo populations.

During the period of the expansion of Nheengatu, the Seventeenth Century and the first half of the Eighteenth Century, bilingualism with Portuguese continued at a rather low level. The major factor was, rather, the incorporation of enormous numbers of new speakers into the speech community through slavery and resettlement villages. One would expect extensive substratum effects from speakers of many different indigenous languages undergoing language shift as they are absorbed into the Nheengatu-speaking colonial system.

In fact, in the Eighteenth Century Nheengatu was already recognized as distinct from Tupinambá. It was the language of Amazonian colonial society, not the language of an indigenous tribal group. As would be expected, borrowings from Portuguese were limited, but the grammar was altered by so many new speakers. The simplification of the morphology described above was underway at this time (Aryon Rodrigues, personal communication), though the exact sequence of grammatical and phonological changes during this phase are not yet known to us. It is clear from the Nheengatu documents of the Nineteenth Century (see text above) that the reduction of the morphology had already occurred by then.

After Nheengatu was officially discouraged and many of its speakers killed during the Cabanagem, the proportion of Portuguese speakers in Amazônia increased, as well as bilingualism in Portuguese among those who spoke Nheengatu. Texts and commentaries on Nheengatu from the second half of the Nineteenth Century are readily available. These show increased Portuguese influence, with the speech of Pará, according to Barbosa Rodrigues (xii-xiii) being the most 'corrupt'. He notes the addition of vowels to eliminate closed syllables. As noted above, Correa de Faria was struck by the difference between the Seventeenth and the Nineteenth Century forms of the language.

Still, even in the latter half of the Nineteenth Century, the lexical borrowings one finds (e.g. *papéru* (<papel) 'paper', *muratú* (<mulato) 'mulato', *kabarú* (<cavalo) 'horse') are phonologically marked as older acquisitions. The obvious Portuguese borrowings are lexical items. Only a few grammatical words, such as *será* 'interrogative', were borrowed. Alongside this very limited lexical diffusion is a far more extensive and more subtle influence from

Portuguese: the many examples in the syntax of what Thomason and Kaufman (1988:351) refer to as structural diffusion without the diffusion of native morphemes. Note in the following example that a native interrogative word, mā?á (maan in the old transcription, retained here) 'what' occurs as the external head of a relative clause formed by the native relativizing particle wa?á (uaá) (Rodrigues 1890:37):

Cuere tenhê re u maan [çacu uaá]S'Rel
now not 2 eat what hot relativizer
'NOW YOU DON'T EAT THAT WHICH IS HOT.'

In modern Nheengatu this relativizer is usually deleted, as in the examples in the syntax section above. This origin explains why such interrogative word relatives in Nheengatu cannot have an external head, which they can have in Portuguese: the 'what' word entered into the relatives as an external head, not as a relative pronoun.

The grammaticization of etá 'many' to become the plural suffix, -itá, was already complete in the Nineteenth Century.

Thomason and Kaufman observe that such cases of structural diffusion are only attested from situations of sustained language contact over centuries. That was the case with Portuguese and Nheengatu. In spite of the limited lexical borrowings, the constant interface with Portuguese produced structural diffusion as shown, for example, in the embedded clauses and also in the reanalysis of the pronominal system.

At the present time most Nheengatu speakers in Brazil also speak Portuguese. There is heavy lexical borrowing from Portuguese, and borrowed words accept native inflectional morphology. As expected, it was only after this extensive bilingualism that syntactic patterns using borrowed morphemes appeared. These are now noticeable in Nheengatu. For example the complementizer kí (<Port. 'que') now appears, as well as conjunction with i (<Port. 'e') and disjunction with u (<Port. 'ou'). A number of affixes from the last century listed in Stradelli (1929) are no longer in use.

In the region of the Upper Rio Negro Nheengatu is generally considered by tribal Indians to be a language of the Non-Indians, while among Portuguese speakers Nheengatu is often considered to be an indigenous language. It is certainly a remarkable language, whose further study will enrich our knowledge of language contact processes.

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