



# Língua Geral Amazônica

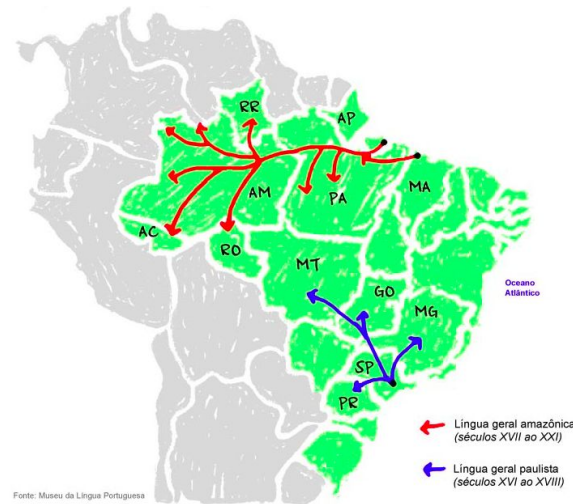
Zoë Barnswell &  
Aidan O'Donnell



# Overview

# Língua Geral Amazônica (LGA)

- Other common names: Nheengatu, the Brasília, coastal or modern Tupi
- Brazil, Colombia, and Venezuela
- Official language in a municipality of Brazil
- Approximately 19,000 present-day speakers
- “Nheengatu has a notable charm. People delight in learning it and regard it with affection”



# Linguistic Features

- Word Classes: Nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, postpositions, pronouns, demonstratives, and particles
- Borrowings: Nouns, verbs, or particles
- Prenasalized voiced stops (mb, nd, ng) before oral vowels
- Multi-vowel syllables
- Physical temporal expression

## Vowels

a	e	i	o	u	aa	ee
[a]	[e]	[i]	[o]	[u]	[a:]	[e:]
ii	uu	ã	ẽ	ĩ	õ	ũ
[i:]	[u:]	[ã]	[ẽ]	[ĩ]	[õ]	[ũ]

## Consonants

b	c	d	g	h	k	m
[b/ <sup>m</sup> b]	[s/k]	[d/ <sup>n</sup> d]	[g/ <sup>ɲ</sup> g]	[h]	[k]	[m]
n	p	r	s	t	x	y
[n/p/ɲ]	[p]	[r]	[s]	[t]	[ʃ]	[j/i]

# Academic Theories

As Nheengatu has been the subject of much academic study, linguists have presented a number of possible theories on the language, not all of them in agreement.

Debates include...

1. Source of borrowings:  
Tupinamba vs. Portuguese
2. Existence of dialect  
differences



# Sample Text

## UIRA-PAYÉ NHEENGAREÇARA *The Spirit Bird Sings*

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

cuité aité 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.'

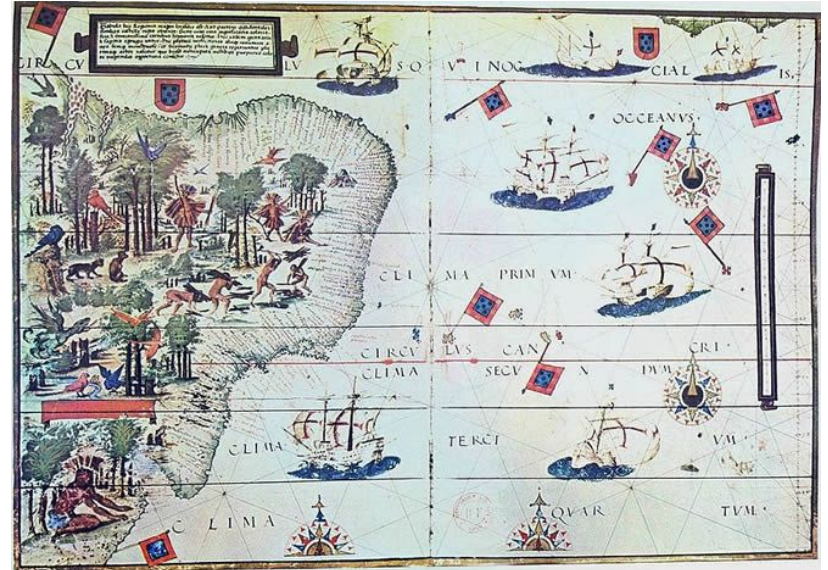


# **Historical Context**



# Portuguese Colonialism

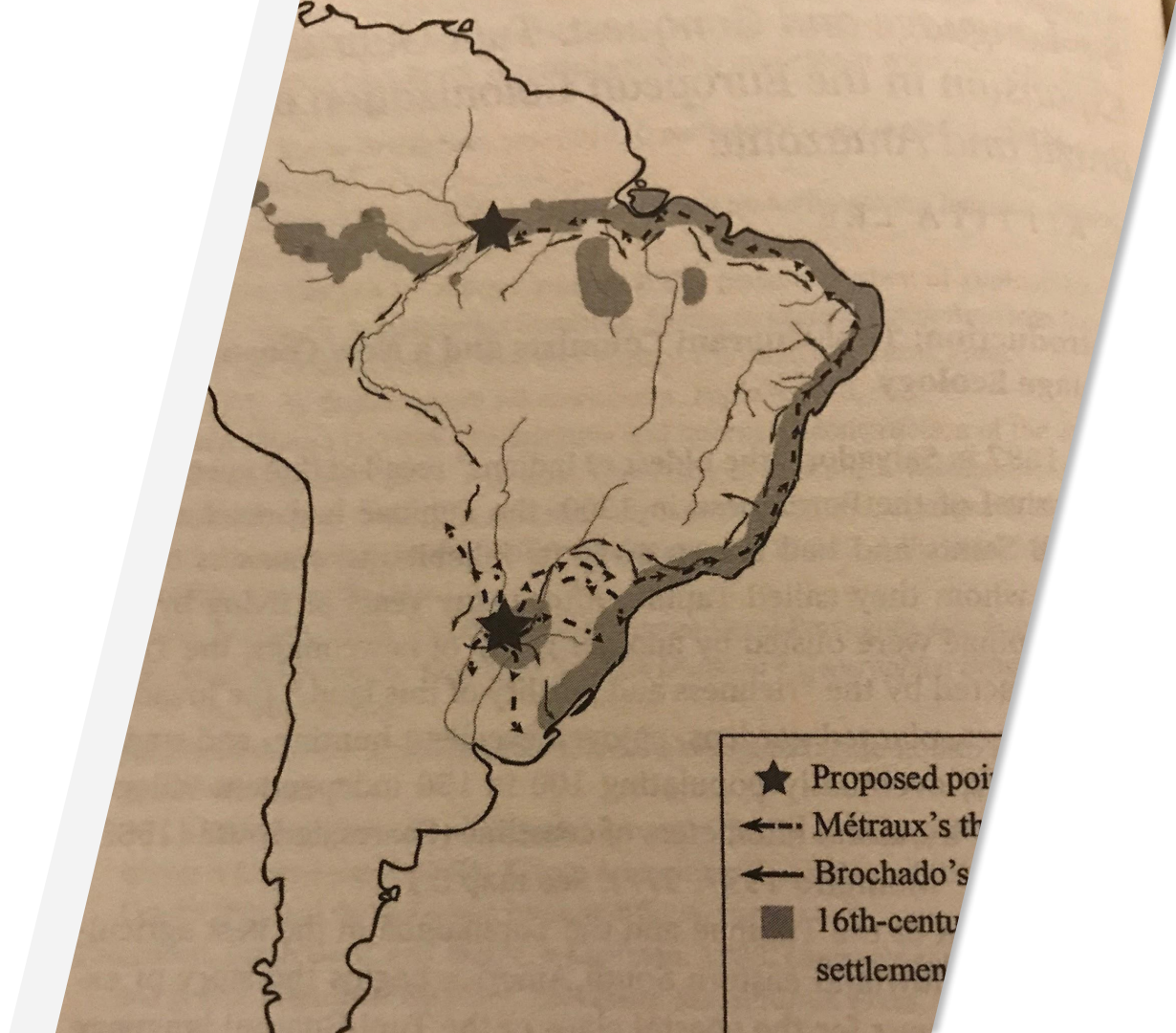
- First contact around 1500
- Dozens of Tupi-Guaraní languages
- Lingua franca initially needed for trade
- Mestizo population
- Jesuit missionary work





## Moving from the Coasts to Amazonia

- The Brasília as the lingua franca for colonial and native peoples
- Language adaptation in LGA (substratum interference)
- The Brasília still used in liturgy





## Brazil's Independence

- Brazil declares independence in 1822
- Large-scale revolt of Native peoples (Cabanagem)
- LGA, or Nheengatu, shifts from a prominent urban to an isolated rural language



**Nheengatu  
Today**

# Tupinamba Resistance and Revitalization

- Movement to reverse the damaging effects of the Cabanagem revolt
- Share oral narratives
- Maintain their connection with nature and other customs
- Feminist space: recognize abuse and reshape community
- Rebuild the indigenous voice



# Modern Context

*“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.”*

- 1998: [Tupi Aquí](#) at the University of São Paulo
- 2002: Official language in São Gabriel da Cachoeira
- Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (GIDS): 7 - “The child-bearing population can use the language amongst themselves, but it is not being transmitted to children.”



# **Discussion Questions**



# Discussion Questions

1. Does LGA, or Nheengatu, present any similarities to other indigenous languages or lingua francas that we have discussed so far this semester or in the readings for today?
2. What role does colonialism seem to play in the development or adaptation of lingua francas?
3. What role might globalization today play in preventing Nheengatu from remaining a prominent lingua franca in Brazil, Colombia, and Venezuela?