

**BY SPEECH AND BY SIGNS:
FIRST ENCOUNTERS BETWEEN INDIANS AND
EUROPEANS ON COASTAL BRAZIL, 1500–1530s¹**

M. Kittiya Lee²

RESUMO: Este artigo considera a tópica da comunicação interétnica. Ele examina os textos dos viajantes do século XVI e do início do século XVII, as cartas dos jesuítas e os textos em língua indígena para sugerir o domínio das variantes costeiras da família lingüística Tupi-Guarani como língua franca entre índios e europeus.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Língua geral; Literatura de viagens; Brasil colonial.

Of the indigenous peoples of Brazil, “their gestures and expressions are so completely different from ours that it is difficult, I confess, to represent them well...”

Jean de Léry, *History of a Voyage to the Land of Brazil*, 1578.³

¹ This essay is a revision of chapter one of the author’s dissertation, “Conversing in Colony: The Brasília and the Vulgar in Portuguese America, 1500–1759,” defended in 2005 in the History Department at The Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland, USA. Research for this chapter was made possible by the Comissão Nacional para a Comemoração dos Descobrimentos Portugueses/Biblioteca Nacional de Lisboa, the Charles L. Singleton Foundation at the Johns Hopkins University, the Fulbright Hays, and the Center for New World Comparative Studies at the John Carter Brown Library.

² *California State University, Los Angeles.*

³ Jean de Léry, *History of a Voyage to the Land of Brazil, otherwise called America, Containing the Navigation and the Remarkable Things Seen on the Sea by the Author;*

In April, 1500, the Portuguese made landfall to a place they called, *A Terra da Vera Cruz*, the Land of the True Cross. Nearby to the harbor later known as Porto Seguro, Brazil, Indians of an unspecified ethnicity greeted, traded, danced, and observed the mariners replenish provisions and take soundings of the port throughout the ten days that Pedro Álvares de Cabral and crew remained at anchor.⁴ As news about the Portuguese “discovery” of Brazil spread throughout Europe – along with information about the endless bounty of the land including what became the first export commodity of the land, brazilwood – expeditions of Portuguese, French, Spanish, Dutch, German, English, Irish, and Italian sailors and merchants began to arrive to the country and meet with its inhabitants. In all known reports about these encounters, the speech exchanged between natives and newcomers occurred in the ethnic languages (first languages or mother tongues) of the Tupi-Guarani language family. This chapter serves to introduce the coastal varieties of the Amerind language family that were used in Indian-European inter-relations in the context of contact and trade of early Brazil. In doing so, it opens discussion on the subject of this dissertation, which examines the historical evolution from ethnic speech into the *Brasílica*, the lingua franca (or common language) most widely used from 1500 until 1757 throughout Brazil and Amazonia, the two colonies of Portuguese America.

This chapter targets the early era of colonization in Portuguese America. I consider the early phase of the colony to be the period when first contacts, ports-of-call, and maritime trade dominated relationships

the Behavior of Villegagnon in That Country; the Customs and Strange Ways of Life of the American Savages; Together with the Description of Various Animals, Trees, Plants, and Other Singular Things Completely Unknown over Here, trans. Janet Whatley (Berkeley; Los Angeles; Oxford: University California Press; Oxford University Press, 1990), 67.

4 Transcriptions of the first three letters to the Portuguese king, reporting the Portuguese landfall to Brazil, are found in Paulo Roberto Pereira, *Três únicos testemunhos do descobrimento do Brasil – Carta de Pero Vaz de Caminha – Carta de Mestre João Faras – Relação do Piloto Anônimo* (Rio de Janeiro: Lacerda Editores, 1999).

between the Indians, the Europeans, and the land. Many of the examples in this chapter fall between the years of 1500, when the Portuguese officially arrived to Brazil, and the decade of the 1530s, when they attempted to create permanent Portuguese settlements in the country. The time frame is meant to serve only as a reference. Contact and trade were ongoing experiences that unfolded as Europeans explored and mapped the extensive coastline and interior and met with indigenous inhabitants. For example, despite the foundation of São Vicente in 1532 to 1533, it was not until the 1580s that the length of Brazil from the River Plate to the Amazon River could be considered a colony with a visible (if not small) European presence, towns, and institutions. And still, the influence of the Portuguese remained limited in the northern forests of the country, for only in 1621 did they establish a second American colony, the State of Maranhão and Pará (commonly known in specialized literature as “Amazonia,” for its location in the Amazon River Basin). Hence, throughout the sixteenth and the first half of the seventeenth centuries in Amazonia and in nearly all of the interior, Indian-European relations were limited to contact and trade, as they had been in early Brazil. For such reasons and because such inter-relations form the focus of this chapter, most events discussed herein occurred along the site of the first of inter-ethnic encounters: seaboard of Brazil, from 1500 to 1530. Though fewer, the meetings that happened after 1539 in lands beyond the coast will be included to demonstrate the experiences which Indians and Europeans held in common in these early encounters and exchanges, despite being separated by historical time and geographic space. Terminology such as “Brazil” and “Amazonia” distinguish the lands from one another where the phrase “Portuguese America” references both colonies commonly. In keeping with this project’s focus on language, the Europeans and the Indians who appear in this chapter are identified by area of provenance and by language group. Because most Europeans in the colony were recent arrivals, the terms “local,” “native,” and “indigenous” refer specifically to the Indians who were born and raised by the coast.

The notable linguistic diversity which early chroniclers claimed to exist in coastal Portuguese America was, in part, illusory. On the one hand, a seemingly infinite variety of languages were heard. By modern classifications, these belonged mainly to Karib, Arawak, Macro-Tupi and Macro-Jê language groups, although speech forms of smaller and isolated language families also existed (see chapter two in forthcoming issue). On the other hand, Europeans' activities in trade were tied to the littoral and its immediate hinterlands (*sertão*) during the first three decades of the sixteenth century, putting them into recurring contact with two major language families: the Tupi-Guarani of Macro-Tupi and the Jê of Macro-Jê. Communities of Tupi-Guarani and Jê alternated occupation of the extensive coastal strip and its *sertão* from the Amazon River to the Lagoa dos Patos.⁵ But the Jê did not enter into extended relationships with Europeans until later in the colonial era, especially in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Hence during the early era, trade alliances between Tupi-Guarani speaking Tupinambá, Tupinikin, Karijó and Potiguar and Indo-European speaking Portuguese and French determined that the Amerind language family dominated the linguistic experiences of Europeans with early sixteenth-century native Brazil.

The scholarship on late medieval and early modern Portuguese language policies has highlighted the important roles played by captives in contact, trade, and in gathering intelligence in "Guinea," as the Portuguese called West Africa. Forcibly seized, taken to Portugal, baptized, inserted into the milieu of West African slave communities and acquiring skills in the Lusophone language through immersion, the men and women were taken on subsequent voyages back to their people with whom presumably they spoke their native tongues and translated mes-

5 Greg Urban, "A história da cultura brasileira segundo as línguas nativas," in *História dos Índios do Brasil*, ed. Manuela Carneiro da Cunha (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, Secretaria Municipal de Cultural, FAPESP, 1992), 88, 89.

sages into a Portuguese creole language back to their captors.⁶ Otherwise, Portuguese and French creoles evolved into trade jargons in use between European sailors and native peoples in West Africa, the Cape Verde Islands, and in western India.⁷ The case of the language known as *krioula*, which is still spoken today in Cape Verde, serves as one excellent example of a Portuguese creole developed in inter-ethnic trade dating from the Age of Discoveries, as too, does it illustrate the extent to which Cape Verdean middlemen of mixed Portuguese and West African ancestry came to dominate regional commerce, spreading their speech forms as lingua franca between Africans along the Guinea coast.⁸ In contrast with the European-based pidgins, creoles, and contact languages that characterized and evolved from European engagement with Africa is the situation of colonial Portuguese America. Far fewer Indians were seized and taken back to Europe to serve as slaves, learn Portuguese and provide intelligence about their homelands. Instead, spoken inter-ethnic communications were exchanged through the Tupi-Guarani ethnic

6 Jeanne Hein, "Portuguese Communication with Africa on the Searoute to India," *Terrae Incognitae* 25 (1993); A.C. de C. M. Saunders, *A Social History of Black Slaves and Freedmen in Portugal 1441-1555* (Cambridge: CUP, 1982), 2, 89, 98-102, 105, 111-112, 146, 168, 169, 203n66, 267.

7 Edgar Prestage, *The Portuguese Pioneers* (New York: Barnes & Noble, Inc, [1933] 1967), 301; John Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1800*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 213-215.

8 T. Bentley Duncan, *Atlantic Islands; Madeira, the Azores, and the Cape Verdes in 17th Century Commerce and Navigation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972), 195-238; Deirdre Meintel, *Race, Culture, and Portuguese Colonialism in Cabo Verde* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1984), 35; Walter Rodney, *A History of the Upper Guinea Coast, 1545 to 1800* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1980; reprint, 1970), 174, and esp. 200-222; P.E. [Peter Edward] Russell, "Some Socio-Linguistic Problems Concerning the Fifteenth-Century Portuguese Discoveries in the African Atlantic," in *Portugal, Spain and the African Atlantic, 1343-1490: Chivalry and Crusade from John of Gaunt to Henry the Navigator and Beyond* (Aldershot: Variorum, 1995), 13.

languages,⁹ acquired partially by repeat sailors to the colony and fluently by long-time residents and noted by European visitors and writers. In the early colonization of the country, the seaborne commerce in brazilwood provided the occasion for Europeans to learn these native languages.

TRADE IN BRAZILWOOD

Until 1532, eight tiny trading posts from Pernambuco to Santa Catarina comprised the European presence in Portuguese America – one limited to the Atlantic littoral of the colony. Although Portugal and other European crowns backed expeditions of trade, exploration, and conquest through the country since 1500, their primary interest remained tied to the maritime commerce of the tree they called “brazil” (*Caesalpinia sappan*). In the minds of Europeans, so closely linked was this trade item with the land that the name of the tree soon replaced the religious title

9 A note on terminology. The Tupi-Guarani speech forms will appear in this chapter in their plural form, such as “Tupi-Guarani trade jargons” or “creole languages.” By doing so, I wish to recognize the linguistic differences that may have characterized each native group’s barter with each the Europeans. For example, Portuguese communications with the Potiguar may have differed linguistically from those used with the Tupinikin, even though both groups spoke closely-related Tupi-Guarani languages and occupied adjacent regions near Porto Seguro. In addition, crews on vessels sailing forth from Portugal integrated Lusophone speakers with varying dialects from the many regions of the Portuguese empire. Crewmen from other parts of Europe on Portuguese vessels also represented, albeit in smaller numbers, the speech of other Indo-European languages (see chapter two, forthcoming in the next issue of this journal). Furthermore, the trade jargon used by French traders with another group of Tupi-Guarani speakers, the Tupinambá, may have been distinctive. Because the classification of languages is not the objective of this dissertation and because the projects to standardize and nationalize speech were not pertinent to these early inter-lingual encounters, reference to plural interlingual “languages” of barter will more adequately represent the linguistic diversity of the times.

for which Brazil had first been named by the Portuguese (the Land of the Holy Cross). Previous to the knowledge of the Europeans about the dense patches of brazilwood along the eastern shores of Brazil, Venetian merchants had met the demand for red dyewoods from samples logged in the Levant, India, Sumatra, and Ceylon.¹⁰ The frequency of European ships stopping along the Atlantic coast increased from Paraíba and Pernambuco in the northeast to São Vicente and Santa Catarina in the southeast where the tree groves were abundant. In 1502, King Manuel agreed to contract a group of New Christian merchants to explore and claim 300 leagues of coast per year on behalf of the Portuguese crown, building and maintaining, along the way, one new fort every three years, as well as delivering loads of dyewood.¹¹ In return, the entrepreneurs adhered to a schedule of payments in brazilwood to the crown, keeping the remaining profits for themselves. In 1509 and 1510, French and German merchants agreed to similar terms with the Portuguese crown.¹² So long as Portugal received a share of the profit, contracts with other nations were regularly signed.¹³ Consequently, ships heavy with dyewood returned to European ports, leaving Rio de Janeiro before 1510, Bahia in 1510 and 1526, Cabo Frio in 1511 and Pernambuco in 1520, 1522, 1526, 1527 and 1531.¹⁴ Such recorded voyages probably do not represent more

10 João Capistrano de Abreu, *Chapters of Brazil's Colonial History 1500-1800*, trans. Arthur Brakel (New York: Oxford University, 1997), 28; Kax Wilson, *A History of Textiles* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1979), 91.

11 Scholars have calculated the quantity of brazilwood demanded by the crown from Noronha's men as ranging from 20,000 quintals to 30,000 logs (750 tons) annually between 1501 and 1505. Alexander Marchant, *From Barter to Slavery. The Economic Relations of Portuguese and Indians in the Settlement of Brazil, 1500-1580* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1942), 29; Prestage, 290. 1 quintal is equal to approximately 120 pounds, according to Marchant, 1942, 36.

12 Marchant, 1942, 29.

13 Philip D. Curtin, *The Rise and Fall of the Plantation Complex. Essays in Atlantic History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 49.

14 Marchant, 1942, 29-30.

than a partial picture of what was a burgeoning trade, accessed by the Portuguese and other European kingdoms. Already, by the first decade of the colony, Indian merchants had initiated what was to become a long-standing relationship with representatives of Indo-European languages.

The case of the ship, *Bretôa*, exemplified such a relationship. As a commercial venture, a consortium of Italian and Portuguese bankers and merchants underwrote the enterprise. The crew numbered a captain, a scribe, a boatswain and a pilot, who were responsible for a crew of thirteen seamen, fourteen grummetts, four servants, and one supply officer, all of whom claimed diverse European nationalities.¹⁵ The *Bretôa* set sail on 22 February 1511 from Lisbon and arrived after two months at sea in the Bahia de Todos os Santos on 17 April, where it awaited deliveries of brazilwood until 12 May. Because local coastal societies did not use draft animals and because the European crew was unwilling, Alexander Marchant believes that local Tupi-Guarani speakers provided the hard labor of preparing and hauling the brazilwood. The tendency of native labor as supplier of brazil logs was observed in the 1550s around the Bay of Guanabara.¹⁶ The one African slave aboard the *Bretôa* probably followed the Tupiniquim, Karijó, Potiguar and Tupinambá into the groves and worked alongside them, felling trees, shaving off bark, dividing large trunks into small sections, and rounding off the logs, all tasks greatly facilitated by the metal tools given by the Portuguese.¹⁷ The logs were carried, increasingly at greater distances as the groves of brazilwood by the littoral became depleted, and delivered to the factor (*feitor*), the crown-

¹⁵ Taken from Capistrano de Abreu, 26-7. A different account is offered in Marchant, 1942, 34.

¹⁶ Léry, 101.

¹⁷ Fernão Cardim, *Tratados da Terra e Gente do Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro: J. Leite, 1925), 179; Marchant, 1942, 37.

appointed official who took up residence in the trading post and acted as the local contact for the Portuguese.¹⁸

The Portuguese practice of maintaining trading posts, or factories (*feitorias*) at strategic harbors, an inheritance from their commercial endeavors on the coast of Guinea, ensured sustained relations between the factor who manned the post and local societies with which he bartered for goods. The on-site factor was charged with the duty of negotiating all affairs with locals on behalf of the king, particularly the commercial details. During the months when Portuguese traders were not anchored in the shallow waters of one of the Brazilian coastline's many excellent harbours, the factor was busy in barter among natives, who brought to his storage place brazilwood, cotton, native grains, and other items that piqued European interest.¹⁹ His sustenance was probably provided for by Indians bringing preserved meats, legumes and fruits of the land, manioc "flour and other necessities," in exchange for goods he had on offer, such as glass beads, rattles, scissors or mirrors.²⁰ In addition, native societies, as the only other human inhabitants on the land, provided help in times of need: they were important allies against other hostile Indians and applied local remedies for sicknesses and maladies. In some cases, Indians might have wished to seal agreements to trade with a foreigner by taking him into their residence and offering him a female companion, a sign of his acceptance and adoption into the group.²¹ The system also provided the Portuguese crown with a middleman familiar with native languages and customs. Seamen desiring barter with locals were supposed to do

18 Léry, 101; Marchant, 1942, 34-41.

19 Marchant, 1942, 39.

20 Léry, 26, 54.

21 Claude d'Abbeville, *História da Missão dos Padres Capuchinos na Ilha do Maranhão em que se trata das singularidades admiráveis e dos costumes estranhos dos índios habitantes do país* (São Paulo: Livraria Martins Editora, [1614] 1945), 115; Léry, 43, 153; Manuel da Nóbrega, *Cartas do Brasil e mais escritos do P. Manuel da Nóbrega*, ed. Serafim Leite (Coimbra: Universidade de Coimbra, 1955), 19, 79.

so through the factor, who interpreted the transactions.²² The factor also made it his business to confirm that the brazilwood was properly loaded onto ships bound for points of commercial interest to the Portuguese.²³ Most likely, he was the one European with whom Indians interacted most and probably one of the few whites involved with the brazilwood trade who spoke Indian languages, and not simplified trade jargons.

Although the Treaty of Tordesillas (1494) had given Portugal a claim over the lands which were to include the Brazil and Amazonia, the lure of profits which could be illegally gained from the lucrative trade in brazilwood was too much to resist for other European nations. Among the major early competitors of the Portuguese were the French, who had established friendly relations with coastal Indians since the start of the sixteenth century. Although it is thought that the French did not possess the same factory system as the Portuguese maintained in Brazil, there is evidence that they had at least one trading post at Pernambuco and it is likely that others had been built and served as landmarks for incoming ships and holding stations for trade items bartered locally and awaiting transport to Old World markets.²⁴ French sailors and merchants had been trading and some even “liv[ing] a long time in [Tupinambá] country,” since the early sixteenth century.²⁵ These men were known in the historical documentation as “Norman interpreters,” and their work has been often compared with that of the *coureurs de bois* of the fur trade in New France.²⁶ Like the fur traders, their integration into local societies – and particularly what became long-standing alliances with the Tupinambá – did much for French merchants, engaged in the commerce in brazilwood.

22 Capistrano de Abreu, 27.

23 Marchant, 1942, 17.

24 Capistrano de Abreu, 35.

25 Léry, xix, 140, 235-236n3.

26 Barbara A. Sommer, “Colony of the Sertão: Amazonian Expeditions and the Indian Slave Trade,” *The Americas* 61, 3 (2005): 405.

They formed alliances of solidarity and friendship ranging from trade to marriage, adoption, cohabitation and the first generation of *mameluco* offspring of indigeous and European ancestry.²⁷

EARLY LANÇADOS, SHIPWRECK SURVIVORS AND SELF-EXILES

In the early modern Atlantic world, Brazil not only offered lucrative dyewood for commerce. It had plentiful and attractive ports of call and safe harbors.²⁸ Local merchants eager to acquire Old World exotica also welcomed European fleets in search of information, bartered goods, and to replenish water and food supplies for their continued voyages to the Caribbean, India, or the Far East. In the early years of the sixteenth century, for example, on an expedition entirely unrelated with Portuguese America and the trade in brazilwood, the *São Hieronimo* checked in to what may have been the Bay of All Saints, to repair a rudder that had been destroyed in a storm and to take on food and water. The crew traded with locals, swapping fishhooks and pins for food and crafts.²⁹ These forms of barter exchange might have been mediated by the factor of the trading post or by the few whites living on the land.

Countless undocumented men and women arriving on European ships forsook the arduous sea life of the continuing trip to Asia or Africa, as trade routes flowed, in favor of the inviting, verdant and abundant New World tropics. High rates of desertion were noticed when vessels

27 Francisco López de Gómara, "La História General de las Indias," in *Historiadores Primitivos de Indias* (Madrid: M. Rivadeneyra, 1852), 211; Léry, xix, 140, 235-236 n3; Marchant, 1942, 40-43; Frei Vicente do Salvador, *História do Brasil, 1500-1627*, 6th ed. (São Paulo: Edições Melhoramentos, 1975), 143, 246, 248, 273.

28 Gómara, 211; Roberto do Amaral Lapa, *A Bahia e a Carreira da Índia* (São Paulo: 1968); Alexander Marchant, "Colonial Brazil as a way station for the Portuguese India Fleets," *The Geographical Review* 31 (1941).

29 Marchant, , 1942, 44.

stopped at Portugal's American ports in the South Atlantic.³⁰ Though the Portuguese were forbidden from carrying on board their vessels any free persons, going inland, or staying ashore among natives, men, women and children were able to slip into a new American life, as evidenced by their constant presence in early chronicles.³¹ In addition to two *degredados* (convicts) Cabral left among the Tupiniquim in May 1500, for example, two more deckhands jumped ship.³² In 1511, the *Bretôa* picked up Portuguese Joham de Braga, who had been living in Bahia.³³ Cristovão Jacques, another Portuguese who acted in multiple roles as soldier, factor, trader and interpreter and who probably maintained close relations with local societies, possibly marrying native women, is said to have lived in Brazil between 1516 and 1519 and 1528 and on two further occasions from the 1520s to the 1540s. On each stay, he remained for one to two years, acting in various capacities representing Indians in trade with other Indians and with Europeans and in serving the crown by driving away French interlopers.³⁴

Expeditions of trade, exploration, and conquest also left behind human flotsam. Crewmen on voyages outfitted with hundreds of soldiers and seamen sometimes strayed or lost their way. Lucky sailors survived shipwrecks – only to find themselves separated from the shipmates. Conflicts with native societies or hunger left behind some travelers, abandoned by the crewmen. Amazonia, for example, hosted 22 Spanish-led expeditions in the first three quarters of the sixteenth century. Numerous voyages targeted the River Plate, where a long line of Europeans

30 Charles R. Boxer, *The Portuguese Seaborne Empire, 1415–1825* (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1969), 206, 219.

31 John Hemming, *Red Gold. The Conquest of the Brazilian Indians, 1500–1760* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), 11.

32 Eduardo Bueno, *Náufragos, traficantes e degredados: as primeiras expedições ao Brasil, 1500–1531*, vol. 2 (Rio de Janeiro: Objetiva, 1998), 34.

33 Marchant, 1942, 35.

34 *Ibid.*, 43–44.

remained on the land, as attested in travel accounts.³⁵ Also forming part of the small white communities of early colonial Brazil were *lançados* (from the cognate *lançar*, to throw), male and female sinners and convicts who were put ashore, instructed to interact with the locals, learn the languages of the land, acquire geographic, ethnographic and trade information, explain the Portuguese crown's intent, ascertain items available for trade, negotiate commerce, and help consolidate commercial and political alliances with coastal chiefs. The experiences of Spanish Francisco del Puerto in southeastern Brazil offer one concise view of the circumstances in which whites may have found themselves in the colony. As a lançado himself, del Puerto was left among the Indians near the River Plate around 1516. As a result of his friendship with area inhabitants and his knowledge of the land, he had assisted and saved the lives of many Europeans, deserted, shipwrecked or lost along the coast.³⁶ Not all wayward souls found del Puerto's directions useful, however; three Spanish men remained lost for a decade after meeting him.³⁷

Hans Staden is one such adventurer who, resolved to see "India," or America, left his hometown of Hamburg in 1547 and arrived to the lands of the Tupinambá and Karijó in Pernambuco the following year. This first trip lasted sixteen months at sea and one sailing along the coast of northern Brazil, with orders to barter for brazilwood and attack any other

35 José Ribamar Bessa Freire, *O Rio Babel: a história das línguas na Amazônia* (Rio de Janeiro: Editora da Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro, Editora Atlântica, 2004), 110.

36 Gonzalo Fernandez de Oviedo [y Valdés], *Historia General y Natural de las Indias* (Madrid: [1851-1855] 1959), 355.

37 Gómara, 212. For a comprehensive study of the Portuguese crown's use of exile as a policy for populating its global empire, see Timothy Coates, *Convicts and Orphans. Forced and State-Sponsored Colonizers in the Portuguese Empire, 1550-1755* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001).

European vessels seen doing the same.³⁸ Staden traveled again to Brazil in 1549 but this time, the stay was prolonged considerably, and against his will. The Tupinikin of Bertioga, sworn enemies of the Portuguese, mistook the German as a Pero, as the Portuguese were known along the coastal inhabitants, and seized him with the intention to kill, roast and eat him to avenge the deaths of their kinsmen by Portuguese settlers. Eyes bathed with tears, the devout Staden began to sing solemnly in German, “From the depths of my mystery, I call out to You, my God!” To which the Tupinikin snickered, “Look how he cries! Listen to him lament!” Luckily for Staden, he was able to make contact with a French ship which took him back to Europe in 1554. By the time he left Brazil, he was completely fluent in Tupinikin speech. His six years among the Tupinikin improved the language skills he had already acquired on the previous trip.³⁹

The French commitment to cultivating interpreters and cultural brokers was clear throughout the sixteenth century. Aside from the Norman interpreters who facilitated the kingdom’s commerce in brazilwood, the French, too maintained the practice of leaving behind castaways and orphans. “Ten young boys . . . and five young girls, with a woman to watch over the [girls],” left the port of Honfleur, in Normandy, France, in 1556 to be left behind in Brazil in order to acquire “the language of the savages.”⁴⁰ Around the Bahia de Todos os Santos, planter, sugar mill and slave owner and chronicler Gabriel Soares de Sousa recalled in 1587 that habitually, the French had left behind “young men” to learn the language and ways of the land with the Tupinambá and to be of service to French settlers anticipated in a future shipment.⁴¹ Friendly Franco-Indian relations pre-

38 Hans Staden, *Duas Viagens ao Brasil*, trans. Alberto Löfgren (São Paulo: Beca Produções Culturais, 2000), 33.

39 *Ibid.*, 22, 26, 35, 56-63, 126.

40 Léry, 7.

41 Gabriel Soares de Sousa, *Notícia do Brasil* (Lisboa: Alfa, [1587] 1989), 242.

dated early Portuguese attempts to establish ties with locals, as the first Jesuits to Ceará learned in 1607, that the French had already been engaging in trade relations among tribes in Maranhão.⁴² The participation and work of such men and women made the French among the most important of contenders against the Portuguese monopoly over Brazil.

Fanning out along the long coastline, speakers of Romance languages, namely, Portuguese, Spanish and French, struggled to survive off the land. Individuals who managed to locate, or were dropped off near to one of the factories, may have received assistance from former fellow Old World denizens. About 800 leagues north from the Tupinambá of the Bay of All Saints, for example, 8 to 10 whites were living together by a trading post in the 1530s.⁴³ While waiting for the arrival of promised Portuguese armadas to populate the coast, this small group of individuals relied on Indians for survival, food, loading Brazilwood, and protection.⁴⁴ Other less fortunate travelers or shipwreck survivors erected shelters of wood, leaves and adobe, probably with the counsel of friendly area inhabitants who taught them how to utilize the natural resources.⁴⁵ Stranded or de-

42 Serafim Leite, S.J., *História da Companhia de Jesus no Brasil*, x vols. (Rio de Janeiro: Imprensa Nacional, 1943), III, 6.

43 One league is between 5,555 and 6,000 meters. Stuart B. Schwartz, *Sugar Plantations in the Formation of Brazilian Society: Bahia, 1550-1835* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), xxiii.

44 Oviedo [y Valdés], 350.

45 João Felipe Bettendorff, *Crônica da missão dos padres da Companhia de Jesus no Estado do Maranhão*, 2nd ed. (Belém: Fundação Cultural do Pará Tancredo Neves; Secretaria de Estado da Cultura, 1990), 19; Fernão Cardim, *Tratados da terra e gente do Brasil* (Lisbon: Comissão Nacional para as Comemorações dos Descobrimientos Portugueses, 1997), 435n4; Ivo d'Evreux, *Viagem ao Norte do Brasil feita no[s] annos de 1613 a 1614 pelo Padre Ivo d'Evreux religioso capuchinho. Publicada conforme o exemplar, unico, conservado, na Bibliotheca Imperial de Paris com introdução e notas por Mr. Ferdinand Diniz, Conservador da Bibliotheca Santa Genoveva.*, trans. Cezar Augusto Marques, *Bibliotheca de Escriutores Maranhenses* (Rio de Janeiro: Depositarios Freitas Bastos & Cia., 1929), 109.

serting Europeans may have crossed paths serendipitously and probably banded together, forming tiny communities adjacent to larger Indian villages. Under such circumstances, Europeans were fortunate if they were accepted by their Indian neighbors, and had to comply with existing social structures and cultural norms. Their lot could be quite risky – bearing the brunt of natives’ fear, suspicion, or fury, with death always a possibility.

Those who survived married local men or women, and by these means, certain Portuguese men ended up as key protagonists in later Indian-white relations. The union between João Ramalho and Potira, daughter of Tupinikin headman Tibiriçá, illustrates a long-standing relationship between individuals in pre-settlement days that propeled the colony building efforts that occurred later when permanent settlements were erected. By accepting and taking in Ramalho, the Tupinikin gained access to trade with Ramalho’s “clan.” As members of the clan, the Portuguese in turn knew counted on the Tupinikin for brazilwood, food, friendship, and shelter. Moreover, the Tupinikin believed that the ranks of their warriors would swell with the backing of Portuguese soldiers, armed with powerful metal weapons and guns, rendering Tibiriçá all the more powerful in the internecine wars which characterized Tupi-Guarani societies. Santo André, the third colonial settlement in the captaincy of São Paulo (1553), was founded under Ramalho’s leadership, which rallied the support of his Tupinikin kinsmen.⁴⁶ When the Jesuits chose to establish a mission in the region, Ramalho was essential to securing native support and willingness to receive the Fathers.⁴⁷ Sao Vicente was also the gateway into the sertão, which held promise of gold, infinite Indian slaves and new lands to conquer by following trails well-worn by

46 John Monteiro, *Negros da terra: índios e bandeirantes nas origens de São Paulo* (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1994), 37-38.

47 Serafim Leite, ed., *Cartas dos Primeiros Jesuítas do Brasil*, 111 vols. (São Paulo: Comissão do Centenário da Cidade de São Paulo, 1956), 194r.

Indian networks of trade, communication and migration.⁴⁸ For his part, Ramalho had proven himself as a capable warrior and village founder and headman. Ramalho's daughters were married to prominent Portuguese immigrants, contributing to the growing population of mamelucos of Indian and European ancestry.⁴⁹ In the mid-sixteenth century, the captaincy of São Paulo already had become reknown for its local interpreters, who played essential roles in colonial matters from town-building to catechism, the administration of sacraments, expeditions of exploration, trade, enslavement, and conquest into the sertão.⁵⁰ The early history of colonial São Paulo captaincy owed much to the Tupinikin-Portuguese partnerships initiated by Tibiriçá, carried out by Potira and Ramalho and given continuity by their mameluco offspring.⁵¹

Sharing similar personal trajectories were two other Portuguese men. Diogo Álvares and Jerônimo de Albuquerque both married the daughters of prominent local chiefs, becoming respected warriors in their own right. Both men were essential to colony-building in their respective regions of influence. Álvares and the Tupinambá helped the first Portuguese colonists with the foundation of Vila Velha; their support was also indispensable when the provincial government was established

48 Serafim Leite, "Jesuítas do Brasil na fundação da missão do Paraguai (11 August 1588)," *Archivum historicum S.J.* VI (1937): 2.

49 Francisco de Assis Carvalho Franco, *Dicionário de bandeirantes e sertanistas do Brasil: séculos XVI, XVII, XVIII* (São Paulo: Comissão do IV Centenário da Cidade de São Paulo, Serviço de Comemorações Culturais, 1954), 323-325; Muriel Nazzari, *Disappearance of the Dowry. Women, Families, and Social Change in São Paulo, Brazil (1600-1900)* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), 33.

50 Maria Cândida Drumond Mendes Barros, "The Office of Lingua: a Portrait of the Religious Tupi Interpreter in Brazil in the Sixteenth Century," *Itinerario* XXV, 2 (2001): 123; Cardim, 1925, 195.

51 John M. Monteiro, "The Crisis and Transformations of Invaded Societies: Coastal Brazil in the Sixteenth Century," in *The Cambridge History of the Native Peoples of the Americas*, ed. Frank Salomon and Stuart B. Schwartz (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 992.

at Salvador and the first Jesuits began their programs of religious conversion among Indian communities around the Bay of All Saints (1549). Albuquerque's ties with his Tobajara kinsmen was also a great asset to the Portuguese at Recife and Olinda and it is little wonder that the captaincy of Pernambuco flourished in its first years of settlement, attributable to the strong Tobajara-Portuguese alliance which had been built.

Ramalho, Álvares and Albuquerque are representative of the many *lançados*, self-exiled men and women, and survivors of shipwrecks who remained blissfully nameless but were crucial first links to the creation of a shared *lingua franca*. As vehicles for gathering intelligence, they expanded Portuguese access to new lands, peoples and trade goods; arrivals following in the footsteps of men like Ramalho, drifting inland at the anchoring of each ship and the penetration of each expedition. They were the forerunners to subsequent waves of foreigners acculturating into native societies. These, in turn, came to help travelers, father *mameluco* offspring, and serve as Europe's informal emissaries to the native communities of Portuguese America.

The nature of Indian tribes' initial responses to their first meetings with Europeans individuals depended on the context of the encounter and also on the numbers and the standing (as perceived by the Indians) of the intruders. João Ramalho's acceptance by the Tupinikin headman Tibiriçá was one example of how Portuguese men married the daughters of local leaders. Half a century later and in the captaincy of Maranhão, Friars Claude d'Abbeville and Ivo d'Evreux, two French Capuchins provide vivid accounts of the welcome they received in their 1613-1614 visit to Tupinambá villages in Maranhão. At first sight, arrivals may have been acknowledged simply by the query: "Ere-iur Xetuassa-pe?" (Have you arrived, my compadre?).⁵² For the more auspicious visitors, a ceremony of cries and lamentations is invoked by the womenfolk, who

⁵² Evreux, 242.

*“arrive with [their] hands over the[ir] eyes and, taking one of the legs of the visitor, begin immediately to cry with marvellous shouts and exclamations. This is one of the most evident signs of courtesy that their friends are accustomed to witnessing. Upon crying, they add thousands of words of elogy, saying that [the visitor] is welcomed, confirming [his/her goodness] and lamenting that [he/she] had suffered such a difficult journey in order to come visit them from so far away.”*⁵³

Writers noted similar ceremonies of welcome among the Tupinambá of Bahia and Rio de Janeiro in the mid-sixteenth century, suggesting these as standards of Tupinambá welcome for arrival Europeans.⁵⁴ Two accounts by French men of religion, Friar Evreux and Calvinist pastor Jean de Léry, capture the speech in these instances, providing transcriptions of Tupinambá phrases, words, expressions, discourses, and religious oration in French orthography. Each written with approximately half a century of Tupinambá-French trade relations and separated by four decades of history and half a continent, the transcriptions reflect little change in the speech of the Tupinambá.

Following the women’s welcome, ensuing rounds of question and answer invariably began with the visitor’s introduction of himself or herself after the hosts ask, “Marapé derere?” (What do you call yourself?), followed by invitations to dine, smoke, converse about the local conditions in each speaker’s native lands, begin barter and ending with “Erey-potar kere-y-pé?” (Would you like to sleep?) after which the hammock is strung and the visitor left to deliberate his adventures and new experiences adapting to the local speech of the Tupinambá.⁵⁵

53 Abbeville, 227-228; Evreux, 241-246.

54 Evreux, 242.

55 Ibid, 243-246; Léry, 162-169, 178- 194.

BY SPEECH

Upon arrival to inhabited territory, the French practice was to fire the cannon several times to warn area residents, in response to which “suddenly... a great number of savage men and women [appeared] on the seashore.”⁵⁶ The use of the cannon was reported on other occasions by the Portuguese and Spanish in the 1530s, 1547, and throughout the 1550s. That such a protocol existed implies the regularity and stability of amicable relations between the Europeans and coastal dwellers, at least throughout early colonization. On these occasions, coastal societies may not have noted difference between the Portuguese, French, Spanish, Dutch, German, English, and Italian sailors and merchants who anchored in their harbors. These men all appeared clothed, grew mustaches and beards, and many appeared regularly on Sundays before prostrated before large wooden crosses planted into the ground. The similarities between European customs and cultures were paralleled by what may have sounded to natives’ ears as closely-related speech forms, as were, indeed, the European languages.⁵⁷

What became increasingly clear to native inhabitants was the newcomers’ desires – insatiable, it may have seemed – for their forest wood, particularly their *ibirapitanga*, or *araboutan*, common terms in Tupi-Guarani languages for brazilwood.⁵⁸ What appeared puzzling, to native peoples, were the extreme conditions Europeans were willing to endure in order to acquire its logs. The following dialogue, taken down by Léry on his mission to the nascent French colony in the Bay of Guanabara (1556-1558), represents this native curiosity with the European fever for brazilwood. An elder Tupinambá was recorded as having asked Léry, “What

⁵⁶ Léry, 25.

⁵⁷ Abbeville, 115.

⁵⁸ “Vocabulário da lingua Brasileira,” Biblioteca Nacional de Lisboa, Lisbon, Portugal, Reservados 3144; “Prosodia da Lingoa.” s.d., Academia de Ciências de Lisboa, Lisbon, Portugal, Série Azul 569.

does it mean that you French and Portuguese come from so far for wood to warm yourselves? Is there none in your own country?" To which the pastor replied that the wood in France was fit for burning, but not for the purpose of creating a deep red dye, which araboutan offered, used to color garments and other articles. The elder continued his query, asking why such enormous quantities of the wood were needed. Léry described the merchants of his kingdom, so wealthy with "more knives, scissors, mirrors, and other merchandise than you have ever seen over here; one such merchant alone will buy all the wood that several ships bring back from your country." When asked, with a sense of awe, if these merchants ever expired and if so, what would come of his belongings, Léry enumerated the children, siblings and kinsmen in line to inherit the goods. At this, the elder marveled at what he had just heard, exclaiming:

*"Truly ... I see now that you Frenchmen are great fools; must you labor so hard to cross the sea, on which (as you told us) you endured so many hardships, just to amass riches for your children or for those who will survive you? Will not the earth that nourishes you suffice to nourish them? We have kinsmen and children, whom, as you see, we love and cherish; but because we are certain that after our death the earth which has nourished us will nourish them, we rest easy and do not trouble ourselves further about it."*⁵⁹

Léry's transcription of the dialogue, which he presumably translated into French for his readership, was reconstructed from memory at intervals, and was variously lost, damaged, and rewritten again between 1563 and 1578. Although in this instance, he makes no mention of the interpreter, throughout the text, it is clear that he had to rely on interlingual mediators who accompanied him in his rounds through the Indian villages. During his visit to the solemn assemblies said to occur among

59 Léry, 101-102.

the Tupinambá every three or four years, for example, an anonymous interpreter, who claimed to have been “six or seven years ... in that country,” translated for Léry and his travel companion, Jacques Rousseau.⁶⁰ It appears that Léry eventually acquired sufficient proficiency in Tupi-Guarani languages to be able to put together an extensive “Colloquy” in Tupinikin and Tupinambá dialects.

André Thevet, French royal cosmographer and personal chaplain of Catherine de Medici, noted after his ten-week visit to the Bay of Guanabara that among the Tupinambá and other villagers, popular European trade pieces included scissors, needles, “certain hatchets, knives, daggers, swords, and other iron tooles, beades of glasse, combes, loking glasses” (sic).⁶¹ Additional items offered by Europeans in initial encounters included rattles, bells, red felt hats, and pieces of cloth.⁶² Some of these things may have been valued for their exotic appeal. Glass beads were admired for their aesthetic value and bells, rattles and whistles may have been believed to contain and convey to their owners special powers reigned in from foreign lands.⁶³ Other goods may have been accepted as

60 Ibid, 140.

61 André Thevet, *La Cosmographie Universelle* [1575], reprinted partially by Suzanne Lussagnet, *Le Brésil et les Brésiliens par André Thevet* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, [1575] 1953), 225; Andrew Thevet, *The New found world, or Antarctike wherein is contained wõderful and strange things, as well of humaine creatures, as beastes, fishes, foules, and serpents, trées, plants, mines of golde and siluer: garnished with many learned aucthorities, trauailed and written in the French tong, by that excellent learned man, master Andrew Thevet. And now newly translated into Englishe, wherein is reformed the errors of the auncient Cosmographers.* (Amsterdam, New York: Da Capo Press, Theatrum Orbis Terrarum Ltd., [1568]1971), 73v.

62 Aires de Casal, ed., *Corografia Brasileira. Fac-simile da edicao de 1817* (Rio de Janeiro: Imprensa Nacional, 1945), I, 14-17.

63 See Richter’s excellent discussion of the ways by which Amerindians in North America may have fit European goods into their own cultural patterns, for example, hammering kettles flat and using the metal to shape amulets, imbued with powerful forces as they originated from the other side of the sea. Daniel K. Richter, *Facing East*

acts of goodwill. For example, some Margaia men and women, although enemies of the French, willingly traded with Léry's crew, when the time came for the French to depart, the Margaia men donned the shirts they had received in exchange for the manioc flour, hams, boar meat and fruits they provided for the hungry travelers. Perhaps as a sign of respect to the French, they waded in the glistening waist-high waters away from the ship, with their shirttails held high as to not drench their newly-acquired garments. As they neared the beach, with the water receding, the Margaia men strode, bare-bottomed and laden down with other gift items from the French, strode back onto the sandy beach.⁶⁴

Metal goods were also eagerly traded for by native communities. Accessories, necklaces and cuffs hammered out of metal adorning the necks of people of "Brasilica nations" were seen by Father Provincial Domingos Coelho, suggesting metal goods as common, daily household items for many Tupi-Guarani Indians by 1635.⁶⁵ In another form, metal, when made into tools such as machetes, saws and even scissors and knives forever altered the lifestyles of Indian peoples. Japi-açu, one of the most powerful Tupinambá headman on the Island of Maranhão in the early seventeenth century, made clear his people's dependency on the metal tools traded by the French and Portuguese.⁶⁶ Tasks which previously had required considerable manpower and investment in time, such as making weapons, felling trees, building a village and making canoes, could be completed more quickly and by far fewer people. Indians no longer content with scraps of metals, glass and cloths increasingly demanded scissors, fishhooks, knives, and machetes, all wares costly for Europeans to acquire. That the *Bretôa* crew carried a surplus of these items suggests that Indians had already begun soliciting these as early as 1511. Europeans

from Indian country: a Native history of early America (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), especially chapters 1 and 2.

64 Léry, 26.

65 Bras 8(2), 469f.

66 Abbeville, 60.

who wanted New World items had no choice but to acquiesce to local demands. The chapter entitled, “Instruction for those who go for the first time to [Maranhão],” in French Capuchin Friar Yves d’Evreux’s *Voyage* advised future colonists that trade was not necessarily cheap, and that they should be prepared to bring all that was deemed as necessary for living.⁶⁷ Especially in the pre-settlement period, commerce usually adhered to local rules, traditions and preferences.⁶⁸

On the other hand, exchanges in trade goods were mutual affairs. Indians, too, had to meet the demands of Europeans if they desired Old World novelties. Food was the trade item requested most by hungry sailors and merchants, who typically spent two months at sea surviving on scanty rations of preserved meats, breads and wine, making for a monotonous diet. Besides brazilwood, other trade pieces of local exotica included monkeys and parrots.⁶⁹ German artilleryman Hans Staden recalls having seen in the mid-sixteenth century many ships anchored in the Bahia da Guanabara in the southeast and Bahia de Todos os Santos in the northeast, where logs were being loaded. There, Indians offered French traders food provisions, pepper, monkeys and parrots, all abundant and natural to the land and so, easy to acquire for the Indians.⁷⁰ Indeed, coastal inhabitants gained handsomely in trading brazilwood, and they aggressively sought barter with Europeans. In 1531, coastal inhabitants took the initiative and propositioned Pero Lopes de Sousa, who was still on board his ship. Swimming speedily along with the vessel’s swift pace, they queried his wish for trade, possibly by gestures or by yelling above the din of crashing waves, seagulls and the ship’s groan, “ibirapitanga!” or “araboutan!”⁷¹

67 Evreux, 240.

68 Curtin, 49.

69 Marchant, 1942, 29; Prestage, 290.

70 Staden, 2000, 22, 32–33, 101.

71 Marchant, 1942, 33.

The Margaia Indians Léry wrote about also seemed to value trade with whites. Despite enemy relations with the French, one of the acting leaders of a welcome group greeting Léry's men insisted that their araboutan was the best in the land and that his people would willingly offer food and provide manpower to fell trees and divide and carry the logs to the French ships.⁷² Further north, near the swirling waters of the Amazon River in early 1542, news about exotic goods convinced Omagua Chief Aparia to dispatch four to five canoes laden with trade items to intercept Spanish Francisco Orellana's fleet.⁷³ Word spread quickly and Indians living far inland traversed well-worn trails to the coast to exchange in barter with the white men. Through the long-standing trade networks that crisscrossed South America, Old World goods and technologies penetrated into the societies and lands still not traversed by Europeans and villages in the remote hinterland, integrating strips of clothe, bells and mirrors into their daily lives, anticipated face-to-face encounters with the pale and bearded "others" whom they had yet to meet.

Most likely, conversation was limited to a minimum in the early phases of inter-ethnic trade. Thevet recounts that Indians' exclamation, "Look there! A ship full of merchandise!" probably from the Tupinambá, opened up rounds of barter on the seacoast, which proceeded with "this maner [of speech]: 'give me that, and I will give thee this,' without any further talk (sic)."⁷⁴ Like many of the trade languages to spring up as a consequence of commercial interaction between peoples speaking mutually unintelligible languages, the Tupi-Guarani speech forms used in the early sixteenth century between European merchants and coastal Indians consisted of little more than a string of terms. A limited vocabulary restricted early Indian-white spoken communications to the immedi-

72 Léry, 27.

73 David Sweet, "A Rich Realm of Nature Destroyed: the Middle Amazon Valley, 1640-1750" (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1974), 7.

74 Thevet, [1575] 1953, 225; [1568] 1971, 73v.

ate goals of the seaside exchanges: names for the commodities for trade, their physical traits (colors, sizes and weights), rudimentary greetings, and phrases for price haggling. One of the earliest known expositions of the trade jargon used between Indians and Europeans was published in Venice in 1536, authored by Antonio Pigafetta, scribe on board Magellan's fleet (1519–1522), of which one vessel circumnavigated the globe. Duly recorded for posterity, Pigafetta's short list gave the local terms for corn,⁷⁵ flour, fish hook, knife, comb, scissors, bells and the persuasive selling phrase, "a bit more than good."⁷⁶ Léry's "Colloquy" offers a similar laundry list of materials, items, colors, sizes, quantities and simple sentences.⁷⁷

It appears that if European merchants wished to trade with the coastal peoples, the newcomers had to learn to twist their tongues to identify, request, bargain for and announce the goods for barter. Pigafetta's and Léry's vocabularies of the trade jargon were lined in two columns: on the left, items written in Italian and French orthography, respectively, corresponded with the right, where the Tupi-Guarani words were listed. These were presumably composed for the few literate arriving sailors and merchants, who might have read aloud the terms on the list for the benefit of their less educated shipmates to memorize or holler out, in the bustle and activity of trade, the words for others to hear and imitate. In no way do these early vocabularies indicate that any loan words, transliterations, or other linguistic properties were adopted from European languages. Indians' efforts to speak a European language would have been matters of noteworthy interest, yet whereas this aspect is absent from early sources, it is a recurring theme and preoccupation in later ones, suggesting that European languages, as with European institutions, cultures, ideas and material

75 "Mahiz," in the Indian language, for what seemed to be described in Italian, "Il suo sormento che par ceci," as a plant with seeds similar to chickpeas. Antonio Pigafetta, "Capitolo vi. Alcune parole che vsano le genti ne la terra del Bresil," in *Il Viaggio fatto da gli Spangivoli a Torno al Mondo* ([Venezia]: MD XXX VI [1536]).

76 "Piu che buon," Ibid.

77 Léry, 178–194.

items, assumed more importance and expression in local affairs as European people, institutions and customs became more visible. That no mention is made of the use of French and Portuguese, the languages of the most active of European traders, leads one to suggest that verbal communication in Indian-white commerce drew principally, if not at times wholly, from Tupi-Guarani dialects. When and where Portuguese or French may have been spoken between natives and seafarers, scribes probably did not see the need to notate their own language. The exotic appeal of taking down “[s]ome words [used by] the people of the land of Brazil,” for posterity, as Pigafetta’s vocabulary announced, and their interest in compiling a language guide for reference in future trade might have been reason enough to put ink-blotted feather to paper. The tradition of recording trade jargons used in faraway places was also established in Europe.⁷⁸

The trade pidgin, or trade jargon, of early colonial Brazil exhibited the typical qualities ascribed to oral forms growing out of interlingual commerce. The Tupi-Guarani trade jargons possessed limited ranges, being composed of little more than a string of vocabulary, void of grammatical structure and inadequate for expressions beyond simple identification of objects and perhaps, for the savvy merchant pitching a great sale, rudimentary adjectives highlighting an item’s “much more than good” value.⁷⁹ Linguistic records documenting early Indian-white contacts in colonial Brazil reveal that inter-lingual communication, at its most base level, was little more than extended lists of vocabulary and phrases inquiring and identifying the names of flora, fauna, trade items, parts of the body, genealogy, numbers and making salutations.

The sheer imbalance in numerical representatives of Tupi-Guarani speakers as compared with Indo-European users also favored the preva-

78 Examples include earlier works such as Eustache de la Fosse, *Voyage à la côte occidentale de l’Afrique en Portugal et Espagne (1479-80)*, edited by R. Foulché-Delbosc (Paris: Alphonse Picard Et Fils, Eds., 1897).

79 David Crystal, ed., *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Language*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 336, 439.

lence of the local speech forms. It may be argued that only several Indians might appear to trade at any one time; these same Indians became native commercial emissaries to the white seamen and perhaps they learned to speak some European words and phrases, although these instances are as rare in the early sources as they are abundant in the later ones. Considering the territorial, political and cultural expansion and dominance of Tupi-Guarani speakers throughout eastern South America in the early sixteenth century, Europeans found it more effective and practical to acquire skills to solicit trade, to bargain and to make requests for specific items in Tupi-Guarani languages and applied these rudimentary language skills to their commerce with inhabitants living along the extension of the coast where groves of brazilwood abounded, practically the entire littoral from Paraíba to Santa Catarina. The existence of an intra-Indian interlanguage might also be suggested by sixteenth century chroniclers. Early European observers commonly remarked on the incomprehensibility of the speech of “other” Indian groups living adjacent to Tupi-Guarani speakers or in the immediate sertão.⁸⁰ However, the sources of these early reports – Tupi-Guarani speaking Indians – never confirmed that the so-called “barbarous peoples,” or Tapuia, did not understand the speech of the informants. Intra-Indian relations enacted through trade, temporary alliances against a common cause, intermarriages, adoption and war indicate possibilities by which non-Tupi-Guarani speakers living in the region may have possessed varying levels of familiarity with the many dialects which were part of the Tupi-Guarani languages.

The use of Tupi-Guarani in commerce between Indians and Europeans and its continued importance in mediating interlingual contact during the period of settlement and colonization conform its function as a regional lingua franca among Indians. The existence of interlingual

80 Cardim, 1925, 194-206; Sousa, 215, 216, 247, 248; Hans Staden, *Duas viagens ao Brasil. Arrojadas aventuras no séculos XVI entre os antropófagos do Novo Mundo*, 3rd ed. (São Paulo: Publicações da sociedade Hans Staden São Paulo, [1557] 1942), 71.

speech based on local languages and growing out of similar in situations of high linguistic diversity has been common throughout the New World.⁸¹ At least by the mid-sixteenth century, it is clear that its languages had become the general language “most used on the coast of Brazil,” through which occurred interlingual communication, contact, commerce, colonization and Christianization in the State of Brazil.⁸² Much less is known about the pre-settlement history of the State of Maranhão and Pará. Though sources were quick to enumerate the scores or hundreds of distinct tongues spoken among natives of Amazonia, and to map out where dense groupings of Karib and Arawak language families existed, they told little about the use of common languages. One wonders, for example, how Indians living in the Province of Machifaro, deep in the Upper Amazon River Valley in the sixteenth century, traded dried fish with neighbors when neither side comprehended the other. Commercial and social contact was frequent in the early sixteenth century. The Portuguese Diogo Nunes, writing in the 1530s, recalled that so intense was the network of trade and exchange between villages that there was a network of heavily used trails which were so wide that they could have been rightly termed as roads.⁸³

81 Inga Clendinnen, *Aztecs: An Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), xiii; Emanuel J Dreschel, *Mobilian Jargon. Linguistic and Sociohistorical Aspects of a Native American Pidgin* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997); Lois M. Feister, “Linguistic Communication between the Dutch and Indians in New Netherland, 1609-1664,” *Ethnohistory* 20, 1 (1973): 31; Edward G. Gray, *New World Babel: Languages and Nations in early America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 14.

82 José de Anchieta, *Arte de Gramática da Língua Mais Usada na Costa do Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro: Imprensa Nacional, 1933).

83 Diogo Nunes in Nelson Papavero et al., eds., *O Novo Éden. A fauna da Amazônia brasileira nos relatos de viajantes e cronistas desde a descoberta do rio Amazonas por Pinzón (1500) até o Tratado de Santo Ildefonso (1777)* (Belém: Museu Paraense Emílio Goeldi, 2000), 3-4.

BY SIGNS

Accompanying the encounters between the Indians and the Europeans, signs and gestures conveyed messages over simple commercial engagements.⁸⁴ A Norman interpreter described to Léry how trade in the early sixteenth century unfolded between “Ouetaca... Cara-ia,” (or Goitacá and Karajá) Margaia, Tupinambá, and other coastal groups, all Tupi-Guarani groups. Because the bellicose Goitacá were feared and mistrusted by other tribes and clans, a willing merchant showed his offerings only from a distance, indicating desire to barter through gestures.

If the other agrees, he shows in turn a bit of featherwork, or some of the green stones that they set in their lips, or some other thing that they have in their region. Then they will agree on a place three or four hundred steps from there; the first, having carried the thing that he wants to exchange and set it on a stone or log, will then withdraw, either back or to one side. The Goitacá then comes to take it and leaves the object he had displayed at the same spot; then he too will retreat and will allow the [other] to come and get it; so that up to that point they keep their promises to each other. But as soon as each one has returned with his object of exchange, and gone past the boundaries of the place where had first come to present himself, the truce is broken and it is then a question of which one can catch the other and take back from him what he was carrying away.” Considering the Goitacá’s remarkable swiftness, reputed even among the more agile Indians, the Huguenot missionary discouraged barter with them, lest “the lame, gouty, or otherwise slow-footed folk from over here want to lose their merchandise.”⁸⁵

84 To compare, see accounts of sign language in early Indian-European encounters in North America, Richter, 26 and Feister, 26-28.

85 Léry, 29.

Although Europeans often managed to solicit the assistance of factors and other middlemen, where they were not available (nor effective, as is presumed in the case of Portuguese *lançados* trained in West African dialects aboard Cabral's fleet to Brazil in 1500), a form of trade sign language may have ensued. While at first Pedro Álvares Cabral and his crew judged the natives of the Land of the Holy Cross to be utterly "barbarian [in] that in addition to not having a language which we could understand, nor by scenes [signs] did they know how to give a signal of the thing which we asked them," persistence paid off and subsequent gestures were mutually comprehended.⁸⁶ In exchange for the clothing, bells, metal armbands, mirrors, paper and linen offered by the Portuguese, the Indians returned with corn, flour, beans, fruits and other legumes of the land.⁸⁷ In the first recorded encounter between Portuguese and probably Tupiniquim, Potiguar, Caeté or Tupinambá, during which 18-20 Indian men armed with bows and arrows moved robustly towards Cabral's ships – a scenario which appeared menacing to the Portuguese – signs seemed to help: Nicolau Coelho gestured to them "that they repose their bows," and sure enough, the armed men acquiesced.⁸⁸

Immediately, rounds of barter opened up with a spontaneous burst of colors in flight. Coelho tossed to the natives a red cap, another linen hat he was wearing and a black umbrella. In return, one of the Indians flung over a fan of long bird feathers decorated with a small cup formed by red and black feathers while another offered a chain of tiny, white shells.⁸⁹ Two days later, the Portuguese beckoned two Indians to board one of the ships. When the Indians entered, "one of them eyed the necklace of the Captain and began to act out with the hand [in the direction of] the land, and after, towards the necklace, as if telling us that there,

86 Damião de Góis, *Chronica d'el-rei D. Manuel* (Lisboa: 1909), 46.

87 Ibid.

88 Casal, ed., *Corografia Brasílica*, I, 14.

89 Ibid.

gold [could be found. The two Indians] were shown a black parrot ... they took it immediately in the hand and gestured toward the land, as one says that there, they are found.” If Europeans suspected any coincidence or randomness in the Indians’ signing, their suspicions were allayed when, upon displaying a sheep, the natives did not react by gesturing towards land.⁹⁰ Once commercial relations had been established between European and Indian merchants, exchange grew routine. Possibly, already familiar with previous trade with whites, natives ventured out in their canoes to meet ships at anchorage, and even went on board to take a closer look at the foreign visitors’ belongings. This occurred during Cabral’s 1500 stay in Porto Seguro and was reported also in other instances of interlingual trade.⁹¹ Although a trade sign language between English and Africans on the Guinea coast was to be observed later, in the mid-nineteenth century, the circumstances described nonetheless provide a glimpse of how Indian merchants may have climbed aboard European ships to advertise their goods, without uttering one word:

“articles of traffic ... [are placed] on the deck, and the business is conducted by signs between the parties ... done by signs and gestures of the hands and fingers, and by placing a quantity of goods belonging to the vessel, opposite the ... articles the natives have to dispose of.”⁹²

⁹⁰ Ibid, 1, 16.

⁹¹ Ibid, 1, 16-17. See the example of the Micmacs trading with Frenchmen Jacques Cartier in sixteenth-century Newfoundland, in Richter, 26-27. A considerable discussion to nineteenth-century English-West African coastal trade is offered in Joshua A. Carnes, *Journal of a Voyage from Boston to the West Coast of Africa with a full description of the Manner of Trading with the Natives on the Coast* (New York: Negro Universities Press, [1852] 1969), 85, 94-95, 285.

⁹² Carnes, *Journal of a Voyage from Boston to the West Coast of Africa with a full description of the Manner of Trading with the Natives on the Coast*, 210. On Indians going on board Portuguese and French ships, see Staden, 1942, 93.

Gestures, expressions and signing in interlingual contact were not exclusive from speech, although the tendency in the specialized literature is to call attention to oral language when it occurs, ignoring study of body language and relegating the latter to instances whereby conversation is limited or lacking. Léry's account provides numerous examples of native speech and gestures acting in concert to convey messages to him – messages which the pastor misunderstood on several occasions, much to his own fretting and consternation (and the later amusement of his interpreters and Tupinambá hosts). Three weeks after Léry's arrival, he was escorted by an interpreter to four or five villages around the Bay of Guanabara. When he entered a Yabouraci village, called "Pepin" by the French, he was immediately approached and asked for his name, "Mara-pé derere?" Before he could stammer out an answer,

*"one of them took my hat, which he put on his head; another my sword and my belt, which he put around his naked body; yet another my tunic, which he donned. Deafening me with their yells, they ran through the village with my clothing. Not only did I think I had lost everything, but I didn't know what would become of me. As experience has shown me several times they do the same thing to everyone who visits them, and especially those they haven't seen before. After they have played around a little with one's belongings, they carry them all back and return them to their owners."*⁹³

Startling as such a welcome might have been for Léry, a previous experience had caused him such a fright as to have him pass a fitful and sleepless night in his first visit the Tupinambá village of Euramirim. Léry and his interpreter entered Euramirim just as the Tupinambá were ending a rite of cannibalism, begun only six hours previously with the slaying of a prisoner taken in war. Distraught with the view of the pieces of the

93 Léry, 160-161.

warrior's body cut up and roasting on a grill over a roaring fire, Léry sat numbly through the weeping ceremony of the women and a speech of welcome made by the village elder. Immediately thereafter, his interpreter, who "liked to drink and roast human flesh as much as" the Tupinambá, abandoned him to partake in the remainder of the eating, dancing and drinking of the anthropophagic ceremony. Léry stayed far from the festivities and tired, laid down to rest. Shortly after,

"one of [the Tupinambá] approached me with the victim's foot in hand, cooked and [roasted] ... His countenance filled me with such terror that you need hardly ask if I lost all desire to sleep. Indeed, I thought that by brandishing the human flesh he was eating, he was threatening me and wanted to make me understand that I was about to be similarly dealt with."⁹⁴

Léry persevered through the night, though not without great anxiety for his own life and anger at his deserting interpreter, who returned the next morning to find the pastor "not only ashen-faced and haggard but also feverish." Léry could bear no more and called the man a "scoundrel to have left me among these people whom I couldn't understand at all." The interpreter, thinking the entire situation rather amusing,

"recounted the whole business to the savages – who, rejoicing at my coming [the previous day], and thinking to show me affection, had not budged from my side all night – they said that they had sensed that I had been somewhat frightened of them, for which they were very sorry. My one consolation was the hoot of laughter they sent up – for they are great jesters – at having (without meaning to) given me such a scare."⁹⁵

94 Ibid, 163.

95 Ibid, 163-164.

The two occasions described here were not solitary instances of misunderstanding between Léry and the Tupi-Guarani speakers he met. Luckily for the pastor, whose skills in understanding the verbal and gesticulatory languages of the Tupinambá appeared rather limited in the early portion of his visit, numerous interpreters were available to bridge communication gaps.

As the sixteenth century wore on, the oral life of Portuguese America became more kaleidoscopic. Traders continued arriving on the shore to peddle their wares. Starting in the decade of the 1530s, migrants from Portugal moved in to settle the land. Throughout the century, men and women from all over the Old World, meaning both Europe and Africa, traveled to live out their lives in Brazil, flushing into the littoral six major groups of speakers of Indo-European and African language families. In addition to these speakers of Old World tongues, masses of Indians, foreign to coastal Brazil and coming from other parts of Portuguese America, converged into or near to colonial settlements which continued to develop by the sea. Chapter two (see forthcoming issue) examines this linguistic diversity among the migrants – Indian, European and African – who came to claim Brazil and Amazonia as their new homes.

Early settlements contained hundreds to thousands of Indians, mostly Tupi-Guarani speakers although Karib, Arawak and Jê figured prominently in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Few whites, among whom many were from Portugal, lived there, as did hundreds and, starting in the late sixteenth-century, thousands of Africans, the majority of whom originated from the western and central portions of the continent. Within this cornucopia of languages, the Brasília endured the dynamic changes occurring in the coastal linguistic demography and held their primacy in interlingual mediation from initial phases of permanent settlements until the close of the seventeenth century in Brazil. In Amazonia, the Brasília maintained a steady trajectory as colonial interlanguage

in the history of oral Portuguese America, from the early days of contact and trade in the northern colony until the mid-eighteenth century. Particularly for non-native Tupi-Guarani speakers, it was only a matter of time before their adaptation to Portuguese America was accompanied by ever growing ease in enunciating, speaking and understanding the Brasília.

ABSTRACT: Set against the backdrop of brazilwood trade and of encounters between the native inhabitants and the ocean-crossing sailors who arrived in Portuguese America during the initial era of colonization, this essay considers the topic of inter-ethnic communication. It examines sixteenth – and early seventeenth-century travelogues, Jesuit letters, and indigenous-language texts to suggest the dominance of the coastal varieties of the Tupi-Guarani language group as *lingua franca* between Indians and the Europeans.

KEYWORDS: Tupi-guarani indians and languages; Early colonization; Brazilwood; Brazil; Amazonia