Zo'é (Brazil) – Language Snapshot

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Language Name:	Zo'é
Language Family:	Tupian
ISO 639-3 Code:	pto
Glottolog Code:	zoee1240
Population:	310 people
Location:	-0.089888, -55.785014
Vitality rating:	seriously endangered

Summary

Zo'é is a Tupian language which is spoken by the homonymous ethnic group who live in the municipality of Óbidos, state of Pará, Brazil. Classified as a vulnerable language by UNESCO, Zo'é has been little studied by field linguists. In a search of internet-based databases with the keywords Buré, Jo'é, Poturu, Poturujara, Poturú, Puturú and Tupi of Cuminapanema, only twenty publications were found to discuss in some depth the phonetic-phonological dimension of the Zo'é language. Following steps for a systematic review, closer scrutiny of these publications has revealed the existence of four distinct vowel inventories and five distinct consonant inventories of this language. As a result, a descriptive-analytical study was devised aiming to understand the reasons for such divergent descriptions, and to decide which of these inventories is more representative of Zo'é. In case all lack adequacy, our aim is to provide a revised, updated analysis. Currently, the team of researchers awaits permission from the Brazilian government to visit the Zo'é Indigenous Land to present the research proposal to community leaders and upon agreement start the process of data collection. Meantime, data collected in encounters with the Zo'é people in the 1980s and 1990s are being explored.

1. The Zo'é people and their language

The Zo'é language is spoken by a recently-contacted indigenous group who live in Óbidos, one of 144 municipalities that comprise the state of Pará in Bazil (see Figure 1), where about 25 indigenous languages from the Macro-Jê and Tupi stocks and the Karib family are spoken (Franchetto 2000; Moore et al. 2008; Ferreira-Silva et al. 2014). According to Moseley (2010), 97 indigenous languages are currently classified as vulnerable in Brazil, including Zo'é. Their land, referred to in the Brazilian government's official documents as Zo'é Indigenous Land (*Terra Indígena Zo'é*), consists of 668,565 hectares, which represents 23.85% of the total territory of Óbidos (28,021,443 km^2) (Brasil 2009).
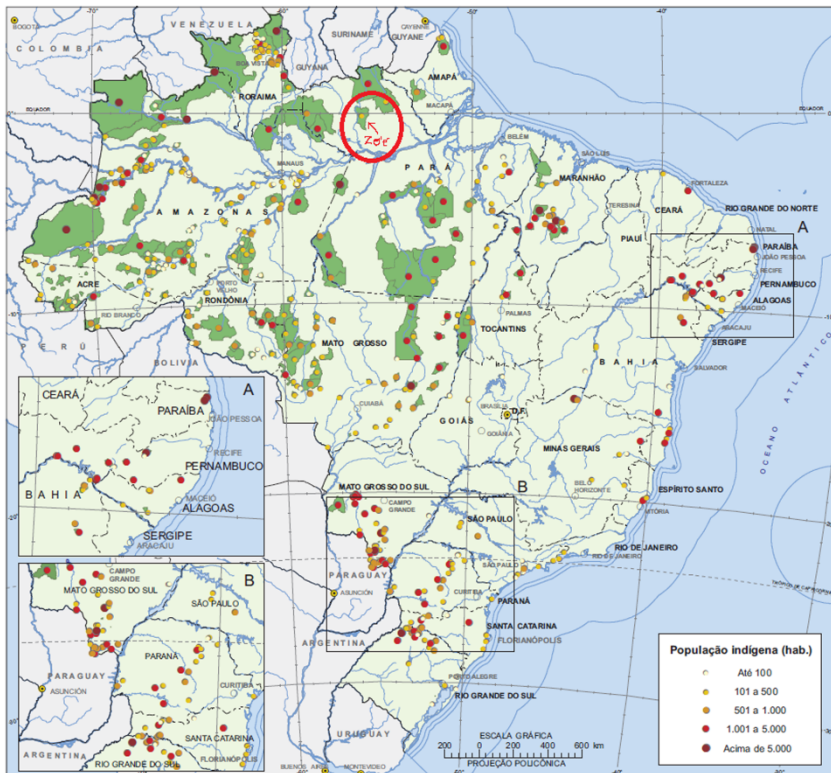

Figure 1. Zo'é Land (Censo Demográfico 2010, 2012, Cartograma 2)

In 1982, a group of missionaries from *Missão Novas Tribos do Brasil* (MNTB) contacted members of the Zo'é people for the first time. Due to the brevity of the encounter, however, it was not possible to estimate the number

of Zo'é living in the area at the time. In their next contact with the group in 1987, the missionaries were able to count 119 of them, who had survived the ravages of malaria (Castro, 2011). With the social assistance and health care provided by the missionaries, the population began to grow again, and four years later, by the time of first contact by FUNAI[1] with them in February 1991, the population was reported as 133 (an increase of more than 11%), and it rose to 172 in the same month in 1998, according to Brasil (1999). In 2010, the Zo'é numbered 259 people, of whom only four spoke Portuguese at home (Censo Demográfico 2010 2012). Gallois (2019) estimated the population at 310 people, which represents an increase of more than 160% since their second encounter with the MNTB missionaries in 1987.

From 2008 to 2011, the Zo'é had contact with the Tiriyó and the Waiwai – two other indigenous Amazonian groups – and with Brazil nut gatherers and traders, known as *castanheiros* for whom members of the Zo'é people worked gathering Brazil nuts in the forest. And sometimes they made excursions into the city of Oriximiná, in a neighbouring municipality bearing the same name. In 2011, eight Zo'é youngsters (7 males and 1 female) had a meeting with the Minister of Justice and the President of FUNAI in Brasília (Fundação Nacional do Índio 2011). They were taken there by the then Coordinator of the Cuminapanema Ethno-environmental Protection Front (FPEC) in the aftermath of a complaint by members of the Zo'é about FUNAI's failure to assist them that a Brazil nut trader had recorded and published on Atalaia TV (Florenzano 2010). More recently, the Zo'é have been in touch with their neighbours again, both via radio and in person: 'They [the Tiriyó] always talk with us over the radio, so we don't really worry about them'. They noted that 'We have recently visited the Wayampí Indigenous Land. We also received, in our Indigenous Land, our neighbours Katxúyana, Tunayana, Waiwai and Hixkaryana' (Gallois 2019: 45; 102) [our translation from Portuguese].[2] Generally, however, the Zo'é only leave their land on rare occasions for health treatment at the Regional Hospital, in Santarém, Pará, or when they are taken by the incumbent FPEC Coordinator and the non-governmental organization that works there for events of interest to the FPEC. Despite of that, contact of the Zo'é people with the outside world has been more frequent than might have been expected. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, visitations to the Zo'é

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[1] The National Indian Foundation (FUNAI) is the Brazilian government agency in charge of developing and implementing policies for Indigenous Peoples throughout the country.

[2] 'Eles [Os Tiriyó] falam sempre no rádio, por isso não nos preocupamos mesmo' (Gallois 2019: 45). 'Recentemente realizamos intercâmbio para a Terra Indígena Wajãpi. Também recebemos, em nossa Terra Indígena, nossos vizinhos Katxuyana, Tunayana, Waiwai e Hexkaryana' (Gallois 2019: 102).

Indigenous Land by filmmakers, magazine editors, reporters, and television teams from Brazil and other countries were recurrent (Oltramari 2000; Nóbrega 2014; Costa 2015).

But even after more than thirty-seven years of recurrent contact with non-indigenous people, the Zo'é people have displayed a strong sense of identity. One piece of evidence of this is the fact that they still wear the *pŏtuʾɾu*, an adornment made of a wood that bears the same name (Carvalho et al. 1993) which is pierced though the space between the chin and the lower lip of every member of the community from childhood: girls at seven, and boys at nine years of age (Williams 2016). The Zo'é say that the culture of wearing *pŏtuʾɾu* was imparted to them by *sihɛt*, the ancestor who was their teacher (Carvalho et al. 1993). This adornment is arguably one of the most conspicuous expressions of Zo'é identity (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. A member of the Zo'é wearing their distinctive adornment (Guiraud, 2014)[3]

Zo'é is part of the Northern Tupí-Guaranían branch of the Tupí-Guaraní language family (Campbell 2012); it shares some similarities with two other languages in the same branch, namely Emérillon – also known as Teko (Rose 2009) – and Wayampí (Rodrigues & Cabral 2002; Rose 2000; Sousa 2013). The results of a meta-analysis conducted by Sousa (2013) appear to support the hypotheses that Zo'é is phonologically, lexically, and grammatically closer to Emérillon than to Wayampí, and that these three languages constitute a sub-branch of Northern Tupí-Guaranían. The meta-analysis capitalizes mostly on Jansen (1979), Cabral (1996b, 1998), and Rose (2000), which Sousa (2013: 8) regards as the 'latest works on lexical correspondence, and grammatical differences between Zo'é, Emérillon and Wayampí' [our translation from Portuguese].[4]

In terms of vitality, Zo'é has been classified as 'seriously endangered' (Crevels 2012: 188),[5] however, according to the Expanded Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (EGIDS, see Lewis et al. 2010), Zo'é is a *vigorous* language. Nevertheless, considering the small number of speakers and the rate at which indigenous languages have become dormant or moribund in Brazil, this latter assessment may not be correct.

2. Previous publications on Zo'é

We have conducted a literature review of 20 publications on the Zo'é language (14 articles, 3 master's theses, 2 books and 1 dictionary), many of which conflict in terms of basic description, such as its phonetics and phonology. We have four different descriptions of the vowel system, ranging from six phonemes (Cabral 2000, 2009, 2013; Cabral et al. 2010), to eight (Cabral 1998), to twelve (Cabral 1996a, 1996b; Souza 2003) to fourteen (Castro & Carvalho 1998; Castro 2003, 2017, 2018a) as shown in Table 1, over page.

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[4] 'Trabalhos mais recentes sobre correspondências lexicais, fonológicas e gramaticais entre o Zo'é, o Emérillon e o Wayampí' (Sousa 2013: 8).

[5] See also Endangered Languages Project, http://www.endangeredlanguages.com/lang/1632 (accessed 2020-05-27).

Table 1. Four Zo'é vowel inventories

Reference	Vowel inventory	No.
Cabral (2000: 573)	/i/, /ɛ/, /ɨ/, /a/, /u/, /ɔ/	6
Cabral (2009: 3145)	/i/, /e/, /ɨ/(y), /a/, /u/, /ɔ/(o)	6
Cabral et al. (2010: 52)	/i/, /e/, /ɨ/, /a/, /u/, /o/	6
Cabral (2013: 15)	/i/, /ɛ/, /y/, /a/, /u/, /ɔ/	6
Cabral (1998: 65-66)	/i/, /y/, /u/, /ɛ/, /ɔ/, /a/, /˜/, /´/	8
Cabral (1996a: 23-24)	/i/, /ɛ/, /y/, /a/, /u/, /ɔ/, /ĩ/, /ɛ̃/, /ỹ/, /ã/, /ũ/, /ɔ̃/	12
Cabral (1996b: 48)	/i/, /e/, /y/, /a/, /u/, /o/, /ĩ/, /ẽ/, /ỹ/, /ã/, /ũ/, /õ/	12
Souza (2003: 34-42)	/i/, /ɛ/, /ɨ/, /a/, /u/, /ɔ/, /ĩ/, /ɛ̃/, /ɨ̃/, /ã/, /ũ/, /ɔ̃/	12
Castro & Carvalho (1998: 1)	/i/, /ɛ/, /e/, /ɨ/, /a/, /u/, /o/, /ɔ/, /ĩ/, /ɛ̃/, /ɨ̃/, /ã/, /ũ/, /ɔ̃/	14
Castro (2003: 19; 2017: 2)	/i/, /ê/, /e/, /y/, /a/, /u/, /ô/, /o/, /ĩ/, /ỹ/, /ẽ/, /ã/, /ũ/, /õ/	14
Castro (2018a: 3)	/i/, /e/, /ɨ/, /a/, /u/, /o/, /ĩ/, /ẽ/, /ỹ/, /ã/, /ũ/, /õ/, (/ɛ/, /ɔ/)	14

Regarding consonants, five different inventories occur in previous publications, ranging in size from twelve phonemic segments (Souza 2003), to thirteen (Cabral 1996a, b, 2000, 2013), to fourteen (Cabral 2009; Cabral et al. 2010), sixteen (Cabral 1998; Castro 2018a), and nineteen phonemes (Castro & Carvalho 1998, Castro 2003, 2017), as set out in Table 2, over page.

Table 2. Five Zo'é consonant inventories

Reference	Consonant inventory	No.
Souza (2003: 34-42)	/p/, /t/, /c/, /kʷ/, /s/, /h/, /w/, /ɾ/, /ɟ /, /m/, /n/, /ŋ /	12
Cabral (1996a: 23-24; 1996b: 48)	/p/, /t/, /s/, /k/, /kʷ/, /ʔ /, /h/, /m/, /n/, /ŋ/, /r/, /w/, /j/	13
Cabral (2000: 573; 2013: 15)	/p/, /t/, /k/, /kʷ/, /ʔ/, /b/, /d/, /g/, /s/, /h/, /r/, /w/, /j/	
Cabral (2009: 3145); Cabral, Rodrigues & Carvalho (2010: 52)	/p/, /t/, /k/, /kʷ/, /ʔ/, /s/, /ʧ/, /h/, /b/, /d/, /g/, /r/, /w/, /j/	14
Cabral (1998: 65-66)	/p/, /t/, /k/, /kʷ/, /'/, /b/, /d/, /g/, /ʧ/, /s/, /h/, /r/, /w/, /j/, /˜/, /´/	16
Castro (2018a: 3)	/p/, /t/, /k/, /m/, /n/, /ŋ/, /β/, /r/, /h/, /ʔ/, /w/, /j/, (/s/, /ʃ/, /b/, /d/)	
Castro & Carvalho (1998: 1)	/p/, /b/, /b/, /t/, /d/, /k/, /kᵘ/, /g/, /ʔ/, /s/, /š/, /h/, /č/, /ǰ/, /m/, /n/, /r/, /w/, /y/	19
Castro (2003: 19; 2017: 2)	/p/, /t/, /k/, /kw/, /m/, /b/, /n/, /d/, /g/, /β/, /r/, /s/, /x/, /tx/, /dj/, /h/, /'/, /w/, /j/	

In addition to variations in the number of phonemes shown in Tables 1 and 2, the descriptions are also conflicting in the choice of symbols used to represent the phonemes, even by the same author. Compare, for instance, the set of vowel phonemes and symbols used by Cabral (2000) with those in Cabral (2013).

3. Current research

We have received funding for a research project on Zo'é to produce a phonetic-phonological description based on newly collected field data. We plan to obtain agreement from FUNAI and the Zo'é community for the project

and then collect a corpus of audio-recorded data for transcription and analysis. The corpus will consist of narrative texts (mythological and historical), dialogues, and lexical elicitation. We will apply prevailing models of descriptive linguistics research to identify and establish the distribution of the distinct sounds in the language. In addition, software tools such as *SayMore* (SIL International 2020), *Praat* (Boersma & Weenink 2019), *ELAN* (2019) and *Fieldworks Language Explorer* (FLEx 2019) will be used to analyse the field data. On completion of the research, arrangements will be made for the material to be stored in the digital archive of indigenous languages at the *Museu do Índio* run by FUNAI, if the indigenous community allows it. Currently, we are awaiting permission from FUNAI[6] for us to enter the Zo'é Indigenous Land[7] while creating metadata and transcribing field data that were collected by three researchers who had the opportunity to be in direct contact with the Zo'é people as part of a team of linguists and anthropologists working for MNTB during the period from 1987 to 1991 (Castro et al. 2020). The researchers learned to communicate with them in their own language, and when MNTB was denied access to the Zo'é Indigenous Land by FUNAI in 1991 (Castro 2011), the team had recorded more than 200 hours of speech in Zo'é, including conversations, and mythological and historical narratives. Unfortunately, many of the recordings were made on cassette tapes with low-quality recording equipment, and thus are not adequate as a basis for computer-assisted speech sound analyses. Nevertheless, before leaving the Zo'é Indigenous Land, the researchers were able to make field notes, translations into Portuguese, and phonetic transcriptions, and to have them validated by Zo'é speakers (Castro et al. 2020). At the moment, we are working on the least compromised recordings, and trying to make a phonetic-phonological reanalysis of the language.

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[6] FUNAI has been controlling access to this Indigenous Land since 1991 (Peixoto 2011).

[7] According to the Brazilian Electronic Citizen Information Service System, there are only two independent research proposals on the Zo'é language awaiting permission from FUNAI to visit the Zo'é Indigenous Land: (i) Processo SEI nº 08620-014624/2018-56 – Ana Suelly Arruda Cabral: Pesquisa linguística da língua Zo'é com vistas à finalização de uma gramática e de um dicionário; and (ii) Processo SEI nº 08620-001850/2020-91- Onésimo Martins de Castro: Documentação, conservação e educação indígena: revisitando o sistema fonológico da língua Zo'é visando à produção de um sistema ortográfico unificado.

See: https://bit.ly/2WsMzN7 (accessed 2020-05-27).

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