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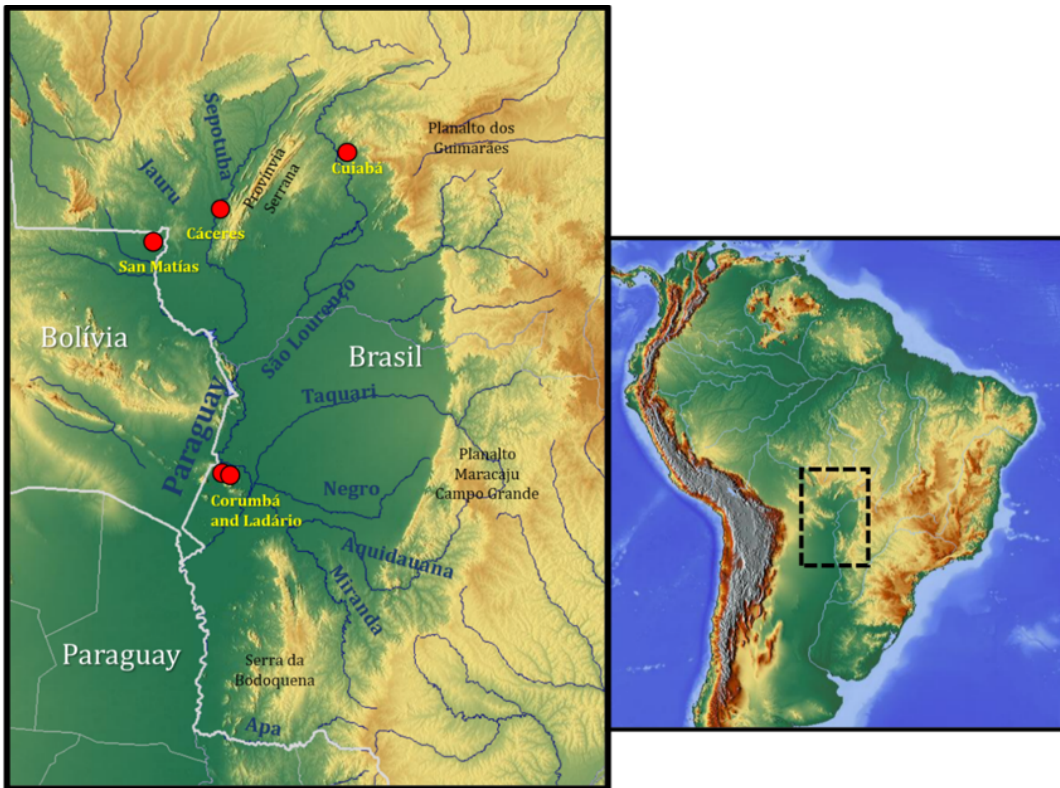
# Multilingual Pantanal and its decay

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## Introduction

The Pantanal is the world's largest tropical wetland, situated within the Upper Paraguay River basin in the heart of South America (see Map 1). This region is primarily located in the central-western part of Brazil, encompassing portions of Mato Grosso do Sul and Mato Grosso states, while also extending into Bolivia and Paraguay.



map 1. Pantanal (made by Gustavo Godoy). Based on a free map from <https://maps-for-free.com/>.

Various Indigenous groups coexisted and interacted in the Pantanal region for centuries. Although its ethnolinguistic diversity drastically decreased during the colonization period, current language preservation and revitalization efforts by extant groups like the Guató offer some hope for the future. In contrast to other South American biomes (such as the Amazon forest or the Gran Chaco), the Pantanal is not usually characterized as a distinct cultural and/or linguistic area.

Murdock (1951: 422-23) describes the Paraguayan cultural area, which in great part corresponds geographically to the Pantanal, and what it looked like in the past. The area was inhabited by different ethnic groups: Guachí, Guató, Guaná, Mbayá, and Payaguá. The Guaná (Arawakan) cultivated cassava, corn, and cotton and lived in villages. These aspects reflect their connection with the Bolivian area. Other groups were less sedentary and agricultural, subsisting primarily from fishing and gathering. Their lifestyle was closely associated with the periodic changes in water levels. Instead of villages, temporary camps or shelters for individual families were preferred. The Guató people in particular are known for having constructed mounds (Portuguese: *aterros*) for spending the flood periods at.

Fishing was more important than hunting. The acuri palm was an important subsistence resource, and wild rice was collected. All ethnic groups of Paraguayan area produced ceramics. Some groups exhibited class stratification and practiced enslavement or other types of domination. Probably the most prominent example of the latter is that of the Mbayá (Guaicuruan), ancestors of the modern Kadiwéu.

Galvão (1960: 19, 34-35) calls the region south of the Brazilian Pantanal the “Paraguay area.” It includes the Kadiwéu and Terena groups. The author comments that the Kadiwéu are in “permanent contact” with neo-Brazilian society, whereas the Terena are already “integrated” into the regional society. Like Murdock, he emphasizes the nomadic Mbayá/Kadiwéu horsemen’s domination over the Guaná/Terena agriculturalists.

According to Melatti (2020), the Pantanal is a part of the Chaco cultural area. He mentions the Kadiwéu and Payaguá peoples, who once dominated the Pantanal, and points out some cultural aspects of the Guató. Melatti doesn’t provide a classification of which cultural area the northern edge of the Pantanal belongs to.

In this article, we will explore the Pantanal as an area characterized by multilingual interactions, a phenomenon evident since the sixteenth century. Historical evidence indicates that the Pantanal served as a meeting point for different Indigenous groups. The Guarani traveled through the region from east to west on their way to the Andes, while various groups used the Paraguay River basin as a trade and communication route from north to south. These crossroads persisted over time, even after the arrival of European colonizers. Today, despite the significant reduction in linguistic diversity, some remnants of the Pantanal multilingual history can still be observed. For example, the Pantanal remains the place where the Terena, the southernmost Arawakan group, and the Kadiwéu, the northernmost Guaicuruan group, have been closely interacting for a few centuries.

We begin our discussion with a characterization of the Indigenous people of the Brazilian Pantanal and their languages in the present day, along with an overview of linguistic studies of the Pantanal area focusing on extinct languages, genetic relations, and linguistic contact. The section following is devoted to the available archaeological data on the Pantanal. We then seek to describe the ethnic and linguistic landscape of the Pantanal at the time the conquistadors first came to the region in the sixteenth century, followed by a discussion of how Jesuits and slave raiders changed the configuration of Indigenous peoples in the Pantanal between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. From there, we move into addressing the appropriation of territories because of the gold rush of the eighteenth century and the expansion of cattle farms in the nineteenth century. Finally, we provide a recapitulation of the multilingual configurations that historically existed in the Pantanal region.

## **Current situation and studies of the Indigenous languages of the Pantanal**

Seven officially recognized Terras Indígenas (Indigenous Lands, abbreviated as TI) exist in the Brazilian Pantanal. The sum of the area of the listed Indigenous Lands is 6,835 km<sup>2</sup>. They occupy only around 4.5% of the Brazilian Pantanal’s total territory, which amounts to

approximately 140,000 km<sup>2</sup> (Souza et al., 2006) (see Map 2). The respective areas in square kilometers of the Indigenous Lands are as follows:

1. Kadiwéu (5,390 km<sup>2</sup>);
2. Cachoerinha (360 km<sup>2</sup>);
3. Tereza Cristina (342 km<sup>2</sup>);
4. Taunay/Ipegue (340 km<sup>2</sup>);
5. Baía dos Guató (193 km<sup>2</sup>);
6. Perigara (107 km<sup>2</sup>);
7. Guató (103 km<sup>2</sup>).



**map 2.** Indigenous Lands (TIs) of the Brazilian Pantanal. This map was created by Kristina Balykova based on the Land Use database and the open mapping visualization tool available at <https://mapbiomas.org/>.

The largest of the TIs, the Kadiwéu Indigenous Land, was established in 1899. It is also the only one officially inhabited by Kadiwéu people. To its east, the Taunay/Ipegue and Cachoerinha Indigenous Lands are mainly inhabited by Terena people. Outside the Pantanal, but still in the Mato Grosso do Sul state, nine other Indigenous Lands are home to Terena people.

Four Indigenous Lands are in the northern part of the Brazilian Pantanal. The Guató people inhabit two territories: the Guató and Baía dos Guató Indigenous Lands. The other two territories, the Perigara and Tereza Cristina Indigenous Lands, belong to the westernmost

groups of the contemporary Bororo people. Further to the northeast, beyond the Pantanal area, the Bororo people inhabit four other Indigenous Lands.

According to official data,<sup>1</sup> the Kadiwéu Indigenous Land is the only multiethnic Land in the Brazilian Pantanal. Its population includes Kadiwéu, Chamacoco, Terena, and Kinikinau people. However, the official data do not fully reflect the real ethnic composition of those territories. For example, some Guató people are of Bororo origin, and some inhabitants of Guató Indigenous Lands are ethnic Chiquitano. We note that the data in this section only concern the Brazilian part of the Pantanal.<sup>2</sup>

LANGUAGE	FAMILY	INDIGENOUS LAND	SPEAKERS
Bororo	Bororoan	TI Tereza Cristina, TI Perigara	~700
Guató	isolate	TI Baía dos Guató, TI Guató	2 (outside the Indigenous Lands)
Kadiwéu	Guaicuruan	TI Kadiwéu	~1,000
Terena Kinikinau	Arawakan	TI Cachoeirinha, TI Taunay/Ipegue, TI Kadiwéu	>8,000 (Terena) <7 (Kininiau)
Terena Sign Language	isolate	TI Cachoeirinha	>13

table 1. Indigenous languages in the Brazilian Pantanal.

Regarding the linguistic situation among the Indigenous groups in the Brazilian Pantanal, it is evident that all the languages spoken in the region are endangered to varying degrees. Terena (Arawakan) is recognized as one of the most widely spoken Indigenous languages in Brazil. According to the last demographic census (IBGE, 2010: Table 15), it was used by over 8,000 people. Nevertheless, it is crucial to acknowledge that these census findings tend to be overly optimistic and do not necessarily reflect the real situation of Indigenous languages.

In several Terena communities, a shift to Portuguese has been taking place and posing a risk to the survival of the Terena language. A sociolinguistic study carried out between 1995 and 1996 concluded that “half of the Terena population in the Miranda municipality lacks the minimal command of the Terena language necessary for its preservation” (Netto and Ladeira, 2002: 111). Kinikinau, a sibling dialect (or language), is critically endangered, as “fewer than seven elderly speakers” are reported to be fluent in it (Oliveira, 2017: 30). While some scholars claim that Kinikinau could be considered a distinct language due to its political status or certain grammatical features (Souza, 2007), Carvalho (2016) argues that no linguistic evidence supports classifying Kinikinau and Terena as two separate languages. Given that there are no clear parameters to define language boundaries, and since we do not intend to engage in this debate, we will refrain from further exploring this matter.

Additionally, the Terena deaf community has its own sign language. Although there are no precise estimates for the number of Terena signers, Sumaio (2014: 65) reported documenting the sign language with thirteen signers who served as consultants for her research. The existence of a Terena signing community adds to the region’s multilingualism, given that Brazilian Sign Language (Libras) is also used in neighboring cities and schools within the Terena territory (Sumaio, 2018). As a result, the Terena people of the Cachoeirinha Indigenous Land live in a multilingual environment, as there is daily interaction between Portuguese, spoken Terena, Brazilian Sign Language, and Terena Sign Language.

The Kadiwéu language (Guaicuruan) still maintains approximately 1,000 native speakers (Sandaló, 2017: 111). However, as is the case with Terena, the increasing spread of Portuguese

1. IBGE (2010) and <https://terrasindigenas.org.br/>.

2. To fully grasp the linguistic situation of the Pantanal’s Indigenous peoples, it would be important to also examine data from the Paraguayan portion, home to such Zamucoan groups as Ybytoso, Tomaráho, and Ayoreo (DGEEC, 2004, and <https://www.ine.gov.py/>).

among the younger generations poses a threat to the future of the Kadiwéu language. As for the Bororo language (Bororoan), according to Nonato (2008: 13), it is spoken by around 700 people.

Finally, Guató (isolate) is the most critically endangered among the Pantanal Indigenous languages. Kristina Balykova and Gustavo Godoy have been documenting the language, collaborating with the last three proficient speakers, Vicente da Silva, André de Oliveira, and the late Eufrásia Ferreira. Since 2016, we have been regularly conducting fieldwork with them, always working to build a collection based on documentary linguistics. A portion of the audiovisual collection produced since then is available in The Archive of the Indigenous Languages of Latin America.<sup>3</sup> A summary of the initial written language analyses is found in Balykova et al. (2023). Kristina Balykova's thesis will be a descriptive grammar of the Guató language. In addition to the three most competent speakers mentioned, there are also about half a dozen other elderly individuals who can recall words and sentences in Guató, but most of them either stopped using the language during childhood or never achieved fluency in it.

Despite the significant damage caused to the Pantanal's linguistic diversity over the centuries of colonization, it is noteworthy that the region still harbors five or six Indigenous languages that belong to different linguistic groupings (Arawakan, Bororoan, Guaikuruan, a spoken isolate, and a signed isolate), as indicated in Table 1 above. This means that the number of linguistic groupings in the Pantanal remains comparable to other widely recognized multilingual regions in Brazil. For instance, the Upper Xingu region is home to languages from four linguistic groupings (Arawakan, Cariban, Tupian, and Trumai as an isolate), or five, if we consider Khîsetje, a Macro-Jêan language, while the Upper Rio Negro boasts five groupings (Arawakan, East Tukanoan, Kakua-Nikak, Nadahupan, and Tupian represented by Nheengatu) (Lüpke et al., 2020: 16-17). Additionally, we should include the two widely spoken Romance languages in these regions, Portuguese and Spanish, and other languages that circulate in these areas. Considering that mainly the Upper Xingu, but also the Upper Rio Negro, are refuge areas where it was possible to maintain high levels of linguistic diversity patterns alongside regional integration, this figure indicates that an even higher level of linguistic and ethnic diversity would have characterized the Pantanal in the past.

To date, not much is known about the exact patterns and outcomes of interaction between different languages in the Pantanal. As stated by Carvalho (2016: 41-42), "our knowledge of the historically attested ethnic and cultural variation in the Pantanal-Chaco-Paraguay region is much more complete than our current understanding of the properly linguistic diversity." Most of the Pantanal's languages (and especially the extinct ones) have only been poorly documented and described.

The Guachi and Payaguá languages were once widely spoken along the Paraguay River but are now extinct. The known records of Guachi are limited to two wordlists, one by Natterer (1826) and the other by Castelnau (1851: 278-80). The documented material on Payaguá is somewhat more robust, consisting of half a dozen wordlists as described by Schmidt (1949: 250-53). Moreover, the author himself published a compilation of words and sentences dictated by the last reported Payaguá speaker, María Dominga Miranda, in 1940 (Schmidt, 1949: 254-64).

Viegas Barros (2004: 26) argues that both Guachi and Payaguá should be included in the Macro-Guaicuruan stock along with the Guaicuruan and Mataguayan families. Furthermore, the author suggests that the entire stock originates from the Upper Paraguay region in the Pantanal. Referring to Guachi, Seifart and Hammarström (2017: 275) assert that there is still insufficient evidence to strongly support the relationship between Guachi and Payaguá languages or their connection to the Guaicuruan linguistic family.

Bororo is the only vital extant member of the Bororoan family. Two more languages are included in this grouping: Otuke and Umutina. According to Cruz (2012: 1-2), the last active

native Umutina speaker, Julá Paré, passed away in 2004. The author worked with two elderly people who remembered words and short sentences in the language. While there is a description of some grammatical features of the Umutina language (Lima, 1995), it is regrettable that a comprehensive grammar of Umutina was not created while proficient speakers were still available. Otuke is an extinct language with very scarce documentation. Créqui-Montfort and Rivet (1912) analyzed the available materials on the language, in particular underscoring the numerous lexical similarities between Otuke and its historical neighbor Saraveka (Arawakan).

The Saraveka or Sarave people, previously called Xaray, and their language are also extinct. The documented material about Saraveka is scarce: a wordlist by d'Orbigny and a small text by Castelnau (1851). These materials were analyzed by Brinton (1891) and by Créqui-Monford and Rivet (1913). There is also an unpublished list of words and sentences recorded by Johann Natterer in the 1820s, which is being analyzed by the linguists Fernando O. Carvalho and Ana Paula Brandão.

Studies on linguistic contact in the Pantanal are equally scarce. Rodrigues (1983) argues that the lack of a specific second person plural marker in Guató is due to Guató speakers' contact with Kadiwéu people, "as a result of the strong social interaction and partial integration of the Guató people as slaves in the network of Guaicuru intertribal dominion." It is questionable, however, whether Guató slavery was so widespread among the Kadiwéu that it could affect the language, and unclear why the only apparent consequence of that influence would have been the loss of grammatical distinction between second person plural and second person singular.

The most comprehensive study of language contact was conducted by Carvalho (2018), who analyzed a collection of Terena nouns that were borrowed from the northern branch of the Guaicuruan language family (now represented by the Kadiwéu) because of close contact between these groups.

Nonato and Sandalo (2007) concentrate on pinpointing a grammatical and phonological similarity among languages belonging to the Bororoan, Guaicuruan, and Matacoan language families, alongside conducting a comparative analysis of lexical items in these languages. The authors conclude that a spread of loanwords must have taken place.

Finally, only two extant languages of the Pantanal are represented in digital archives: Kadiwéu and Guató. A small, annotated corpus of Kadiwéu texts is available on the Tycho Brahe Platform of the State University of Campinas (Unicamp).<sup>4</sup> The authors of this paper have been compiling a collection of Guató data at the Archive of the Indigenous Languages of Latin America since 2020.<sup>5</sup>

This brief overview shows that there is still much diachronic and comparative work to be done, and there is an urgent need for the documentation and description of the Pantanal's existing languages. In the next section, we take a closer look at the Pantanal's pre-colonial history.

## Ancient Pantanal

The ancient history of the Pantanal dates back many millennia, to a time before the agricultural revolutions led to the dispersion of large language families across South America and, more specifically, in the Pantanal around the time span between 10,000 and 5,000 years ago (Bespalez, 2015; Doughty, 2010). The oldest archaeological site studied in the Pantanal is Santa Elina, a rocky shelter in the municipality of Jangada (MT), near the Cuiabá River. It may date back to up to 27,000 years ago, making it one of the oldest sites in the Americas. Santa Elina's location falls within a transition zone between the Pantanal and the Amazon. The high diversity of the site, which yielded thousands of recovered artifacts and rock paintings, indicates that different groups inhabited the place at different periods in time (Vialou and Vialou, 2019; Vialou et al., 2017; Pansani et al., 2023).

4. <https://www.tycho.iel.unicamp.br/browser/catalog/C12>

5. <https://islandora-ailla.lib.utexas.edu/islandora/object/ailla%3A275792>

Around 10,200 years ago, the Pantanal went from being an arid or semi-arid plain to a floodplain. Between 8,700 and 5,200 years ago, a spread of plants occurred at the same time as Indigenous peoples began to occupy the floodplain. Several plant species were brought by Indigenous peoples from other South American areas, such as the pacara earpod tree (Portuguese: *ximbuva*; *Enterolobium contortisiliquum*), genip tree (*Genipa americana*), macaúba palm (*Acromia aculeata*), and mangaba rubber tree (*Hancornia speciosa*). These trees were concentrated at the feet of hills, where the Indigenous people often settled (Pott, 2013).

In addition to the introduction of new plant species, Indigenous soil management included the construction of mounds. Known as “aterros” or “aterrados,” these mounds are platforms constructed by Pantanal people to provide an elevated surface above the flood limit. They are constructed as raised earthen structures and often incorporate components made of shells of freshwater snails, ceramics, and sometimes cemeteries. The oldest dated artificial mound dates back to 8,000 years before the present, and the most recent *aterro* constructed manually was completed in the early 1990s. It is important to note that there is another type of mounds, referred to as “capões,” which are formed by such phenomena as alterations in the river course and soil management by termites.

The oldest Pantanal (8,000 years before the present) is situated on the right bank of the Paraguay River, in the modern town of Ladário, Mato Grosso do Sul state, Brazil. However, it was only around 3,000 years ago that the occupation of the region became more consolidated, as evidenced by the increasing number of archaeological sites.

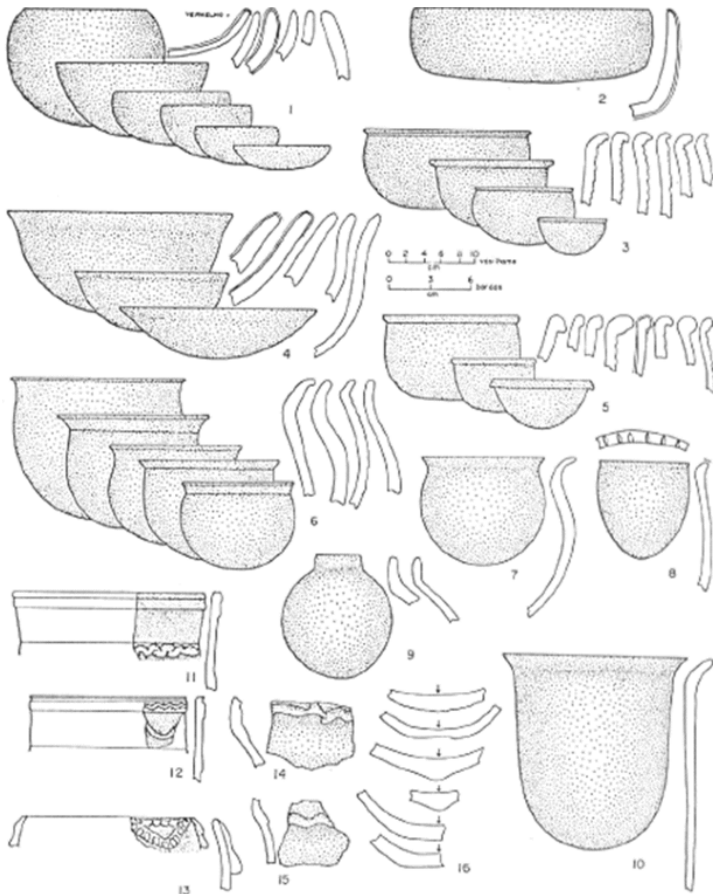
The oldest Pantanal ceramic remains date to around 2,200 years ago. Around the tenth and eleventh centuries A.D., diverse settlement patterns and different technological styles emerged in the region, indicating intensified contacts between groups. On the one hand, the groups that inhabited flood-prone areas regularly moved in search of dry land. On the other hand, in the areas with higher elevation and protection from floods land was cultivated, and settlements were of longer duration.

The former, more mobile groups are associated with the Pantanal ceramic tradition, one of the oldest and most continuous ones found outside the Amazon. These ceramics were primarily used for domestic purposes, such as cooking. They were commonly used by fishers and gatherers, including the Guató people, who until recently produced a subtype of the Pantanal ceramics (Bespalez, 2015; Oliveira, 2002; Oliveira, 2004; Migliacio, 2006; Schmitz and Rogge, 2015).

The latter, agricultural, groups (in particular, the now extinct Xaray people) are associated with the Descalvados ceramic tradition. It is named after a settlement situated on the right bank of the Upper Paraguay River within the municipality of Cáceres. The Descalvados ceramics had larger and more spacious shapes, suggesting their use by larger communities and for more distinct ceremonial purposes. They include open bowls for sharing food, shallow bowls, and roasters for preparing flour (Migliacio, 2006).

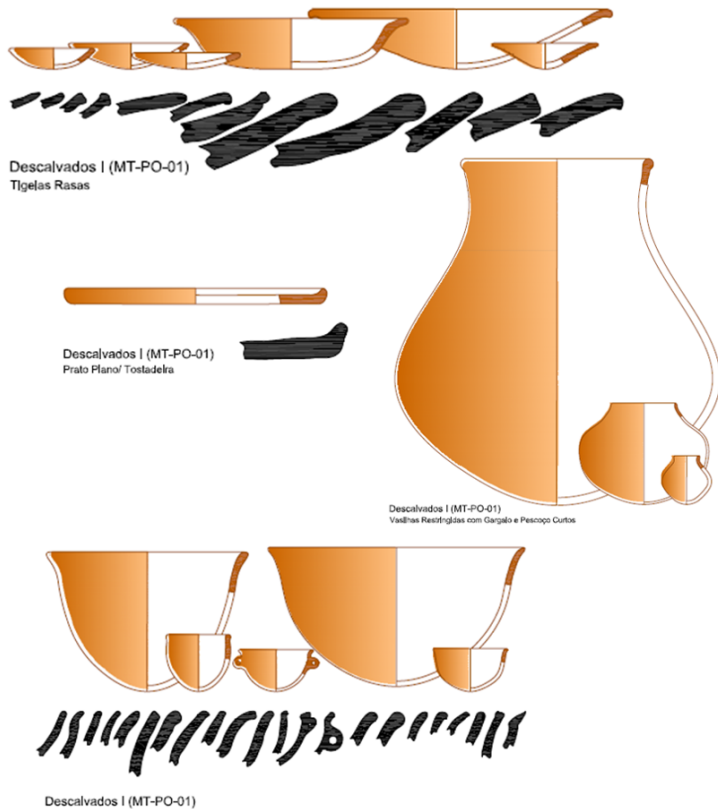
While the Pantanal ceramic tradition does not seem to have connections with other traditions, the Descalvados ceramics can be viewed as a subtype of the Arawakan tradition. Originating from regions to the north, the Arawakan people traversed the Amazon River and the plains within its basin. This expansion extended westward, encompassing Peru and the present-day Acre state in Brazil. Moving southward, Arawakan-speaking groups settled in the lowlands of Bolivia. In addition, they ventured eastward into the southern periphery of the Amazon, where the Upper Xinguan peoples reside. The Pantanal also became a destination for this expansion, housing the southernmost Arawakan groups. This process resulted in the Xaray people occupying the central Pantanal between two other Arawakan groups: the Chané to the south and the Pareci to the north (Heckenberger, 2005: 59).





**figure 1.** Morphology of Pantanal pottery, according to Schmitz (2002: 204, Fig. 4).

1. Simple outline, convex base;
2. simple outline, flat base;
3. inflexed outline, angle equal to or greater than ninety degrees;
4. inflexed outline, angle less than ninety degrees;
5. inflexed outline, reinforced rim;
6. compound outline;
- 7, 8, 10. tall vessels, inflexed outline;
9. jug;
- 11, 12, 14, 15. fragments with appliqués;
13. fragment with appliqué and appendix;
16. bases.



**figure 2.** Morphology of Descalvados pottery (Migliaccio, 2006), including shallow bowls, a toaster, large vessels with necks, and deep bowls.

The Tupian dispersion originated from the opposite direction. The Guarani (Tupian) were initially concentrated along the Paraná River and started to extend northwestward around 1,000 years ago, eventually reaching the Miranda River in the southern part of the Pantanal, later referred to as Itatín. Subsequently, the dispersion route of the Guarani extended to the Paraguay River (Bonomo et al., 2015: 59, 68).

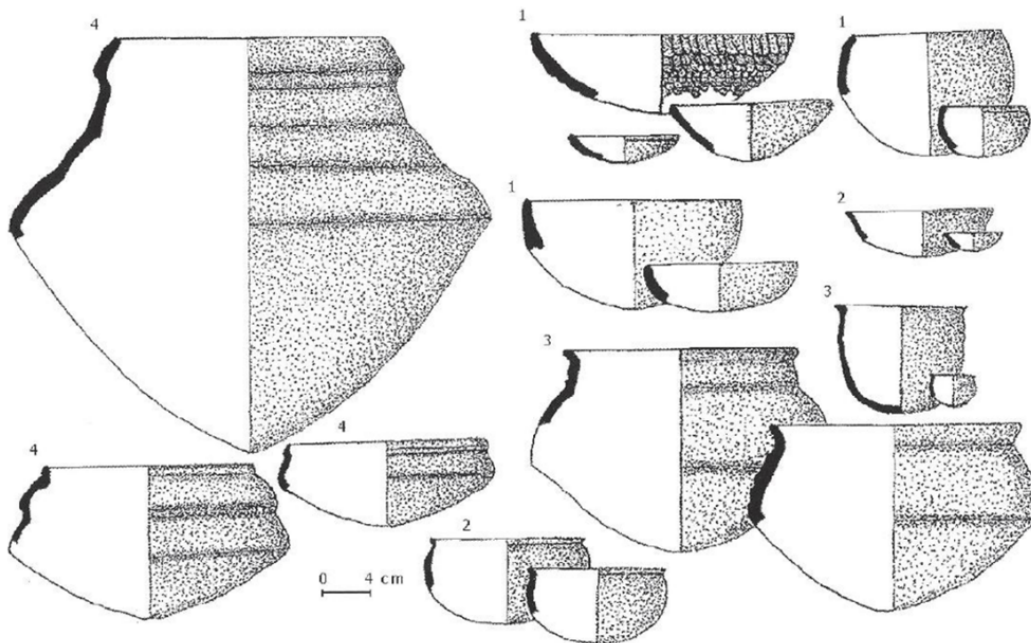


figure 3. Morphology of Guarani subtradition pottery in the Pantanal (Peixoto, 1998).

Groups from these two major families, Arawakan and Tupian, played an important role in the early colonial history of the Pantanal. The conquistadors entered the Pantanal from the south, guided and supported by Guarani groups. As they moved northward, they encountered the Xaray, whose ethnonym they used to name the region. Another Arawakan group, the Chané, is now identified as the ancestors of the Terena (or a sister group of the Terena ancestors), and of groups that eventually adopted Eastern Bolivian Guarani. The chronicles of these first European expeditions serve as the primary source of information shedding light on the complex interconnections between Indigenous societies in the Pantanal at that time.

In the following sections, our focus will be on describing the peoples and languages that dominated the Pantanal in the second half of the sixteenth century, when the Europeans first arrived in the region. Specifically, we will delve into the ethnolinguistic situation along the Upper Paraguay River and explore the colonization processes that occurred in the region at various periods after the first invasion to discuss their impact on the linguistic landscape of the Pantanal.

### First colonial incursions

The colonial history of the Pantanal began with initial incursions originating from the River Plate that were made possible by the alliances formed between Spanish conquistadors and Indigenous Guarani groups. A pivotal role in this historical narrative is performed by the Paraguay River, the second-largest river within the River Plate basin. Its upper course shapes the landscape of the Pantanal and occupies a strategic position on the route leading towards the Chaco region and subsequently the highlands, where skilled metallurgists were situated.

Historical accounts from the sixteenth century not only illuminate the European aspirations of finding valuable metals, but also recognize the Indigenous inhabitants' deep

understanding of the trade routes spanning the continent from the western to the eastern parts of South America. Almost all groups residing along the Paraguay River were engaged in metal trade along these routes. The communities residing along the riverbanks reported that valuable metals were dispatched from the western territories and journeyed along the trails that crossed the Pantanal wetlands and led to the Atlantic coast. As a result, the routes taken by the European explorers were essentially the Indigenous paths that united the diverse regions of the River Plate basin (Combès, 2008: 54; Holanda, 2017: 30-31).

In 1537, a Spanish settlement was established in a village inhabited by the Cario subgroup of the Guaraní people situated on one of the trade routes. This settlement was named Asunción and later evolved into the capital of modern-day Paraguay. Forming an alliance with the Guaraní Cario villagers and leveraging their profound knowledge of the routes and their extensive experience as travelers, the Spanish explorers embarked on numerous expeditions along the Paraguay River, venturing northward and subsequently westward from Asunción (Julien, 2007: 251).

Varieties of Guaraní were prevalent over a substantial expanse of the River Plate basin. In 1591, Father Alonso Barzana, a European missionary, observed the widespread use of the Guaraní language, which extended from Brazil to Santa Cruz in what is now Bolivia and served as a widely used lingua franca, like Quechua (Candela and Mélia 2015). However, it is difficult to ascertain exactly what linguistic variety or combination of varieties was referred to as Guaraní at that time, since the Guaraní language was not well-documented until the seventeenth century, a time by which the linguistic situation in the region could already have suffered intense changes.

The role of Guaraní groups as guides for the conquerors within the colonial narrative of the Pantanal introduces instances of linguistic interaction and multilingualism. The Guaraní language was widespread and widely known by other peoples. A piece of evidence for this fact is a letter from Domingo Martínez de Irala, one of the main conquerors of the La Plata province (Candela and Mélia, 2015), which describes an encounter in a location near what is now the Brazilian city of Corumbá.<sup>6</sup> There, the expedition members talked to a chief of the Chané people, who had two names: *Maraoma* in Chané and *Xagoany* in Guaraní. The letter reports that his group had been kidnapped by Guaraní speakers. The Chané population is described as under the domination of the Guaraní, and, consequently, as speakers of their language.

According to the historical sources, it was a common practice among Indigenous people in the Pantanal to capture individuals from other groups and use them as interpreters. For instance, the Guaxarapó captured members of the Guaraní Cario group in the southern area of the Pantanal, while the Guaraní Itatín captured members of the Chané group (Julien, 2007: 252-53). European colonizers also employed this strategy during their expansion in the region in the sixteenth century.

The Xarayé people, who occupied the northern area of the Pantanal, were another regional power. They spoke an Arawakan language later known as Saraveka. After the first European invasions, the area we now call (northern) Pantanal was first named after this people, *Lagunas de Los Xarayes*.<sup>7</sup> Certain groups of the Xarayé people engaged in marital exchanges with the Guaraní (Combès, 2010: 71, 244-45). As a result, Guaraní was also used in the Xarayé region.

However, Guaraní does not seem to have been the only lingua franca in the region. In the late sixteenth century, a Jesuit missionary reported that Gorgotoqui, Guarayú, and the language of the Chané were prevalent in Santa Cruz la Vieja, a settlement located 300 km west of the Paraguay River and near the western border of the Pantanal. These languages also served as linguas francas (Métraux, 1929: 929-30).

Combès (2012) argues that the Gorgotoqui language belonged to a western branch of the Bororoan family, whose speakers ultimately mixed with Chiquitano-speaking groups.

6. Located on the Paraguay River, Corumbá nowadays is one of the main gateways to the Pantanal.

7. The expression also refers to the large lagoons located in the Upper Paraguay River basin: Uberaba, Gaíva, and Mandioré. Later, this name started to designate the Pantanal in general and persisted until the nineteenth century, when it was replaced by the Portuguese word Pantanal (Combès, 2010: 316).

Nikulin (2019: 22) supports this hypothesis, observing that the Gorgotoqui suffix *-toki* can be a cognate of *-doge*, the plural suffix for human nouns in Bororo.

Guarayu is a general term applied to some Tupian languages in Eastern Bolivia. Tupian languages were widely spoken on both sides of the Paraguay River, with a larger population density of speakers at the eastern bank. From there, speakers migrated westwards, crossing the river (Combés, 2010).

The Chané language belonged to the Arawakan family and had many speakers at the western bank of the Paraguay River. They migrated to the east, settling in the southern Pantanal. Descendants of the Chané speakers, represented by the Terena and Kinikinau ethnicities, continue to live in the Pantanal region today (Carvalho, 2018).

The early accounts of the Pantanal region depict a landscape characterized by large-scale commercial networks. The interactions between different societies could vary from cooperative to competitive and aggressive, depending on the power dynamics at the time. The interconnected groups spoke languages from different genetic groupings. On the one hand, there were agricultural peoples that represented large linguistic families: Chané and Xaray (Arawakan); Itatín, Chiriguana, Guarayu, and Cario varieties of Guarani (Tupian); Chiquitano (Macro-Jêan); and possibly Gorgotoqui (Bororoan). On the other hand, there were fishers and nomadic canoers, such as the Payaguá, Guachi, and Guató, whose languages are considered isolates, or at least without a reliable genetic classification.

The networks in the Pantanal extended far beyond the main course of the Paraguay River, creating intricate connections with various Indigenous groups in the surrounding regions. Towards the south, the networks reached the estuary of La Plata, where the Charrua and Querandí people were integrated into them to some extent. Another branch of the trails stretched eastwards to the Atlantic coast, facilitating access to the region for the Tupiniquim people of São Paulo. The westernmost branch of these connections passed through the northern Chaco and the Chiquitania region, intersecting with the Andean foothills. Combès (2015: 131) highlighted that, thanks to trade and other means, such as marriage links, wars, and more, all the groups in the region were intricately interlinked.

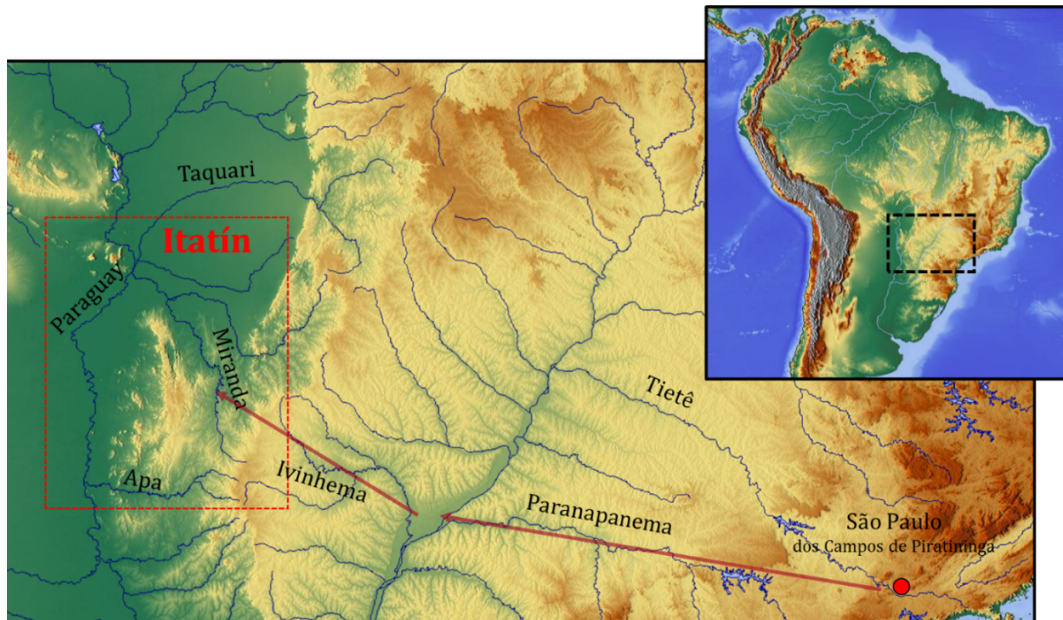
## Jesuits and Paulistas in the Pantanal

In the early sixteenth century, the Portuguese forged strategic alliances with the Tupiniquim people in what is now the state of São Paulo and engaged in slave raids. The individuals conducting these raids, often referred to as Paulistas (and later commonly known as *Bandeirantes*), followed river routes to the south and west, capturing members of various Indigenous groups. The Guarani were among the groups most frequently targeted by these attacks.

At the same time, a system of servitude emerged in the west. The Indigenous people were subordinated to *encomiendas* in Asunción and Santa Cruz. As summarized by Tuer (2013: 13), “the encomienda system granted Spanish colonists the right to the labour tribute of indigenous males over the age of fifteen within a defined geographical area [...] It was open to great abuse and often amounted to tacit slavery.” Besides these two options of forced labor, a third option for the Guarani and neighboring peoples were Jesuit missions. In the seventeenth century, with the approval of the Spanish Crown, Jesuits went to the Guarani people in the La Plata River basin, gathering people from different villages to live together. Their first concern was the conversion of those people to Christianity, but they soon became central actors in Indigenous politics.

One of the areas under Jesuit influence in the seventeenth century was the Itatín in the southern Pantanal (see Map 3), where nine of the fifty-seven Jesuit missions among the Guarani were established (Freitas da Silva, 2011). The Itatín region was historically inhabited by a group identified as Guarani. However, Ferrer (1633, in Cortesão, 1952: 30), the region's ethnographer, noted that the Itatín language was somewhat distinct from Guarani and ap-

peared to be more closely related to the coastal Tupiniquim. Regrettably, there are no detailed descriptions available for the Itatín language. Three modern Tupian Indigenous groups are proposed as descendants of the Itatín: the Kaiowá in Brazil, the Paĩ-Tavyterã in Paraguay, and the Guarayu in Bolivia (Combès, 2017).



map 3. The Itatín and the trails to Pantanal (made by Gustavo Godoy)<sup>8</sup>

The Itatín region was a meeting place for different peoples speaking different languages. To the west of the Paraguay River, there were people identified as “gualacho” (Ferrer, 1633 in Cortesão, 1952: 45-47), a generic term for those who did not speak Guarani. These individuals engaged in trade with the Itatín inhabitants. The Payaguá, a canoe people who dominated the Paraguay River, also maintained friendly relations with the Itatín groups. While the Guató people were initially described as enemies of the Itatín Guarani (Cabeza de Vaca, 1555), they later established frequent contact with the Jesuits in the Itatín and, consequently, with the Guarani (Anônimo, ca. 1650 in Cortesão, 1952: 85-86). It is important to emphasize the regional significance of the Guató and the Payaguá during this period, as shown by the fact that the Jesuit priest Alonso Arias even learned their languages (Pastells, 1915: 193). Unfortunately, the Jesuit priest was murdered before he could provide a more detailed account of these languages.

The missions of Itatín were established in 1632. One year later, Ascenso Quadros, a slave raider from São Paulo, reached the region and enslaved some Guarani chiefs. The missions persisted, moving to other locations. After the Paulistas destroyed the Itatín missions, the Payaguá moved in from the south to occupy the region (Holanda, 2014: *passim*). The expulsion of the Guarani also made it possible for the Guaicuru, allies of the Payaguá, to enter the Itatín region. In this way, the successive raids of the Paulistas in the region restructured the linguistic landscape in the southern Pantanal. At the same time, they disrupted the Itatín Guarani-speaking area and introduced Tupiniquim in the region. This probably increased the mixture between the two languages.

### The Pantanal reshaped by gold mining

The Bororo groups were once distributed across a considerable stretch of the northern Pantanal and the nearby plateaus. These Bororo groups are conventionally divided into three major

categories based on the region's hydrography. The (western) Bororo of the Cabaçal River resided along this tributary on the right bank of the Paraguay River, above present-day Cáceres, with their territory extending to the Sepotuba River. The Bororo of Campanha inhabited the lower course of the Jauru River descending to the Paraguay River. Finally, the Eastern Bororo group, the only one that persists as a distinct ethnic group, inhabited the upper course of the São Lourenço River and established settlements in Highlands/Plateau (Colbacchini and Albisetti, 1942: 19-21).

In the eighteenth century, Paulista expeditions, which had previously focused on enslavement, shifted their focus to the control of the mining regions. This change occurred when gold was discovered in the territory of a Bororo group, the Coxiponé. As the Paulistas encroached upon their lands for gold mining and never vacated the region, the Bororo people, who were expelled and subsequently separated, found themselves divided into western and eastern groups, leading to a decline in their previous level of communication with one another (Albisetti and Venturelli, 1962: 217-18).

Some Bororo groups maintained good relations with the Paulistas and even learned the Tupi language of São Paulo to some extent. A wordlist collected by Castelnau (1851: 285-86) among the Western Bororo on the Cabaçal River contains Tupi loanwords, such as, e.g., *cugna* ("woman"), *cuerou* ("sun"), and *jaguarete* ("jaguar"). Some Bororo engaged in trade with the colonizers, and in the first half of the eighteenth century, some groups acted as a local militia, following the orders of Cuiabá chiefs. They allied themselves with the Portuguese in battles against other peoples, such as the Guató, the Payaguá, the Mbaya-Guaicuru to the south, and the Kayapó and Karajá to the east (Vangelista, 2015: 427).

It is also important to consider the number of peoples that were located along the routes the Paulistas used before reaching the Bororo region. In 1726, the Paulista Antonio Pires de Campos documented several Indigenous groups inhabiting the route leading to the gold mines of the Cuiabá River. As with the ethnonyms collected by the Spanish conquistadors of the sixteenth century, the list of ethnonyms collected by Pires de Campos is vast. It includes the Guadaxo, Achihanes, Escolhexez, Cazoyas, Chicaocas, Hahunis, Juniacas, Tiquinitoz, Aba'hihe, Chiquiaez, Humegay, and more. Unfortunately, we have no information about these peoples beyond their names and the locations they inhabited. Pires de Campos (1862 [1723]) also reports that the Payaguá and Guaicuru warriors already formed a consolidated unit. On the São Lourenço River (also known as Porrudos), the Payaguá engaged in trade with the canoeing peoples of the region, such as the Guató and Guaxarapó.

As the Paulistas expanded their influence, the Bororo territory experienced a noticeable reduction and extensive fragmentation. By the end of the nineteenth century, the western Bororo, who had once been an influence in the Pantanal, had dwindled to mere remnants and were subjected to the labor regime enforced by the neo-Brazilians (Steinen, 1915: 392; Koslowsky, 1895). In the twentieth century, the western Bororo lost their ethnic identity and eventually ceased to exist as a distinct society. Simultaneously, the subsistence area of the eastern Bororo also diminished.

With the establishment of gold extraction, new trade routes emerged from São Paulo to the mines at the Cuiabá River. The commercial expeditions following them were known as *Monções* ("Monsoons," named for their periodic nature). The Monsoons attracted the interest of the Payaguá, who were fighting against the Paulistas. During this period, the Payaguá canoers and the Guaicuru horsemen formed an alliance. Together, they would raid Paulista boats and sell the loot in Asunción. In 1725, the Payaguá launched an assault on vessels under the command of Diogo de Souza Araújo, which were heading to Cuiabá. They killed 600 people, including the commander. Over the next decades, until 1786, there were a total of twelve to eighteen attacks. In 1734, the Portuguese waged a war against the Payaguá, resulting

in massacres and enslavement. In 1768, the Guaicuru broke their alliance with the Payaguá and became allies of the Portuguese and enemies of the Spaniards (Vangelista, 2015; Holanda, 2014; Presotti, 2005; Pires de Campo, 1723).

Parallel to these events, the Guaicuru (also known as Mbayá) established contact with the Guaná people, identified with or related to the Chané, who were already present near the Paraguay River. A symbiotic relationship developed between the two groups, with the Guaná contributing agricultural knowledge and cultivating plants and the Mbayá providing military forces and horses for defense. Towards the end of the eighteenth century, the Guaná migrated to the north and settled between Corumbá and Miranda, which led to a weakening of their ties with the Mbayá. However, individual relations between the Terena and the Kadiwéu, the descendants of the Guaná and the Mbayá respectively, have persisted until today.

To summarize, the gold mining in the Cuiabá River resulted in significant shifts and alliances in the region. The Bororo territory contracted and became fragmented due to Paulista expansion. Farther to the south, the Guaicuru first allied themselves with the Payaguás, who prevented the Paulistas from advancing into the area. The Guató, in their turn, aided the Paulistas against the Payaguá. Subsequently, the Guaicuru allied themselves with the Guaná. Together, the Guaicuru and Guaná initially formed an alliance with the Portuguese, but over time, they grew apart. The peace treaty between the Guaicuru and the Portuguese Crown, as well as alliances with certain Bororo and Guató groups, facilitated the establishment of neo-Brazilian colonial settlers in the Pantanal region.

These interactions played a pivotal role in shaping the current socio-political landscape of the area, and they also contributed to the definition of the borders between the countries in the region. After the gold mining period, the Pantanal increasingly specialized in cattle raising, an economic activity that dominates its landscape until today. Cattle production impacted Indigenous communities by encroaching on their lands and utilizing their labor on cattle farms.

### **The expansion of cattle farms**

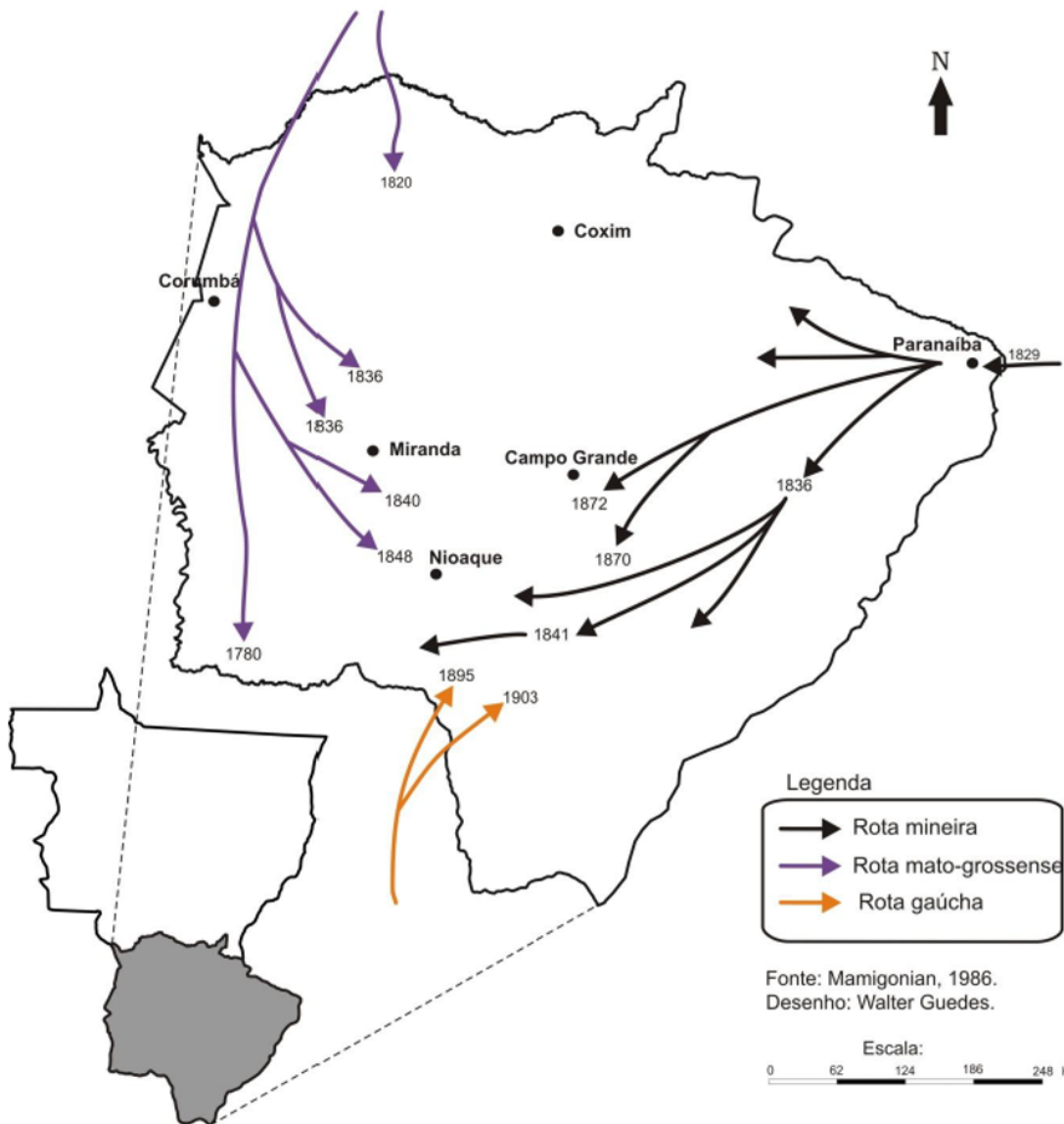
By around 1844-45, vast cattle farms had spread across the entire region between the Cuiabá, São Lourenço, and Paraguay Rivers corresponding to the northern Pantanal. Indigenous people served as the workforce on these farms from the beginning (Mamigonian, 1986: 47). Map 4 below represents the routes (in purple) by which cattle farms advanced into the region.

Montero (2012: 96) mentioned that in the nineteenth century, the Bororo who were still present in the area became absorbed into the cattle production system. They maintained semi-independent trade relations with landlords and engaged in exchanges of spirits, money for their labor, and gifts for their women. By the end of the nineteenth century, these Bororo gradually dispersed and were assimilated into the local population.

The assimilation process driven by labor relations at cattle farms affected other Pantanal Indigenous groups as well. In the twentieth century, cattle farms were responsible for the dispersion of the Guató people and their migration to urban centers. An anthropological report (Cardoso, 1985: 4-5) states that the appropriation and usurpation of Indigenous territories by landlords were facilitated by the Guató's settlement pattern. Since the Guató did not establish villages, but rather each family lived autonomously, the loss of space was less a collective issue than a series of disputes.

Guató children were often sent to be raised on cattle farms, where they became workers. Contacts between these children and their families were usually interrupted. One of the consequences of this radical and dramatic change was the complete shift of the children to speaking Portuguese and the loss of their native language. Balykova and Godoy (2020: 10-12)

provide a personal account by Cecília de Souza, who was entrusted to a landlord's wife as a little girl. At that time, she was monolingual in Guató, but she completely forgot the language after growing up at the cattle farm.



map 4. Expansion of cattle farms in the Pantanal (in purple) at the end of the eighteenth and in the nineteenth centuries. (Reproduced from Guedes da Silva, 2011: 36.)

If the Indigenous Lands occupy only 4.5% of the Brazilian Pantanal, as mentioned above, the territory of cattle farms corresponds to 15.6% of the biome. Corumbá, the main Pantanal city, ranks second among Brazilian municipalities in the total number of cattle. Owners of cattle farms remain one of the main obstacles that hinder the demarcation and homologation of Indigenous Lands in the region.

Over the centuries, the Indigenous peoples of the Pantanal, such as the Bororo, Guató, and Guaicuru/Kadiwéu, have experienced significant changes in their territories, social structures, and languages due to the use of native trade routes to explore the territory, raids, gold mining, and cattle farming. In the following section, we summarize some facts related to language interactions in the Pantanal.



## Language interactions in the Pantanal

The Pantanal region, situated in the upper course of the Paraguay River and its tributaries, was inhabited by Indigenous groups that spoke languages with diverse genetic affiliations. During the sixteenth century, there were vibrant trade routes, which the conquistadors used to seek precious metals, and these networks intertwined with relations of warfare and slavery. The language that would later become known as Guaraní was already firmly established in the Paraguay River basin, especially in the southern Pantanal. Therefore, the expeditions led by Guaraní people in alliance with the Europeans employed Guaraní as a means of communication with other peoples in the region. During this period, various forms of interactions existed among these peoples. The Xaray and the Guaraní engaged in marital exchanges, the Chané were under Guaraní domination, and there was an alliance between the Guató and the Guaxarapó. These groups represent only a few connections that bound different languages together across the Pantanal.

After several years of Spanish presence in Asunción, the Jesuit missions, whose form of operation and organization was still in its early stages, began to gain ground. Amidst the conflicts in the early seventeenth century, these missions expanded throughout the La Plata Basin. Although this initial development deeply disturbed the territorial arrangement and the lives of the region's peoples, the interaction of multiple languages, which was then a defining characteristic of the region, continued to exist in one way or another. In 1630, missions were established in the southern Pantanal, particularly in the area known as Itatín, where a language related to Guaraní (or coastal to Tupiniquim) was spoken. The Itatín missions brought new ways of interaction to these peoples, who already communicated with each other, bringing together people from the Guató, Guaxarapó, Payaguá, and other Pantanal groups who were already familiar with each other and had established relationships in earlier times.

The Itatín missions also enhanced another widely spoken language in the area: coastal Tupiniquim from São Paulo, which was spoken by Paulistas raiders who frequently attacked the missions. Peoples like the Guató and the Bororo were subjugated by and formed alliances with the Tupiniquim-speaking Paulistas. This language persisted in the Pantanal until the nineteenth century. As we previously mentioned, Jesuit Ferrer wrote in his Annual Letter of 1633 (in Cortesão, 1952: 30) that the "Guaraní" language of Itatín could be more accurately identified as Temimino, with a closer connection to the Tupiniquim of the coast. It is worth noting that the Guaraní language, as spoken in Paranapanema, had just been described and published by the Jesuits, who did not have the time and conditions to conduct the same type of study on the language spoken in Itatín.

When the Paulistas started to settle in Cuiabá to export gold, they encountered fierce resistance from the Payaguá and the Guaicuru. In the second half of the eighteenth century, the Guaicuru broke their alliance with the Payaguá and began to instead ally themselves with the Luso-Brazilians under the Portuguese Crown. This facilitated the occupation of the Pantanal by neo-Brazilian populations.

With the increasing need to establish borders between the domains of the Portuguese and Spanish Crowns, and later between Brazil and Paraguay, the Payaguá were expelled from the lands claimed by the Luso-Brazilians, with their last battle taking place in the Pantanal during the War of the Triple Alliance (1864-1870). In the end, the Payaguá retreated to Asunción, where they eventually disappeared as a distinct ethnicity in the first half of the twentieth century.

Today, characterizing the Pantanal as a hub of "multilingualism" might seem like an exaggeration when compared to the multitude of peoples reported in the region between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries. In addition, this may seem like an abuse of the concept of societal multilingualism considering two canonical multilingual regions of lowland South America: the Vaupés (or, more broadly, Upper Rio Negro) area, where linguistic exogamy is

a guiding principle of matrimonial exchanges, and the Upper Xingu, where public discourse discourages linguistic exogamy, yet successful assimilation of various peoples enables elaborate ritual exchanges. However, it should be noted that without a doubt, a reasonable number of languages continue to interact in the Pantanal today, and its past was abundantly multilingual. Perhaps this should prompt us to reconsider the assumptions of what exactly constitutes a multilingual area as a descriptive or comparative concept in the context of South America, which may need to be comprehensive.

For centuries, the ethnic and linguistic diversity of the Pantanal has been attacked by gold seekers, missionaries, slave raiders, landlords, and national governments. Other dramatic events, such as military conflicts and diseases, also took their toll on the Pantanal's Indigenous populations and their languages. The current situation, in which only four Pantanal languages still exist and all of them are endangered, is the result of this long trajectory of violence and oppression.

No region allows for a reliable and accurate reconstruction of its very distant linguistic history. This is even truer for any account of ancient South America, where we can only obtain a hazy, partial, and fragmented view. This is because the effort to understand and document South American languages only started recently and has not yet been definitively established.

In the blurred, but certainly colorful portrayal of ancient South America in historical sources, it is challenging to unravel the tapestry formed by its interwoven languages, cultures, and landscapes. This tapestry created flows reconfiguring the interactions, albeit with varying speeds, extents, and densities, ultimately defining centers of attraction, more than clear distinct regional entities. In this article, we have only scratched the surface of the many paths that can be explored, aiming mainly to provide a glimpse of the Pantanal's impressive diversity.

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