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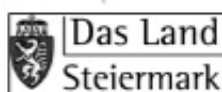
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## **Xokó identity and ethnogenesis – Indigenous identity and the development of Brazilian Portuguese**

### **Abstract**

The paper discusses the self-identification of the Xokó people as an indigenous ethnicity in the context of Brazilian Portuguese (BP). Like other Brazilian ethnicities, the Xokó are monolingual in BP. This cannot be directly attributed to the loss of a native language, since they are emergent Indians, with a history of social and cultural admixture with non-Indian populations. This situation makes the Xokó poor subjects for indigenous language studies and linguistically indistinguishable from non-Indian speakers of the same variety of BP. Yet, language is crucial in their identification as members of an ethnic group. Studying the Xokó language as a space of interactions may contribute to understand the agency of BP in their ethnogenesis processes and shed some light to the diversity of pluricentric languages in Amerindian contexts.

### **1. Introduction – Native Brazilians and interethnic encounters**

When the first Portuguese *caravelas* arrived, five centuries ago, it is estimated that five million people occupied the territory that would be called Brazil<sup>1</sup>. The number corresponds to five times the population of Portugal at the same period, and linguistic, ethnic and cultural diversity was even greater in the west of the Atlantic. While in Europe one single language family, Indo-European, dominated most of the continent, and European communities shared a relatively similar way of life throughout the new-rising nation states, in 16<sup>th</sup> century Brazil, 1200 languages<sup>2</sup> belonging to dozens of language families were spoken by hundreds of ethnic groups, among many of which strong cultural and social-economic differences existed.

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1 Santili (2000:22).

2 Rodrigues (2005:35).