Indigenous language learning support for Krenak youth
Krenak Nation, Brazil
Dartmouth College
Antônio Jorge Medeiros Batista Silva / Po'at Krenak (Brazil, Dartmouth)
Luka Faccini Zanon (Brazil, Dartmouth)

Background
On my "Why Dartmouth" essay, one of my main points was the Linguistics program and the work developed with endangered languages. My family's native tongue, Krenak, features on the "UNESCO Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger." Currently, less than 10 people in our community can speak it fluently. At home, random words would be tossed in our daily conversations – that mainly took place in Portuguese. In the past couple years, as the pandemic hit Brazil and disproportionately affected Indigenous peoples, I started holding our language and culture much closer to my heart. In applying to Dartmouth, I sought opportunities to study my own people, speak to our traditions, and revitalize our language. Now, we seek further help to make this dream a reality, and I see Project for Peace as a useful resource in my community's journey.

In this project, we understand language revitalization as a decolonial approach to the collective notion of Brazilian history that is taught in mainstream education systems. The erasure of Indigenous languages, a process that happened through brutal years of genocide, also meant the erasure of all the ancestral knowledge, some of which the next generations may never have access to. Through this project, we hope to bring this knowledge to the new generation of Krenak youth, who, like me, were institutionally denied parts of their identity. Our hope is that, by understanding our past in a decolonial way, we may incite youth to challenge systems of oppression that erase certain niches of knowledge.

Qualifications
As a Linguistics major, double minoring in Spanish and Native American and Indigenous Studies (NAIS), I believe to be on the right path to awaken our culture, social customs, and language from its states of dormancy.

Luka, my partner in this journey, is a Computational Linguistics major with experience in archival research and digital documentation. Luka would be responsible for the website creation alongside partners from University of Brasilia.

We will also count with the active help of Professor Ana Suely Cabral (ORCID: 0000-0001-7212-9178), a Brazilian scholar of Indigenous languages and my academic mentor. I have personally worked with Prof. Cabral before, having held last summer a research assistant position in her home institution, the Laboratory for Indigenous Languages and Literatures (LALLI), which exists under the University of Brasilia's Linguistics department.

Objectives and Impact
This work will focus on the production of pedagogical material for the Krenak youth. Although I myself am not yet fluent in the language, I have dedicated enough time and energy into compiling and studying multiple resources, ranging from 18th century lists of vocabularies collected by white European settlers to early 2000s recordings of elders speaking the language. These are materials that require some linguistic work: transcribing, cross listing, translating, as well as publishing and promoting. As much of this work is out of my own individual scope, I have sought help from references all around me: Professor Ana Suely Cabral from the University of Brasilia (UnB), a mentor of mine; Dartmouth Professor Laura McPherson; Geilson, Shirley, and Douglas Krenak, community members and knowledge keepers; and Luka Faccini Zanon, with whom I cosign this proposal.

Understanding the myriad of interdisciplinary and intersectional issues that concern the revitalization of Krenak, we have decided to focus this project on the production of educational materials. There is already vast scholarship — mostly published in Portuguese — on the syntactic, semantic, and morphological aspects of Krenak, but none of which actually speak to, interact with, nor serve any purpose to our community. Our hope is that, with the help of the aforementioned group of people — all of whom are willing to come together under our horizontal project leadership — we can finally create a material, ideally in the format of a textbook, that will indeed be useful for teaching and learning the language. We believe that, by doing so, the Krenak youth will find in our work a complimentary resource to our traditional ways of language learning; through elders. This would be a manual to Krenak language focused on a young audience, which

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already takes part in the formal Brazilian educational system, and that could benefit from this teaching method that is more similar to what they see in the formal classroom setting. Moreover, we also plan to develop a digital learning hub, multidisciplinary and multimedia, of all resources on Krenak. Understanding that language revitalization is a process that requires a decolonial lens to be applied, we intend to complement the formal educational model presented by the textbook. In the learning hub — which would be designed as a website — archives of the language would be available in both its written and spoken form, along with culturally significant materials, such as excerpts of the people’s history and art productions. This would allow the Krenak youth to grasp the linguistic material in a way that resembles our own traditional forms of teaching, which cannot be limited to the classroom.

Program details

Timeline

- **Preparations (Feb-June):** before heading to Brasília, we will spend the period of February-June analyzing the materials already available to us. The cross-listing work will begin in this phase, when Luka and I will analyze the Krenak language structures to get familiar with the records we will later be working with.
- **Phase one (June):** based in Brasília (Distrito Federal, Brazil), in LALLI's headquarters, where, under Prof. Cabral's guidance, we will compile and cross-list all the productions on Krenak language.
- **Phase two (July):** in conversation with members of the Krenak community-based in the city of Resplendor (Minas Gerais, Brazil), we will try and understand what teaching practices and methodologies would be the most effective in transmitting this knowledge onto the Krenak youth, as well as recording materials for the final product.
- **Phase three (Mid-July - August):** back in Brasília, where we will develop our final product: physical and digital materials, which include a handbook and a digital learning hub with the material accessible to everyone. Once this is done, we plan on publishing and distributing it among Krenak communities — currently located in the states of São Paulo and Minas Gerais, where I am from.

Conceptual Program Overview

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Sustainability

Our hope is to find members of the community who are interested in getting involved to design, review, and help publish the material, letting them take over the website and textbook usage in the community. Mi'am Krenak is a digital artist we are already in contact with and is willing to work on the project. Working closely with other members of the community, we can ensure that the website is in constant evolution, with new resources and publications, and that the textbook remains useful for community learning purposes. Regular meetings should still be held to keep track of the progress made and to find further ways to help.