



**ETHNOLINGUISTICS IN THE CONTEXT OF SUSTAINABILITY: THE REMAINING NATIVE LANGUAGES IN THE MUNICIPALITIES OF BENJAMIN CONSTANT AND SÃO PAULO DE OLIVENÇA IN THE ALTO-SOLIMÕES MICROREGION, AMAZONAS STATE**

**ETNOLINGÜÍSTICA NO CONTEXTO DA SUSTENTABILIDADE: AS LÍNGUAS NATIVAS REMANESCENTES NOS MUNICÍPIOS DE BENJAMIM CONSTANT E SÃO PAULO DE OLIVENÇA NA MICRORREGIÃO DO ALTO-SOLIMÕES-AM**

**ETNOLINGÜÍSTICA EN EL CONTEXTO DE LA SOSTENIBILIDAD: LAS LENGUAS NATIVAS RESTANTES EN LOS MUNICIPIOS DE BENJAMIN CONSTANT Y SÃO PAULO DE OLIVENÇA EN LA MICRORREGIÓN ALTO-SOLIMÕES, ESTADO DE AMAZONAS**



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**ABSTRACT**

This research aimed to analyze the future of remaining native languages in the municipalities of Benjamin Constant and São Paulo de Olivença (Alto Solimões/AM), focusing on the assumptions of ethnolinguistics in the context of the sustainability of language policies in higher education. The methodological approach of the research was based on the construction of prospective scenarios (Godet, 2000), made possible by a bibliographic survey. The research results contributed to the identification of five remaining native languages, two in the municipality of Benjamin Constant/AM, Tikuna and Kokama, and three in the municipality of São Paulo de Olivença/AM, Tikuna, Kokama, and Kambeba. It was also found that in both municipalities, there are languages at risk of extinction, namely: Kaixana, Witoto, and Kanamari. Regarding the enrollment of indigenous students in higher education, 1,058 were registered in Benjamim Constant and 2,084 in São Paulo de Olivença (IBGE, 2022). Although these data show an increase in the participation of indigenous people in universities in Amazonas, the future scenario of language policies still seems ineffective in the face of the decrease in young speakers of the mother tongue and written records, such as the creation of teaching materials by native speakers, the training of indigenous teachers, and compliance with the Law of Guidelines and Bases of National Education (Law No. 9,394/1996) by public and private universities. In short, the research contributes to the reflection on public language policy actions aimed at providing inclusive education to keep alive oral traditions and ancestral knowledge that are indispensable for the preservation and revitalization of these languages as cultural and sustainable heritage.

**Keywords:** Ethnolinguistics. Language Policy. Indigenous Peoples.

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## RESUMO

Esta pesquisa propôs-se a analisar o futuro das línguas nativas remanescentes nos municípios de Benjamin Constant e São Paulo de Olivença (Alto Solimões/AM), com foco nos pressupostos da etnolinguística no contexto da sustentabilidade das políticas linguísticas no ensino superior. O caminho metodológico da pesquisa foi subsidiado na construção de cenários prospectivos (Godet, 2000), viabilizado pelo levantamento bibliográfico. Os resultados da pesquisa contribuíram para identificação de cinco línguas nativas que ainda remanescem, sendo duas no município de Benjamin Constant/AM, a Tikuna e a Kokama e três no município de São Paulo de Olivença/AM, a Tikuna, Kokama e Kambéba. Constatou-se ainda em ambos os municípios, línguas que correm risco de extinção, a saber: Kaixana, Witoto e os kanamaris. Com relação ao ingresso de alunos indígenas matriculados no ensino superior, registrou-se 1.058 em Benjamin Constant e 2.084 em São Paulo de Olivença (IBGE, 2022). Embora esses dados mostrem um aumento da participação dos indígenas nas universidades no Amazonas, o cenário futuro das políticas linguísticas ainda soa como ineficazes diante da diminuição de jovens falantes da língua materna e registros escritos, a exemplo disso, criação de materiais didáticos do falante nativo, a formação de professores indígenas e o cumprimento da Lei de Diretrizes e Bases da Educação Nacional (Lei nº 9.394/1996) por parte das universidades públicas e privadas. Enfim, a pesquisa contribui para reflexão de ações de política linguística pública visando proporcionar uma educação inclusiva para manter viva as tradições orais e os conhecimentos ancestrais que são indispensáveis para preservação e revitalização dessas línguas como patrimônio cultural e sustentável.

**Palavras-chave:** Etnolinguística. Política Linguística. Povos Indígenas.

## RESUMEN

Esta investigación tuvo como objetivo analizar el futuro de las lenguas nativas que aún se conservan en los municipios de Benjamin Constant y São Paulo de Olivença (Alto Solimões/AM), centrándose en los postulados de la etnolingüística en el contexto de la sostenibilidad de las políticas lingüísticas en la educación superior. El enfoque metodológico se basó en la construcción de escenarios prospectivos (Godet, 2000), posibilitada por una revisión bibliográfica. Los resultados permitieron identificar cinco lenguas nativas: dos en el municipio de Benjamin Constant/AM (tikuna y kokama) y tres en el de São Paulo de Olivença/AM (tikuna, kokama y kambaba). Asimismo, se constató la presencia en ambos municipios de lenguas en riesgo de extinción: el kaixana, el witoto y el kanamari. En cuanto a la matrícula de estudiantes indígenas en la educación superior, se registraron 1.058 en Benjamin Constant y 2.084 en São Paulo de Olivença (IBGE, 2022). Si bien estos datos muestran un aumento en la participación de pueblos indígenas en las universidades de Amazonas, el panorama futuro de las políticas lingüísticas aún se presenta ineficaz ante la disminución de jóvenes hablantes de la lengua materna y de registros escritos, como la creación de materiales didácticos por hablantes nativos, la capacitación de docentes indígenas y el cumplimiento de la Ley de Directrices y Bases de la Educación Nacional (Ley Nº 9.394/1996) por parte de las universidades públicas y privadas. En resumen, esta investigación contribuye a la reflexión sobre las acciones de política lingüística pública dirigidas a brindar una educación inclusiva que mantenga vivas las tradiciones orales y el conocimiento ancestral, indispensables para la preservación y revitalización de estas lenguas como patrimonio cultural sostenible.

**Palabras clave:** Etnolingüística. Política Lingüística. Pueblos Indígenas.



## 1 INTRODUCTION

The Brazilian Amazon is widely recognized as one of the largest repositories of cultural and linguistic diversity on the planet, home to a multiplicity of indigenous peoples whose languages and traditions constitute invaluable intangible heritage. Within this vast territory, the micro-region of Alto Solimões, located in the state of Amazonas, stands out for its ethnolinguistic richness, being inhabited by peoples such as the Tikuna, Kokama, Kaixana, Kambeba and others, who keep ancestral languages and cultures alive. However, these native languages face significant challenges, resulting from historical processes of colonization, globalization and insufficient public policies for their preservation and revitalization. In this context, the construction of future scenarios for the remaining native languages in the municipalities of Benjamin Constant and São Paulo de Olivença/AM, becomes important, especially considering the growing pressure on traditional ways of life and the integration of these peoples in formal educational contexts, such as higher education.

The assumptions of ethnolinguistics, Lyons (1987), receives a special treatment in the present research, for treating language as an expression of the cultural identity of peoples. Sapir (1969) recognizes several impacts that affect human language, whether sociological, ethnic, anthropological or psychological. In view of such circumstances, some areas of science seek to dialogue with linguistics in order to carry out research on language, based on the assumption that when analyzing a language, it is possible to extract information such as cultural reality and customs of a society (Souza and Antunes, 2017)

This article presents the final results of a Scientific Initiation project that had as its general objective, to analyze the future of the remaining native languages in the municipalities of Benjamin Constant and São Paulo de Olivença (Alto Solimões/AM), focusing on the assumptions of ethnolinguistics in the context of the sustainability of language policies in higher education.

The research, of a bibliographic and exploratory nature, focuses on the cities of Benjamin Constant and São Paulo de Olivença, both located in the state of Amazonas, which are emblematic for the significant presence of indigenous populations and the complexity of the challenges faced by these communities. These locations were chosen for their ethnolinguistic relevance and for representing contexts where the interaction between public policies, education and indigenous cultural practices can be observed in a more evident way.

The Alto Solimões microregion is particularly relevant for this study due to its high indigenous population density and the presence of languages that, despite their vitality in some contexts, face risks of disappearing. According to data from the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE, 2022), the Tikuna, for example, represent the largest



indigenous group in Brazil in terms of population, with a significant presence in the Upper Solimões, especially in the cities of Benjamin Constant and São Paulo de Olivença. However, even with this demographic expressiveness, the native languages of the region are subject to external pressures, such as the expansion of hegemonic educational models that prioritize Portuguese to the detriment of mother tongues, and the influence of mass media that marginalize local cultural expressions.

In this context, the methodological process used in the present study was the construction of prospective scenarios (Godet, 2000). This strategy made it possible to carry out a retrospective and historical study of the object of study to understand how public educational linguistic policies contributed to the sustainability of the remaining native languages in these municipalities. The research proposed not only to diagnose the linguistic challenges faced, but also to verify the existence of indigenous students attending higher education. Based on these concerns, the following research problem was raised: what are the limits and possibilities of the linguistic sustainability of the remaining native languages in the municipalities of Benjamin Constant and São Paulo de Olivença/AM, from a retrospective, historical and current approach to the object of study?

In this sense, the research dialogues with authors such as Mühlhäusler (1996), who addresses the importance of linguistic ecology for the maintenance of linguistic diversity, and Fishman (1991), whose model of linguistic revitalization emphasizes the centrality of the community in the process of preserving endangered languages. In addition, the study sought to contribute to the debate on the implementation of language policies that respect and promote the autonomy of indigenous peoples, as recommended by Convention No. 169 of the International Labor Organization (ILO, 1989) and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2008).

Finally, this article intends to offer reflections on the importance of ethnolinguistic studies for the formulation of public policies in the recognition and valorization of the remaining native languages in the Alto Solimões. By proposing the methodology of scenario construction, it sought not only to foresee possible futures, but also to engage social actors, indigenous communities and educational institutions in a constructive dialogue about the role of native languages in the construction of a more just, inclusive and sustainable society. It is believed that the preservation of native languages is essential not only for the peoples who speak them, but for humanity as a whole, as each language represents a unique way of seeing and interacting with the world.



## 2 ETHNOLINGUISTIC DIVERSITY IN THE MICRO-REGION OF THE UPPER SOLIMÕES AND THE RIGHTS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

The National Foundation of Indigenous Peoples (FUNAI, 2025), the body responsible for protecting and promoting the rights of indigenous peoples in Brazil, highlights the immense linguistic diversity present in the country. Data updated by the agency, Brazil is home to more than 150 indigenous languages spoken by about 305 ethnic groups, which places it among the countries with the greatest linguistic diversity in the world. These languages are distributed in more than 20 linguistic branches, such as Tupi, Macro-Jê, Arawak, and Karib, as well as isolated families that have no proven relationship with other linguistic groups.

The anthropologist Darcy Ribeiro, in his work *Os Índios e a Civilização* (1970), already warned of the importance of linguistic diversity as one of the pillars of the cultural identity of indigenous peoples. For the author, "each indigenous language that becomes extinct is like a library that burns down, taking with it ancestral knowledge, worldviews and unique ways of life" (Ribeiro, 1970, p 30). This metaphor illustrates the depth of knowledge that is at stake when a language disappears. Furthermore, the linguist Ayrton Dall'Igna Rodrigues (1986), in his book *Brazilian Languages: for the knowledge of indigenous languages*, reinforces the complexity and sophistication of indigenous languages, which have grammatical structures and classification systems that challenge Western linguistic categories. He highlighted that "linguistic diversity in Brazil is a living testimony of the human capacity to create and transmit knowledge in varied ways that are deeply rooted in their cultures" (Rodrigues, 1986, p. 48).

The National Foundation of Indigenous Peoples (FUNAI, 2025) has emphasized the role of the new indigenous generations in the revitalization of their mother tongues, supporting, for example, the holding of the II National Meeting for the International Decade of Indigenous Languages in Brazil (DILI). The event was held between August 26 and 30, 2025, in the Buriti Indigenous Land (TI), in Dois Irmãos do Buriti (MS). Many communities are implementing bilingual schools and audiovisual documentation projects to ensure that languages are transmitted to children and young people. This initiative is crucial, because, as stated by indigenous leader Ailton Krenak (2019, p.13), "language is the soul of a people, and without it, we lose not only words, but an entire worldview that connects us to the land and to our ancestors".

And this connection is still present in the micro-region of Alto Solimões, located in the state of Amazonas. It is a region recognized for its remarkable ethnolinguistic diversity, home to a significant portion of Brazil's indigenous population. According to the last Demographic Census carried out by the IBGE, (2022), the region concentrates one of the largest indigenous populations in the country, with emphasis on municipalities such as São Gabriel





da Cachoeira and Tabatinga, which together add up to more than 80 thousand indigenous people. This population is made up of several ethnic groups, such as the Tikuna, Kokama, Kaixana, and Yanomami, each with their own languages, traditions, and ways of life, which highlights the cultural and linguistic richness of the region (IBGE, 2022).

The ethnolinguistic diversity of the Upper Solimões is a reflection of the complex history of occupation and resistance of indigenous peoples in the Amazon. As Souza and Almeida (2019) point out, the region is one of the few places in Brazil where linguistic plurality is still alive, with more than 20 indigenous languages in daily use. However, this diversity faces serious threats, such as the pressure of development models that do not consider the rights and cultural specificities of these peoples. The advance of activities such as illegal mining, deforestation, and the expansion of large infrastructure projects have directly impacted indigenous territories, putting not only their lands at risk, but also their languages and cultures.

Due to the growth of indigenous populations in the region, many of these groups face serious structural challenges. To illustrate, the Yanomami Indigenous Land, which extends to the Upper Solimões, has recorded a significant increase in invasions by miners, resulting in deforestation, river contamination, and health problems, such as the spread of infectious diseases (IBGE, 2022). As pointed out by Ricardo (2021), the lack of effective public policies to protect these territories and guarantee indigenous rights has aggravated the vulnerability of these populations.

Despite occasional advances, such as the implementation of bilingual and intercultural schools, many indigenous people still face barriers in accessing basic services. According to Oliveira (2020), indigenous school education in the region still lacks resources and an approach that fully values traditional languages and knowledge. In health, geographical distance and the lack of adequate infrastructure make medical care difficult, especially in more remote areas (Oliveira, 2020).

The issue of identity and self-determination are also central themes in the debates on ethnolinguistic diversity in the Alto Solimões. For Santos (2018), the maintenance of native languages is intrinsically linked to the preservation of territories and cultural practices. The loss of a language represents not only the disappearance of a communication system, but also of a unique set of knowledge and worldviews. In this sense, the struggle of the indigenous peoples of the Upper Solimões for the demarcation of their lands and the recognition of their rights is also a struggle for the survival of their linguistic and cultural diversity (Santos, 2018).



As described by Oliveira Filho (1988), the Upper Solimões went through an intense migratory flow between the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, driven mainly by rubber tapping. The region, originally inhabited by ethnic groups such as the Tikuna, Kokama and some Kambebas, received a large number of migrants, especially from the Northeast, in addition to a significant presence of Peruvians. The author also points out that, in this period, there was a progressive occupation of the lands for activities considered productive, which generated profound social and cultural transformations among the local ethnic groups.

For Castro and Campos (2015), this migratory and economic dynamic resulted in processes of miscegenation between indigenous people, Peruvians and migrants, as well as a reconfiguration of land tenure. When rubber tappers settled in the region, they came to control a large part of these lands, which were previously traditionally occupied by indigenous peoples. In this way, the arrival of the rubber tappers not only altered the land structure, but also significantly impacted the social and cultural relations of local communities, consolidating land tenure in the hands of whites and marginalizing native peoples.

As much as the Alto Solimões micro-region is an emblematic example of the ethnolinguistic richness of indigenous peoples in Brazil, this diversity is under constant threat due to factors such as land invasion, the lack of adequate public policies, and the pressure of predatory development models. The protection of these peoples and their cultures requires, therefore, urgent and coordinated actions that respect their rights and promote their autonomy, ensuring that this diversity continues to flourish for future generations, as Barros (2021) has already emphasized.

In this sense, the rights of indigenous peoples have gained international recognition through legal instruments such as Convention No. 169 of the International Labor Organization (ILO, 1989) and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNUDPI, 2008). These documents represent fundamental milestones in the struggle to guarantee the collective, territorial and cultural rights of these peoples, establishing guidelines for the protection of their identities and ways of life.

ILO Convention No. 169, adopted in 1989, is the only binding international treaty that specifically addresses the rights of indigenous and tribal peoples. In its Article 13, the Convention recognizes the specific interest of the spiritual relationship of indigenous peoples with the lands or territories they occupy or use, stressing that the rights of property and possession over these territories must be respected. In addition, Article 14 also spells out that property and tenure rights over the lands they traditionally occupy must be recognized (p.10), including protection against forced removal from their territories. These devices are essential



to ensure the autonomy and cultural survival of indigenous peoples, who intrinsically depend on their lands to maintain their traditional practices and identity.

In addition, there is also the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDPI, 2008), which expands and complements the principles of Convention No. 169. In its Article 3, the UNDPi states that "indigenous peoples have the right to self-determination" (p. 07), which includes the freedom to determine their political, economic, social and cultural conditions. This right is fundamental for indigenous peoples to be able to manage their own territories and resources according to their traditions and needs. Article 26 of the Declaration reinforces that "indigenous peoples have the right to the lands, territories and resources that they traditionally own, occupy or use" (p. 14), establishing the obligation of States to recognize and protect these rights.

Both documents also address the importance of prior, free and informed consultation as an essential mechanism to ensure the participation of indigenous peoples in decisions that affect their rights and interests. Convention No. 169, in its Article 6, establishes that governments must "consult the peoples concerned, through appropriate procedures and, in particular, through their representative institutions, whenever legislative or administrative measures are envisaged that may affect them directly" (p. 19). Article 19 of the UNDPi adds that "States shall consult and cooperate in good faith with the indigenous peoples concerned in order to obtain their free, prior and informed consent before adopting and implementing legislative or administrative measures affecting them" (p. 12).

However, despite these normative advances, many challenges persist in the implementation of these rights. As highlighted by researchers such as Santos (2018), the lack of effectiveness of public policies and the persistence of development models that disregard indigenous rights have resulted in systematic violations, such as the invasion of lands, the illegal exploitation of natural resources, and the marginalization of these peoples. Convention No. 169 and the UNDPi, therefore, not only establish legal parameters, but also serve as advocacy tools for indigenous peoples to claim their rights before States and the international community.

### **3 THE INDIGENOUS PRESENCE IN THE MUNICIPALITIES OF BENJAMIN CONSTANT AND SÃO PAULO DE OLIVENÇA: A HISTORICAL AND RETROSPECTIVE ANALYSIS**

The Alto Solimões region, where the municipalities of Benjamin Constant and São Paulo de Olivença are located, played a strategic role during the colonial and post-colonial periods, serving as border points and interaction points between different ethnic groups, as Alencar (2005) reminds us. The presence of indigenous peoples, such as the Ticuna, Kokama





and Kaixana, among others, has shaped the historical and cultural dynamics of these municipalities. This study sought to understand the historical evolution of these localities, from their foundation to the present day, focusing on the relationship between the State and the indigenous communities.

According to the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE, 2025), São Paulo de Olivença is one of the oldest centers in the region, founded in the seventeenth century (around 1692) by Spanish Jesuit missionaries, and was later incorporated into Portuguese territory by the Treaty of Madrid (1750). The municipality was officially created in 1853, becoming an important center of catechesis and commerce in the Solimões River basin. Its location near the border with Peru and Colombia gave it geopolitical relevance, especially during the rubber booms of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Benjamin Constant, originally called "Alto Solimões", was elevated to the category of municipality in 1898, receiving its current name in honor of the Brazilian military and positivist. Located on the banks of the Solimões River, close to the triple border (Brazil, Peru, Colombia), the municipality was deeply influenced by the migration of northeasterners during the rubber cycle and, later, by conflicts and international territorial agreements, according to data from the municipality taken from the (IBGE, 2025).

The regions of Benjamin Constant and São Paulo de Olivença are traditionally inhabited by indigenous peoples, especially the Tikuna, the largest ethnic group in the area, as well as the Kokama and Kaixana. These peoples faced violent processes of colonization, enslavement and catechesis, especially during the missionary period and the height of rubber exploitation, as he guides us (Silva, 2010).

The Alto Solimões region, where the municipalities of Benjamin Constant and São Paulo de Olivença are located, is a space of fundamental importance for understanding the sociocultural dynamics of the Amazon, marked by the historical presence of various indigenous peoples. Anthropological studies show that this area was traditionally occupied by groups of the Tupi (Kokama) and Tikuna language families, with records of occupation dating back to at least 3,000 years before the present (NEVES, 2006).

The Tikuna, self-styled "Magüta", represent the most numerous indigenous group in the region, with an estimated population of more than 30,000 individuals in Brazil (Oliveira, 2012). According to data from the National Foundation of Indigenous Peoples (Funai, 2023), there are currently 15 approved indigenous lands in the Alto Solimões region, with the Évare I Indigenous Land being one of the most significant in terms of territory and population.

The historical process of contact between these peoples and national society was marked by several critical moments. During the colonial period, the Jesuit missions



established in São Paulo de Olivença from 1692, Souza, (2008) implemented a system of reductions that profoundly altered the indigenous social organization. The report of the Indigenous Missionary Council (CIMI, 2015) points out that this process resulted in significant population loss, estimated at up to 90% for some groups in the first century of contact.

The rubber cycle (1880-1912) represented another critical moment. Santos (2010) argues that thousands of indigenous people were compulsorily recruited to work in the rubber plantations. The Indian Museum (2020) preserves oral accounts that describe the conditions analogous to slavery imposed on native peoples during this period.

#### **4 LINGUISTIC PUBLIC POLICIES AND THE PRESERVATION OF NATIVE LANGUAGES IN THE UPPER SOLIMÕES: THE CASE OF BENJAMIN CONSTANT AND SÃO PAULO DE OLIVENÇA**

The Alto Solimões region, where the municipalities of Benjamin Constant and São Paulo de Olivença are located, is home to a rich linguistic diversity represented mainly by the languages of the Tikuna, Kokama and Kaixana peoples. As Santos (2021, p. 45) highlights in his work "Language Policies in Bilingual Education in Alto Solimões", "the linguistic diversity of this region constitutes an intangible cultural heritage whose preservation requires specific and continuous public policies". However, this diversity faces serious threats, with some languages at critical risk of disappearing, a situation that requires urgent documentation and revitalization actions.

When discussing the theme, Souza and Pereira (2016) understand linguistic public policy as interventions of a social and political nature that emerge from the inseparability between the linguistic world and human reality. According to the perspective of Louis-Jean Calvet (2002), such policies consist of a set of determinations and major decisions that regulate the relations between languages and society. They represent conscious choices, often mediated by the State or other agents, with the aim of managing conflicts and problems inherent to multilingual contexts. Thus, language policies materialize as public policies when, based on a problematized linguistic reality in the social environment, they seek to intervene and change the course of a given situation. In the case of native languages, it is carried out through planning that aims to value, knowledge, and respect for the experience of indigenous communities, defended by Professor Rosinéa Santos (2021).

In Brazil, the legal framework for the protection of indigenous languages was established by the Federal Constitution of 1988, which in its Article 231 recognizes the right of native peoples to their social organization, customs, languages and traditions. This right was reinforced by the ratification of Convention 169 of the International Labor Organization



(ILO, 2002). Rosinéa Santos (2021) analyzes that the implementation of these legal provisions in the Alto Solimões region has occurred unevenly, with significant advances in the Tikuna case, but still insufficient for the Kokama and Kaixana languages.

In the educational sphere, the Law of Guidelines and Bases of National Education (Law No. 9,394/1996) establishes, in its Article 78, that education in indigenous communities must be taught in the mother tongues. As Santos (2021) observes, the great challenge in the region has been the training of indigenous teachers trained to work in bilingual education, especially in communities where the Portuguese language has already become dominant among children". The author reports successful cases in some Tikuna schools, where "the appreciation of the mother tongue in the school environment has contributed to strengthening the cultural identity of students" (SANTOS, 2021, p. 115).

In the Upper Solimões, the Tikuna language, with more than 50 thousand speakers, presents a relatively stable situation, although even languages with many speakers are not immune to the processes of linguistic substitution, especially in urban contexts. The Kokama language, classified by UNESCO as critically endangered, faces even greater challenges. Santos (2021, p.134), warns that "the last fluent speakers of Kokama are mostly elderly, and intergenerational transmission is practically interrupted". The case of Kaixana is even more serious, with the author noting that there are only two speakers with full mastery of the language, both over 70 years old (Santos, 2021).

The experience of the Alto Solimões, analyzed in depth by Santos (2021), demonstrates that the preservation of indigenous languages requires consistent and long-term public policies that recognize and value the role of indigenous communities as the main agents of this process. And it is the speakers themselves, in their daily practices and in their linguistic choices, who will ultimately define the future of these languages.

## 5 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Alto Solimões mesoregion, located in the southwest of the state of Amazonas, covers the municipalities of Amaturá, Atalaia do Norte, Benjamin Constant, Fonte Boa, Jutai, Santo Antônio do Içá, São Paulo de Olivença, Tabatinga and Tonantins. Together, these municipalities add up to an area of 213,281.24 km<sup>2</sup>, which corresponds to approximately 13.67% of the total territory of the state of Amazonas, which has 1,559,168.117 km<sup>2</sup>. This region is marked by high levels of social vulnerability, with very low Human Development Indexes (HDI) (0.499) and high levels of inequality (above 0.55). In addition, the presence of public institutions is fragile, which makes it difficult to solve common problems faced by the population (IPEA, 2015).

For this research, two municipalities that are part of the micro-region of Alto-Solimões were studied, namely, Benjamin Constant and São Paulo de Olivença. The determining factor for the choice of these locations was precisely the significant presence of some indigenous communities existing in them.

According to IBGE (2022), the population of Benjamin Constant was 37,648 inhabitants and the demographic density was 4.32 inhabitants per square kilometer. In comparison with other municipalities in the state, it was in positions 15 and 14 out of 62. In comparison with municipalities across the country, it was in positions 872 and 5013 out of 5570.

Around 1750, the village of Javari, inhabited by the Tikuna Indians and founded by the Jesuits, already existed near the mouth of the Javari River, in the Solimões. This village was initially chosen to host the Captaincy, as established by the Royal Charter of July 18, 1755, issued by the Portuguese Government and addressed to Mendonça Furtado, governor of Grão-Pará. However, after considering the reasons presented by Furtado and approved by the Metropolis, it was decided to transfer the headquarters of the Captaincy to the village of Mariuá, located on the Rio Negro. In the village of São José do Javari, a military detachment and a tax post (registro) remained. However, the place did not offer the appropriate conditions to meet the purposes for which it was intended.

From a historical and current retrospective analysis of the object of study, six indigenous ethnic groups were detected in both municipalities investigated, which are the Tikuna, Kokama, Kambeba, Witoto, Kaixana and Kanamari, with the Tikuna, Kokama and Kambeba peoples remaining in greater numbers. In 2022, 26,619 indigenous people were counted in São Paulo de Olivença. In Benjamin Constant, 17,811 were counted (IBGE, 2022).

Table 1 presents the remaining ethnicities and native languages in the municipalities selected in the research.

**Table 1**

*Remaining ethnicities and native languages in the municipalities selected in the research*

Etnias	Linguas	População	Município
Ticuna	Ticuna	13.578	São Paulo de Olivença
		9.276	Benjamin Constant
kokama	Kokama e Português	2.893	São Paulo de Olivença
		1.919	Benjamin Constant
kambeba	Kambeba e Português	1.093	São Paulo de Olivença

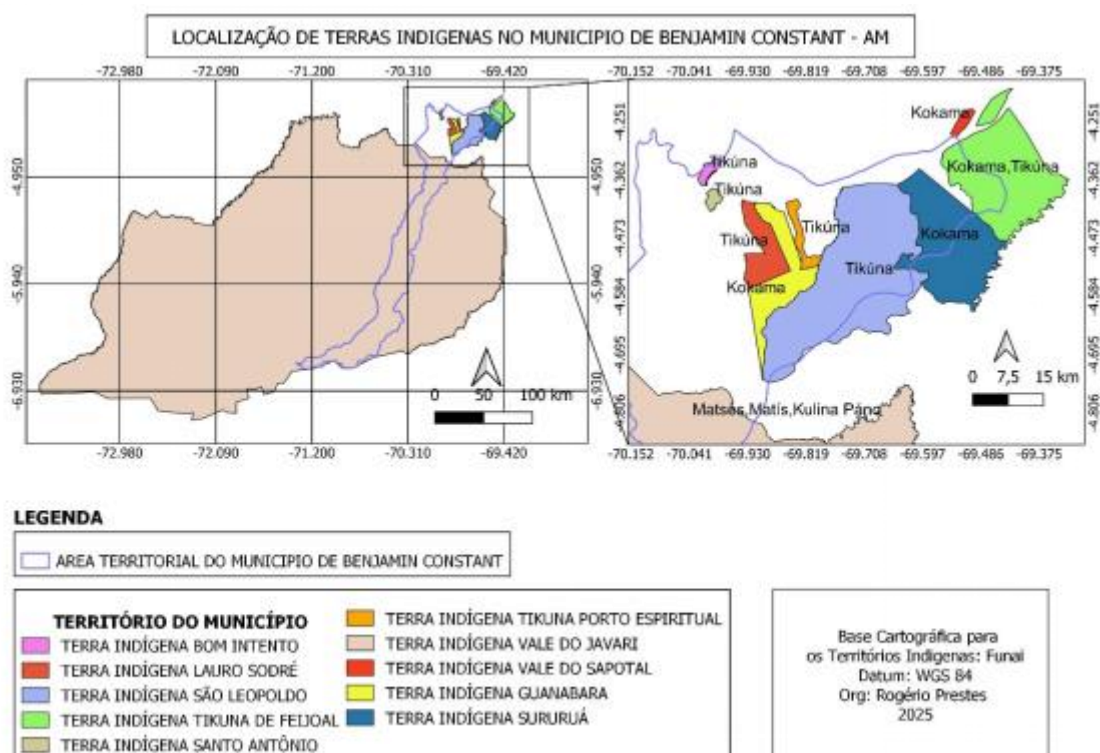
Source: Development Plan for Indigenous Peoples (PRODERAM, 2020).

According to the IBGE (2022), the native languages, Kaixana, Witoto and Kanamari are still present in the region of the two municipalities. However, they are at risk of extinction.

Regarding the location of these ethnic groups and their respective languages, the following mapping was carried out (Figure 1).

**Figure 1**

*Cartography of the remaining native languages in the municipality of Benjamin Constant/AM*



Source: Rogério Prestes (2025).

The figure above shows in detail the region of the municipality of Benjamin Constant with the indigenous territories present. In these regions, the native languages Tikuna and

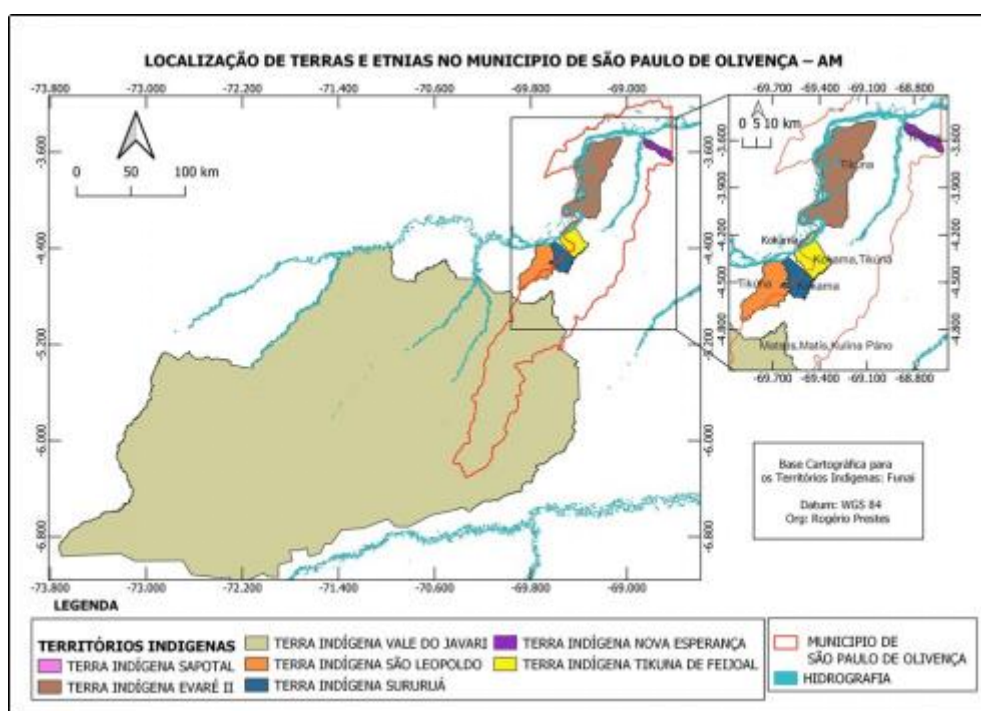


Kokama remain. The population is quite significant of people who declare themselves indigenous, totaling ten territories, in addition to the indigenous people who live in the urban center.

In relation to São Paulo de Olivença, the presence of the languages Tikuna, Kokama, and Kambeba was found (Figure 2).

**Figure 2**

*Cartography of the remaining native languages in the municipality of São Paulo de Olivença/AM*



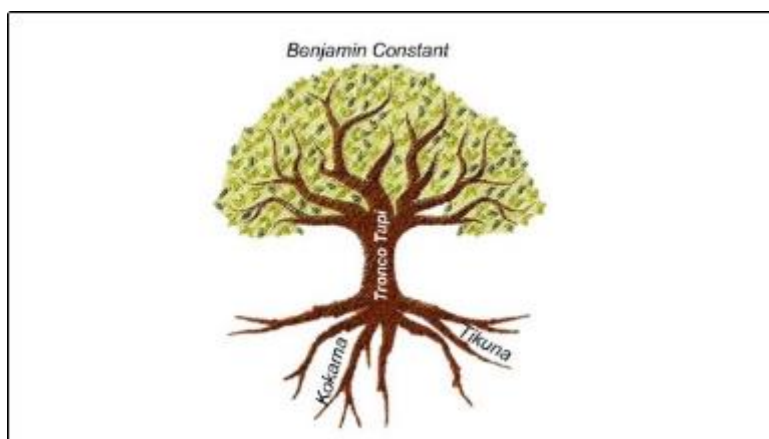
Source: Rogério Prestes (2025).

The ethnic groups present in the municipality of São Paulo de Olivença are mostly located in indigenous lands, totaling seven registered indigenous territories. Without neglecting to highlight, the population that declares itself indigenous present in the urban center of the municipality (not identified on the map).

From the identification and location of the indigenous ethnicities and their languages in the municipalities, it was also possible to identify the linguistic trunks of the languages that remain both in Benjamin Constant and in São Paulo de Olivença. The identification of trunks is of paramount importance to understand the trajectory of native languages to the present day and their modification processes. In Benjamin Constant, the Tikuna and Kokama languages, belonging to the Tupi trunk, are present, Figure 3. In São Paulo de Olivença there are the Tikuna, Kokama and Kambeba languages, also belonging to the Tupi trunk, Figure 4.

**Figure 3**

*Identification of linguistic trunks in the municipality of Benjamin Constant/AM*



Source: Rogério prestes (2025).

**Figure 4**

*Identification of linguistic trunks in the municipality of São Paulo de Olivença/AM*



Source: Rogério Prestes (2025).

Knowing the linguistic trunks of Brazil's native languages is essential to understand the richness and cultural diversity of native peoples. These trunks, such as Tupi, Macro-Jê and Aruak, represent language families interconnected by histories, migrations and ancestral relationships. Studying them helps to reconstruct pre-colonial history, revealing how different ethnicities communicated, organized, and interacted with the territory. In addition to historical value, this knowledge is essential for linguistic preservation. Many indigenous languages are threatened with extinction, and understanding their structures and connections facilitates the creation of revitalization public policies, such as bilingual education and linguistic documentation. It also strengthens the identity of indigenous peoples, ensuring that their voices and knowledge are not erased.

Another important objective of this study was to verify whether the indigenous population living in both municipalities was attending higher education. This question was



raised from the need to verify whether the public linguistic policies aimed at the indigenous population and their respective languages were in fact in force. In view of this, table 2 below shows the number of people who self-declare themselves indigenous and who are enrolled in universities (IBGE, 2022).

**Table 2**

*Number of indigenous people enrolled in higher education in the municipality of São Paulo de Olivença/AM*

São Paulo de Olivença - AM	TOTAL	2084	257
	HOMENS	1102	100
	MULHERES	982	157

Source: IBGE (2022)

**Table 3**

*Number of indigenous people enrolled in higher education in the municipality of Benjamin Constant/AM*

Benjamin Constant - AM	TOTAL	1058	471
	HOMENS	527	252
	MULHERES	531	219

Source: IBGE (2022)

The presence of indigenous people in higher education in Brazil has grown in recent decades, thanks to affirmative action policies, such as quotas and student permanence programs. However, the challenges are still many, especially with regard to language barriers. Many indigenous peoples have mother tongues other than Portuguese, and the lack of adequate linguistic support can make it difficult for these students to access and remain in universities. Although there are laws that ensure these rights, educational institutions still do not meet the linguistic specificities of these peoples.

Public language policies are essential to ensure the sustainability of the remaining native languages in higher education institutions. Projects focused on documentation, bilingual teaching and cultural appreciation are fundamental in this process. The creation of teaching materials in indigenous languages, the training of indigenous teachers and the implementation of schools that respect intercultural education strengthen the linguistic identity of these peoples. In addition, initiatives such as the production of dictionaries, grammars, and audiovisual records help to keep oral traditions and ancestral knowledge alive. And, the guarantee of linguistic rights is also linked to social justice, as it recognizes



the autonomy and dignity of native peoples. Public policies that encourage the use of native languages in formal spaces, such as the media, public administration, and legal systems, contribute to a more inclusive and plural society.

## 6 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The present research sought to analyze the future of the remaining native languages in the municipalities of Benjamin Constant and São Paulo de Olivença (Alto Solimões/AM), focusing on the assumptions of ethnoлингistics in the context of the sustainability of language policies in higher education. The question that guided this work was to know what are the limits and possibilities of the linguistic sustainability of the remaining native languages in the municipalities of Benjamin Constant and São Paulo de Olivença/AM, from a retrospective, historical and current approach to the object of study.

The process adopted resulted in a learning that made it possible to know the ethnoлингistic diversity of the Alto-Solimões micro-region, the rights of Indigenous Peoples, the presence of indigenous peoples in the respective municipalities researched and the assumptions of linguistic public policies.

The results obtained reveal important data on linguistic diversity and the challenges faced by the indigenous peoples of this region, highlighting the urgency of actions aimed at the preservation and revitalization of these languages.

The research identified the presence of languages such as Tikuna, Kokama, and Kambeba, each with its own particularities and contexts of use. These languages, belonging to the Tupi linguistic trunk, as well as isolated languages such as Tikuna, reflect the cultural and historical richness of the region. However, preliminary data also point to a worrying reality: many of these languages are in the process of eroding, with a reduction in the number of speakers and a decrease in their use in community and family contexts.

One of the most relevant aspects observed was the relationship between the vitality of languages and local public policies. The fragility of public institutions and the lack of specific initiatives for the promotion of indigenous languages have contributed to the weakening of these languages. In addition, migration to urban areas and the influence of majority languages, such as Portuguese, have negatively impacted the intergenerational transmission of native languages.

In summary, the research reinforces the need for urgent and coordinated actions to ensure the survival of indigenous languages in the Upper Solimões. The continuity of research and the expansion of dialogue with local communities will be essential to consolidate strategies that promote the revitalization of these languages and, consequently, the



appreciation of indigenous cultures and identities in the Amazon from a sustainable perspective. It is believed that the preservation of native languages is a fundamental step towards building a more inclusive society.

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