

REVIEW

An outline of place-name research in Brazil

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ABSTRACT

This review highlights the main topics presented in the panel *Place-name research in Brazil: contemporary studies*, which constituted an online event at *Abralin Ao Vivo* during Covid-19 pandemic period. Aiming “to provide the academic community in the area of Linguistics and other interested with an outline of place-name research in Brazil”, debaters succeed in discussing relevant theoretical, methodological and applied aspects concerning national toponyms, especially those carried out in recent decades, contributing to scientific dissemination and to peer interaction and concluding that Brazilian place-name research has been increasing.

RESUMO

Esta resenha destaca os principais tópicos apresentados na mesa redonda *A pesquisa toponímica no Brasil: estudos contemporâneos*, que compôs a programação de conferências remotas *Abralin Ao Vivo*, durante o período de pandemia pela Covid-19. Com a finalidade de “fornecer à comunidade acadêmica na área de Linguística e demais interessados um panorama do estado de arte da pesquisa toponímica no Brasil”, os/as debatedores/as proporcionaram o conhecimento e a discussão de relevantes aspectos teórico-metodológicos e aplicados em relação aos nomes geográficos do país, especialmente nas últimas décadas, contribuindo para a divulgação científica e para a interlocução entre pares e constatando que os projetos de pesquisa na área têm se expandido.



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PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Toponímia brasileira. Toponímia Histórica. Topônimos em Libras.

The panel *Place-name research in Brazil: contemporary studies* constituted an online conference at *Abralin Ao Vivo* on July 23, 2020, during Covid-19 pandemic period. By providing academic community in Linguistics and related areas with an outline of place-name research in Brazil, Aparecida Negri Isquerdo, PhD (UFMS/CNPq), Maria Cândida Trindade Costa de Seabra, PhD (UFMG) and Alexandre Melo de Sousa, PhD (UFAC), for two hours and thirty minutes, moderated by Karylleila dos Santos Andrade, PhD (UFT) and simultaneously translated into the Brazilian Sign Language (Libras), discussed on theoretical, methodological and applied aspects and contributions carried out in recent decades.

These researchers emphasized that panel as a fitting tribute to Professor Maria Vicentina de Paula do Amaral Dick, PhD (University of São Paulo), a mandatory reference for Brazilian toponymists, since she has been responsible for the systematization and the *status* of Toponomastics nationwide in the last four decades. So, Toponomastics has been an established academic area in Brazil, present in undergraduate and postgraduate programs in Languages and Linguistics in diverse regions of the country (A PESQUISA, 2020).

Ms. Isquerdo, in her speech *Toponymy as a linguistics science research in Brazil: an overview*, emphasized the toponymic sign as subject for linguistic investigation and by presenting a state-of-the-art, she stressed that Brazilian Toponomastics has assumed theoretical foundations from French and Iberian researchers (e.g., Albert Dauzat, Leite de Vasconcellos and Joseph Piel). She also presented a four-phased periodization for Brazilian place-name studies (1901-1979; 1980-1989; 1990-2009; and 2010-present), updating her previous three-phased one (ISQUERDO, 2012), by verifying the growth of master's and doctoral degree research in the last decade.

By describing objectives, scopes and bibliographies of toponymic atlases in Brazil, Ms. Isquerdo listed the main Brazil's regional projects, such as Toponymic Atlas of Mato Grosso do Sul (ATEMS), under her coordination. She stressed the importance of cartographic bases for data collection and presented the most replicable model for data coding – the toponymic cards proposed by Dick (2004). She described interdisciplinary research bearing on dialectology, ethnolinguistics, cartography, geography and history; highlighted the training of younger researchers with solid theoretical and methodological knowledge in Linguistics, as well as argued about the formation of network databases, as she affirms that future funds must be earmarked for this dataset model.

In *Historical Toponymy*, Professor Maria Cândida Seabra, coordinator of the project Toponymic Atlas of Minas Gerais (ATEMIG), related interfaces between place-name studies and historical linguistics. Ms. Seabra features theoretical aspects to proper names, especially to toponyms (e.g., motivation, identification and reference), and focuses on names seen as linguistic and cultural artifacts relevant for memory and identity. For this, she recalls some theoretical-methodological guidelines by Dauzat (1926), as the establishment of dialectal layers; grammar of toponyms; etymological reconstitution of substratum and adstratum languages; and use of historical documents (apud DICK, 2000, p. 231). So as to describe an interinstitutional study, such as tracing a toponymic *continuum* for the botanical name *buriti* (*Mauritia flexuosa*) in the states of Minas Gerais and Mato Grosso do Sul. Seabra also deals with diatopic and diachronic variation, presenting early forms collected from historical documents and maps. Seabra also presented an ongoing partnership research project at

UFMG which constitutes a set of *toponymic patrimonialization*, concerning the preserving, cataloging and exposure of toponymic data in museums and on the internet. Finally, when quoting Martínez Lema (2018, p. 9), she reinforced the mutual benefits in the interface between Toponymy and historical linguistics.

The theme addressed by Alexandre Melo de Sousa was quite innovative for most people – the description and analyze of place names in *Libras* (Brazilian Sign Language), Brazil's co-official language. This professor says that place names in Brazilian Portuguese, an oral language, and those in *Libras*, which is a visual-spatial language widely used by Brazilian deaf community, coexist socially and these cannot be understood as exclusive transliterations of those toponymic signs in Portuguese.

Due to the specifications of that material, Sousa didactically presents specificities of this linguistic system, such as the adoption of *signwriting* as a system for writing name-signs; he highlighted iconicity as a relevant feature of toponymic lexicon in *Libras*, as well as describing and analyzing, in grammatical and semantic-referential levels, name-signs of the state of Acre. When unraveling some methodological procedures, it is noticeable the adaptation of toponymic card by Dick (2004), as well as a coherent stratification of subjects of Acre deaf community for data validation.

Sousa argued about semantic-referential particularities in the comparison of toponyms in *Libras* and in Brazilian Portuguese and presented the free-access web software *Toponímia em Libras* (SOUSA; QUADROS, 2019). He claimed that the software has been a digital repository of Acre's nomenclature and, according to him, it can suit as a replicable dataset nationwide. Finally, he described a state-of-the-art about place-names in *Libras*; congratulated the *Libras* interpreters for their help in accessibility and thanked for making studies performed in non-hegemonic regions perceptible.

After the speeches, Karylleila Andrade, coordinator of the Indigenous Origin Toponymic Atlas of the State of Tocantins (ATITO), and moderator of this panel, recalled the hectic interaction on chats and greeted the watchers, far from being considered a lay audience, highly constituted of professors and researchers at public universities. Those questions submitted provoked debate on theoretical-methodological and analytical challenges and prospects for place-name research in Brazil, especially in the current state of meager funding; the tendency to regional scope projects, dealing with diverse place-name *corpora*, as established by professor Dick; considerations about the toponymic continuity or change concerning totalitarian referents; functions and limitations of official boards, such as Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), regarding georeferencing, reambulation and cartography of toponymic data considering a continental-size country like Brazil. In their final speech, all lectures saluted the audience and thanked the Brazilian Linguists Association (ABRALIN) for promoting that event.

Regarding place-name contemporary studies, only a part of the surveys could be presented due to time limitation, so that we add other issues that may expand the theoretical framework carried out, such as the emerging interdisciplinary interfaces bearing on sociolinguistics, cultural studies, language contacts and cognition, especially since the 1990s (HOUGH, 2016); and the use of non-prototypical name categories, which demonstrates conceptual and methodological expansion concerning place

names. We highlight the importance not only of making Brazilian toponymic research known abroad but of getting to know by Brazilian toponymists contemporary studies carried out internationally.

As an addendum to the discussions pertinently exposed, we highlight that presentations like this are necessary, among other reasons, so as to show lay people and linguists from other fields that Toponomastics is not limited to “[...] a list of words almost exclusively of Tupian origin, followed by a probable etymology, running out of methods, objectives and scope”, as Carlos Drumond used to recall (cf. DICK, 1990, p. II). We claim that these toponymists achieved that objective and that such online activities contribute to the scientific divulgation to a broader public and promote peer-interaction on adequate or incomplete toponymic surveys. So, we recommend that both academic and non-academic communities watch that panel session so as to get to know about place-name research in Brazil.

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