CHAPTER 4

The Demographics of Colonization in Paraguay and the Emergence of Paraguayan Guarani

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1 Introduction

Paraguay is the only country in Latin America where an originally indigenous language has both gained official status and is spoken by the vast majority of the population. The typological, structural and lexical features of this language and its sociolectal varieties, known in the literature as Paraguayan Guarani, have been analyzed in language contact studies alongside contemporary sociolinguistic aspects of Paraguayan bilingualism. However, an account of how the language emerged as a result of particular circumstances during conquest and early colonization is still missing. The initial socio-demographic circumstances became decisive factors in the early emergence of Paraguayan Guarani. Such circumstances include, among others: a) the size and composition of the Guarani population at the time of conquest; b) the size and pattern of early Spanish immigration and settlement in Paraguay; and c) the patterns of settlement and organization of Guarani population both in Spanish and Indian villages. This contribution addresses the emergence of Paraguayan Guarani from a social and demographic point of view, focusing on the first century of Spanish colonization.

Paraguayan Guarani (henceforth PG) is a Tupian language spoken in Paraguay, the Argentinian province of Corrientes and several municipalities of the Brazilian state of Matto Grosso do Sul. According to the 2002 census,

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2 In accordance with my previous work and that of other scholars, I use the glottonym “Paraguayan Guarani”, from Spanish Guaraní Paraguayo, as a common label of geographical, social and historical significance referring to distinct sociolectal varieties of non-indigenous Guarani spoken in urban and rural areas which show varying degrees of Spanish influence. While “Paraguayan Guarani” has gained currency in the linguistic and sociolinguistic literature, other equivalent glottonyms such as “Mestizo Guarani”, from Spanish Guaraní Criollo,
PG is spoken nowadays in Paraguay by 87% of its population including Spanish-PG bilinguals and PG monolinguals above five years of age.\(^3\) PG has genealogical links to Jesuitic Guarani—the language that emerged in the Jesuit missions in the seventeenth century and was spoken by Indians and missionaries—and ethnic Guarani—the language currently spoken by indigenous groups such as Paí Tavytera, Mbya, Ava and Ache.\(^4\) Nowadays, PG is minimally intelligible with ethnic (and Jesuitic) Guarani and therefore is considered a linguistically related but independent language. A number of morphosyntactic features in Jesuitic and ethnic Guarani explain their minimal intelligibility with PG, although the contribution of Spanish lexical borrowing to sociolectal varieties of contemporary PG is mainly responsible for the differences. Highly Hispanicized varieties of PG are referred in the literature as *jopara* Guarani and colloquial Guarani.

PG is characterized by the ubiquitous presence of Spanish lexical and grammatical borrowings as well as by the frequent switching of Guarani and Spanish sentences, clauses and phrases in discourse. Notwithstanding, PG is neither a creole language nor a bilingual mixed language similar to those documented in the literature (cf. Bakker & Mous 1994; Thomason 1997; Gómez Rendón 2008a). Melià (1982) describes PG as a ‘third language’ linguistically distinct from Guarani and Spanish, but Kallfell (2011) maintains that highly

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3 As of February 2016, the results of the latest, 2012 nation-wide census are not published. The last Permanent Survey of Households (2012) gives 36.3% monolingual Guarani speakers above five years and 24.2% monolingual Spanish speakers above the same age. The same survey gives a percentage of Spanish-Guarani bilingual speakers around 73.2%. These numbers seem contradictory when compared to those of previous censuses inasmuch as the percentage of Guarani monolinguals does not show a progressive decrease as expected whereas the percentage of bilinguals does show a steady increase (49% > 59% > 73%). All in all, these percentages evidence that societal bilingualism was not prevalent in Paraguay two decades ago, but such status would be achieved in the next twenty years as the diatopic gap between PG (rural) and Spanish (urban) is gradually bridged with a nation-wide bilingualism.

4 Jesuitic Guarani was the outcome of a standardization process led by Jesuit missionaries. This process included not only producing phonological spelling, grammars, dictionaries and all kind of materials for religious indoctrination but also erasing differences among dialects of indigenous Guarani present in the missions (Melià 1988). Standardization efforts were strengthened by a gradual process of dialect leveling during one hundred and fifty years of Jesuitical missionary administration and resulted in the creation of a *Guarani koiné* (Lustig 1996: 23).