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Pomeranian language in the Brazilian state of  
Espírito Santo**

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## **An important contribution to the research of the Pomeranian language in the Brazilian state of Espírito Santo**

Beate Höhmann. 2010. *Sprachplanung und Spracherhalt innerhalb einer pommerischen Sprachgemeinschaft. Eine soziolinguistische Studie in Espírito Santo/Brasilien*. Bern: Peter Lang

Through the consideration of the Brazilian language policy and the language planning in the towns of Santa Maria de Jetibá, Alto Santa Maria and Caramuru in the state of Espírito Santo, Beate Höhmann provides a complex picture of the current language use of the Pomeranian speech community and predicts the further development of the Pomeranian language in the examined area.

The research aims to provide the newest results about the current language situation and about promoting Pomeranian language maintenance in Espírito Santo. This Pomeranian is already extinct in Pomerania - its country of origin - but it is still spoken by the descendants of farmers, who emigrated in the second half of the 19th Century to southern Brazil. The aim of the study is to analyse the factors that affect language preservation and language vitality in the investigated speech community. Moreover, language policy and language planning among the Pomeranians are further discussed.

The empirical basis of the study consists of 263 questionnaires, interviews and participant observations in the studied speech community. However, the reference to the last two sources is made only implicitly.

The main part of the study is the third chapter, which is dedicated to the factors of Pomeranian language maintenance. Here, the author analyzes sociolinguistic variables as the first of four factor groups. The relatively high birth rate of Pomeranian immigrants and their high mono-ethnic concentration are identified as factors promoting language maintenance. Furthermore, the supportive effect of rurality, the high degree of the speech community isolation, the low level of industrialization and close network connections are emphasized as supportive factors in language preservation. The low presence of Pomeranian in the media, however, is described as a threat to language maintenance.

In the second group of factors of language preservation, Höhmann discusses variables that have an influence on the ethnolinguistic identity of the speech community members. The relevance of the Pomeranian language as an identification marker is obvious. In addition, the

self-image of the Pomeranian descendants as an independent group with common linguistic and cultural background promotes intra-ethnic cohesion, and thus also language preservation. At the same time, Höhmann points out in this context the drastic decline in prestige of the Pomeranian language, which occurred as a result of its suppression and the prohibition during the nationalization campaign in Brazil, and also during the Second World War. This decline in prestige was manifested in the increasing use of the majority language, especially among the younger generation (G1). Between generations, a significant difference can be observed: „Die positive Spracheinstellung von G1, GII und GIII [der Großelterngeneration] steigt stetig, so dass sich die Differenz von GIII und G1 in Bezug auf die Sprachpräferenz des Pommerischen nahezu halbiert“ (p. 68). As possible explanations of these results, the author points to two primary influences: a negative ethnolinguistic identity, and the integrative orientation of the youngest generation.

The third group of language preservation factors analysed by Höhmann is the religiosity and cultural heritage of the speech community. On this topic, she emphasizes the special role of the Lutheran Church in helping to maintain the Pomeranian language. The Lutheran Church is described as an important factor in education, on the one hand, and as a possible barrier to the acculturation with the Catholic majority society on the other. Furthermore, the cultivation of numerous traditional Pomeranian celebrations, along with other parts of the cultural heritage such as prayers, songs and storytelling, are identified as supporting language maintenance.

The fourth and final group of language preservation factors discussed by the author are variables of language use and language acquisition. With respect to intergenerational language transmission, the data analysis shows a continuous decrease of language use that is diaphasical in a mirror image (p. 87-89.): While the Pomeranian language is mainly used in private domains, Portuguese is preferred in public domains. Portuguese is acquired by the youngest generation at an earlier age than by older generations, which means that the younger generation develops better language skills in the majority language. By contrast the linguistic competence of oldest group of speakers (GIII) in Portuguese is half that of the younger generation (p. 99). Taking these two developments together, the probability of sociolinguistic assimilation increases in favour of the use of Brazilian Portuguese.

In the fourth and fifth chapters, language policy and language planning of the Pomeranian language in Espírito Santo are examined, and its language vitality is calculated on these bases. Its standardization (by creating a Pomeranian - Portuguese dictionary) is displayed. Subsequently, the author describes the Brazilian PROEPO project (acronym for Programa

de Educação Pomerana), which is dedicated to the Pomeranian language and the preservation of culture through the implementation of the Pomeranian language and culture into public education curricula.

The language vitality of the Pomeranian community is determined based on (socio-) linguistic, psychological, cultural and religious factors. The author applies here the UNESCO factors for the classification of language vitality, and situates the interviewee speech community in the middle of the vitality scale. In summary, the author concludes: „Die Verwendung der Minderheitensprache sinkt intergenerational, was auf lange Sicht zu einer Unterbrechung der IS führen könnte und damit zu einem graduellen Sprachverlust“ (p. 155). Despite the difficulty of the long-term maintenance of the Pomeranian language, however, its future development is predicted positively and optimistically by the majority of respondents (p. 157).

A positive point of the study is the wide literature base, which includes Internet sources and unpublished academic works from Germany and Brazil. Critical to note is the terminological uncertainty. Thus, some important terms and concepts have not been defined by the author, or their alternate use has not been differentiated from other uses: Vitalität / ethnolinguistische Vitalität, integrative Orientierung, Code-switching / Sprachwechsel. Furthermore, some important factors of language maintenance have been disregarded, although they were mentioned in section 2.1.1. These include, among others, contact with the origin country and the politics of marriage. Also, the degree of typological proximity between the contact languages has only been annotated with one sentence, thus neglecting a detailed examination (p. 37).

It is also not clear to the reader why some factors are corroborated with the data from the questionnaire survey and others do not (for example, the self-image of Pomeranians, their relationship with Germany, function of the Pomeranian language as identity marker, attitudes of the language community toward other groups). The reader would like to learn more about the evaluation of the interviews. Furthermore, the verification of the first hypothesis is inconsistent because of the inconsequent consideration of preschool age on the one hand (p. 96) and school age on the other hand (p. 155). Inappropriate are evaluative terms such as Apostille (p. 189) and Handreichung (p. 96) that perpetuate the lower prestige of the Pomeranian language.

It would be desirable, finally, if the author sharpened and systematised the described concepts with respect to the empirical results. This study, which goes beyond linguistics in

the narrow sense, can be strongly recommended to all interested in minority research, particularly in language islands.

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Research Interests: language contact, multilingualism and language islands

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