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Sommario/riassunto

The sociolinguistic study, carried out over a period of five years, delineates the development of the Awetí language, spoken by a small Tupian group in the Upper Xingu multilingual area in Central Brazil, during a critical moment when the community split into two. The empirical analysis on individual language competences and language use in the Awetí community has revealed a high level of bilingualism with Kamaiurá, a related language of the Tupi-Guaranian branch. Portuguese, used as a lingua franca and dominant language of bilingual instruction, plays a limited role within the community. The overall pattern of distribution of languages for each Awetí village in combination with developments from outside may allow some conclusions about the viability of the Awetí language in the near future. Keywords: Linguistic vitality; bilingualism; sociolinguistics and documentation.