

The Angola Language Mapping Project: A Countrywide Sociolinguistic Survey

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In 2012, the Angolan Ministry of Culture initiated an ongoing language mapping project with the purpose of providing information that will help promote access to education and the use of indigenous Angolan languages in all domains. The main objective is to identify the distinct languages in Angola and enumerate their dialects as an aid to decision making regarding potential language development programs.

Little linguistic research was conducted in Angolan territory during the colonial era and the subsequent civil war. Redinha's (1962) work on the distribution of ethnolinguistic groups drew on prior sources as well as his own research and brought together the best information available at the time. Fernandes and Ntongo (2002) created an overview of Angolan languages, which is the most detailed resource produced since independence.

In 2011, the Institute of National Languages distributed a preliminary fact-finding survey to be completed by the provincial culture directorates, requesting a list of languages, dialects and ethnic groups present in each municipality of a province. The results of this survey were then used to target specific areas for fieldwork. The researchers collected wordlists for lexicostatistical and comparative analysis, conducted comprehension testing, and facilitated participatory group interviews for a perceptual dialectology study.

Weighing the currently available data, the countrywide survey has identified 50 distinct languages spoken within Angola's borders. Within 14 of these languages, it has been possible thus far to identify a total of 65 dialects and plot them on a series of provincial maps.

The main product of the language mapping project is an up-to-date language atlas of Angola (forthcoming), showing the area where speakers of each language are in the majority and the distribution of known dialects. It is hoped that this will not only provide useful information but also encourage further research and documentation of Angola's ethnolinguistic diversity.

References

- Fernandes, João and Zavoni Ntongo. 2002. *Angola: Povos e línguas*. Luanda: Editorial Nzila.
Redinha, José. 1962. *Distribuição étnica de Angola*. Luanda: Imprensa Nacional de Angola.