

How I “discovered” the Portuguese of Misiones, Argentina

Since graduate school I had been aware of the “Fronterizo” Portuguese spoken in northern Uruguay, and in 2002 I made my first visit to the area, in Rivera which has a dry open border with its Brazilian neighbor Livramento.



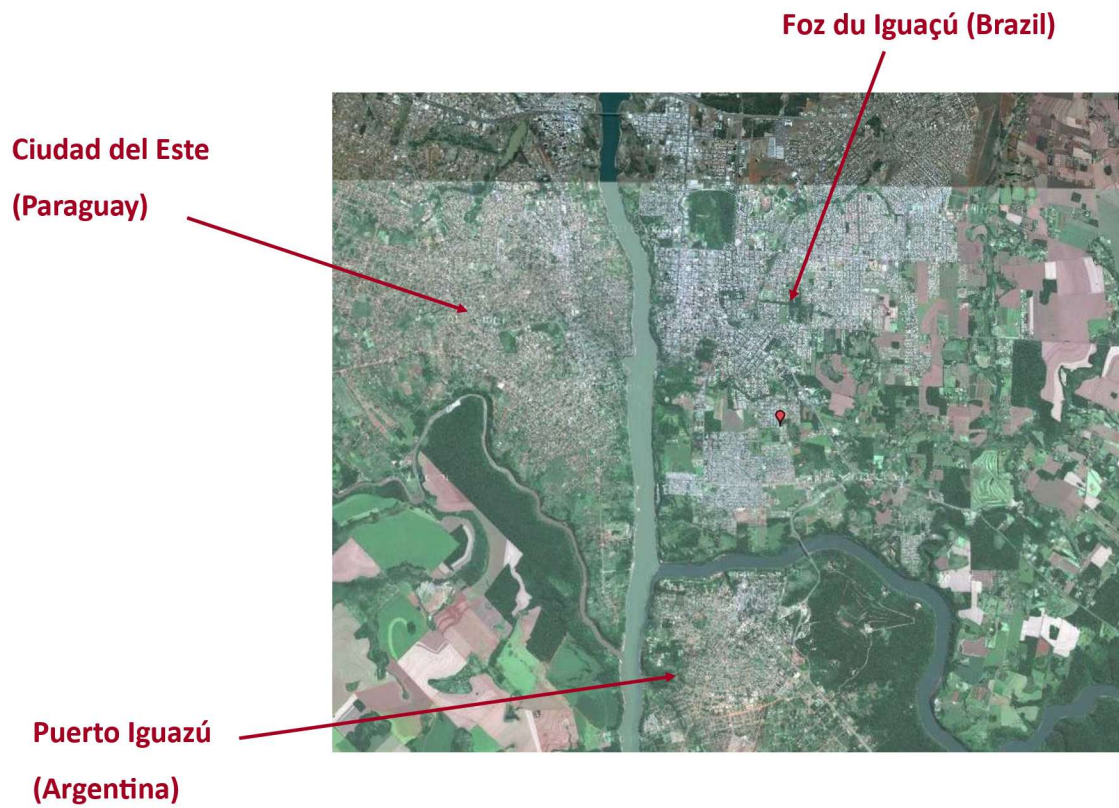
Simply walking down the street one enters the other country, without any barriers or border controls (I took this picture with one foot in each country).



In returned for more data collection in 2006, while I was teaching a seminar at the national university in Montevideo. By this time I was interested in exploring other possible open border configurations, which eventually led into a comparative study of communities bordering on Brazil in Argentina, Paraguay, Bolivia, Peru, Colombia, and Venezuela. But first I looked at maps of South America and saw that in extreme northeastern Argentina there was a town called Bernardo de Irigoyen, which according to the low-resolution maps I could find, seemed to have a dry border with two adjacent Brazilian towns: Dionisio Cerqueira (Rio Grande do Sul) and Barracão (Santa Catarina).



Information in Irigoyen was sketchy (this was ~ 2006), but it seemed worth a try. I needed some initial contacts, and I recalled that Laura Colantoni (U. of Toronto) had done research in NE Argentina, so I asked her if she had any contacts in Misiones. Through a chain of references I finally contact Liliam “Vicky” Prytz Nilsson at the Ministerio de Educación in Posadas, at the time in charge of bilingual schools throughout the province. We eventually became great personal friends, and collaborated extensively in my research on Portuguese-Spanish bilingualism in Misiones. She gave me the name of Fátima Zaragoza, a teacher at the Escuela de Frontera in Irigoyen. Fátima (who also became a friend) offered to help me out if I managed to get to Irigoyen, so my planning started to be more concrete. In 2008 I was in Paraguay giving lectures and continuing my work on the Afro-Paraguayan communities, so I took a bus from Asunción to Ciudad del Este, on the triple border, then a friend of a friend drove me to Puerto Iguazú in Misiones, Argentina (passing through Foz do Iguazú, Brazil). He picked me up late so I missed the direct bus from Iguazú to Irigoyen; I took a bus to Eldorado, then another bus on the long winding road to Bernardo de Irigoyen.



The bus left me off at a traffic intersection, and I walked into the small town, whose 2-block “main street” ends with the customs post at the Brazilian border with Dionisio de Cerqueira.



After leaving my things at the tiny Hotel Noá, I walked a few blocks to the Escuela de Frontera and met with Fátima.





Since I assumed that while all residents would have passive knowledge of Portuguese, only people directly involved with Brazil would speak Portuguese (as a second language). So Fátima gave me contacts to interview a number of shopkeepers and other people with activities relating to Brazil. And as I wandered around, the concept of a completely open dry border became increasingly clear.





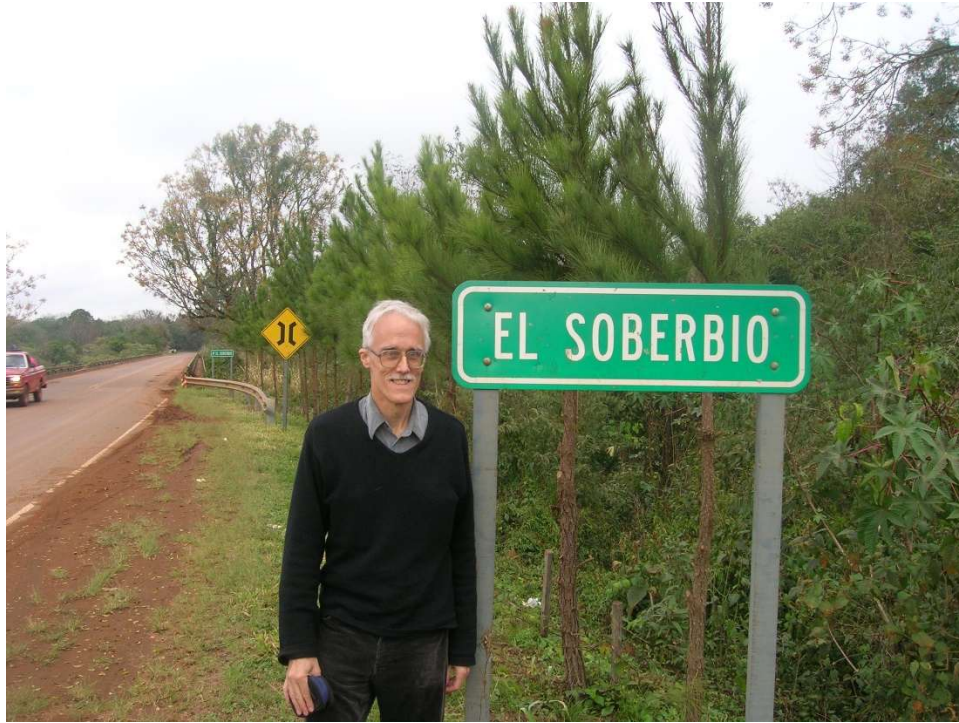
ARGENTINA



BRAZIL

ARGENTINA

But the real revelation came when I met again with Fátima at the school, where she took me to the lunchroom to interview some of the kitchen workers in Portuguese. At the same time she was talking with several children in Portuguese; I assumed they were from Brazil (there was an interchange of teachers between the two cities on either side of the border), but Fátima told me that in the *colonias* (rural settlements), most people spoke Portuguese as a first language. From that point on, I decided to explore Misiones Portuguese, first during a return trip to Irigoyen, and in subsequent years, at strategic towns and rural areas along the northern and eastern border of the province: Puerto Iguazú, Comandante Andresito, San Antonio, Pozo Azul, El Soberbio, Colonia Alicia, Colonia Aurora, 25 de Mayo, Alba Posse, Santa Rita, San Francisco, Panambí, San Javier, etc.































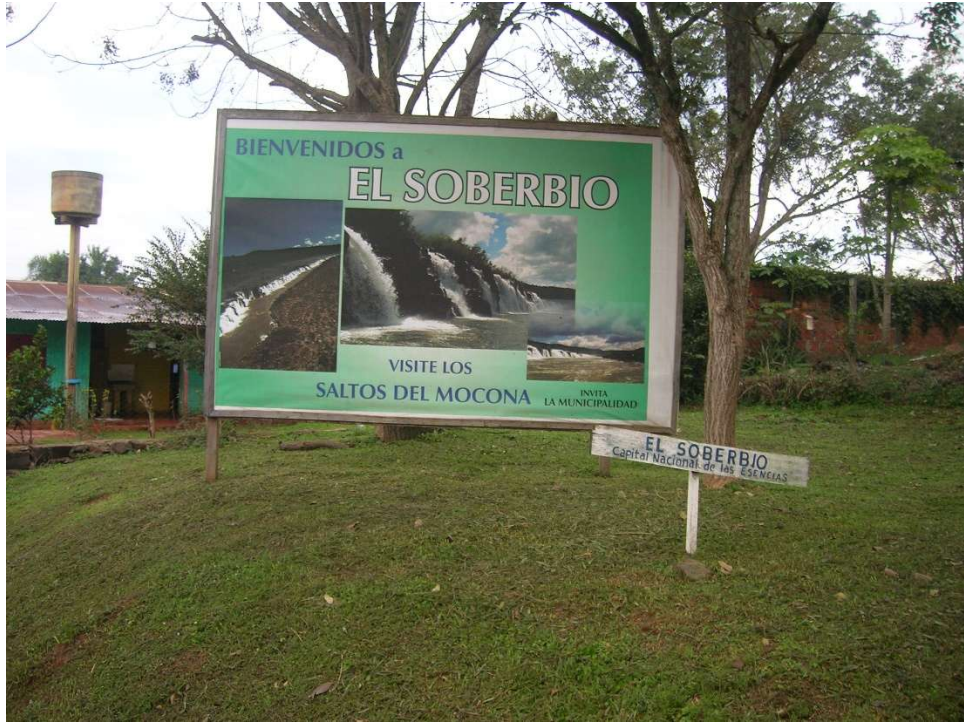


















Misiones Portuguese had appeared in some literature, including stories by the Uruguayan Horacio Quiroga and the Misionero author José Antonio Ramallo and in scholarly semiotic work by Dr. Liliana Daviña of the UNAM (<http://repositorio.filo.uba.ar/handle/filodigital/2902> ; <http://dspace5.filo.uba.ar/handle/filodigital/4417>), but I believe I was the first scholar to provide a complete comparative linguistic analysis of Misiones Portuguese, which led to a number of lectures and workshops in Misiones. I was also fortunate to meet Ivone da Maia, a Brazilian native who teaches Portuguese at the Universidad Nacional de Misiones. Ivone accompanied me on several field excursions and we presented at some lecture events.

Ivone Carissini da Maia: “Estudio sociolingüístico del portugués que se habla en la provincia de Misiones (PDM)” (Universidad Nacional de Misiones, 2021)

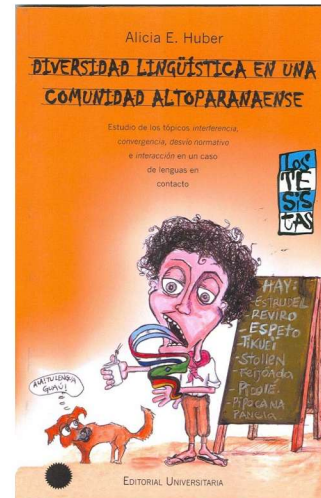
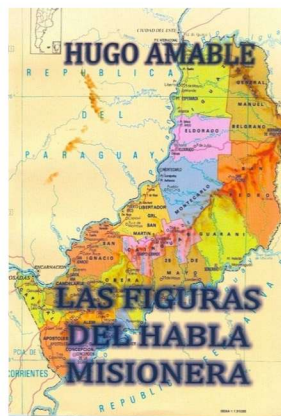
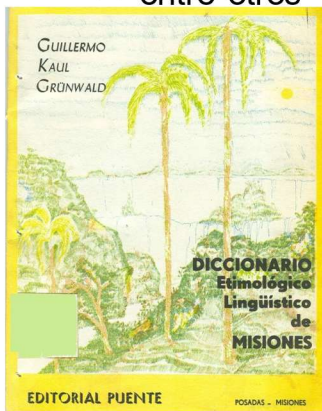
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Her Master’ thesis, also on Misiones Portuguese, is at:

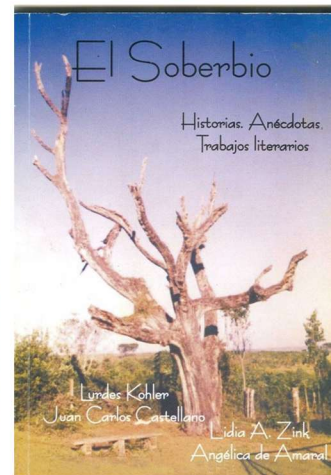
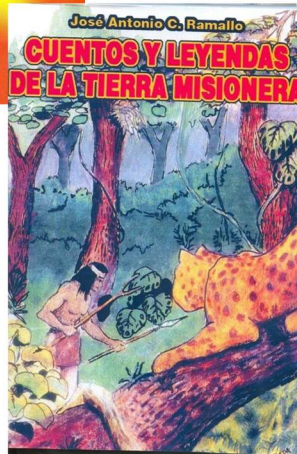
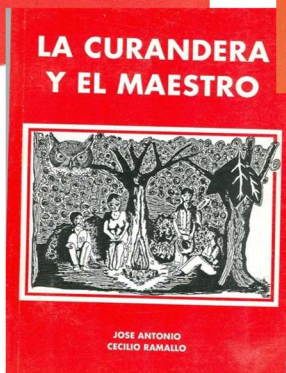
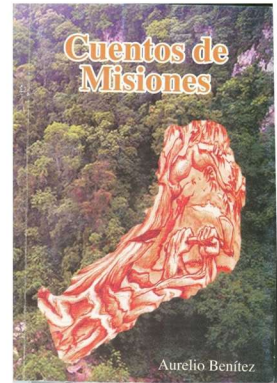
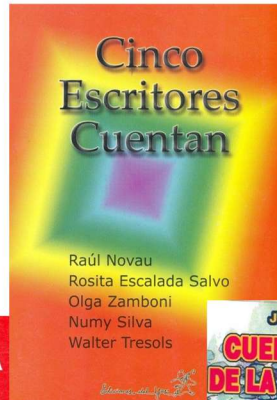
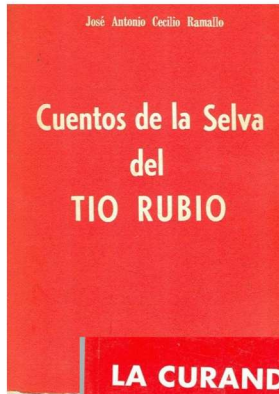
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El portugués de Misiones estudiado por misioneros

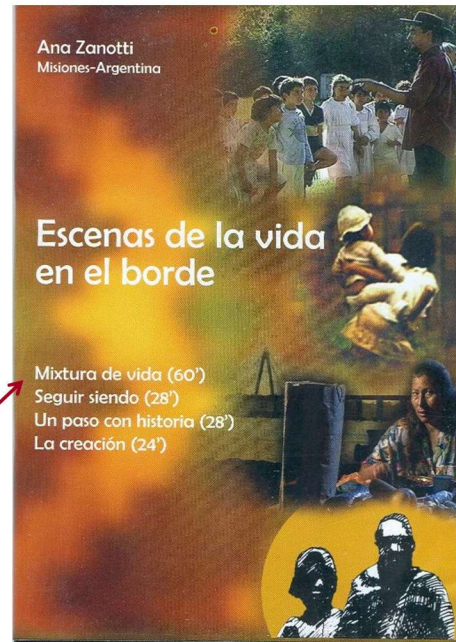
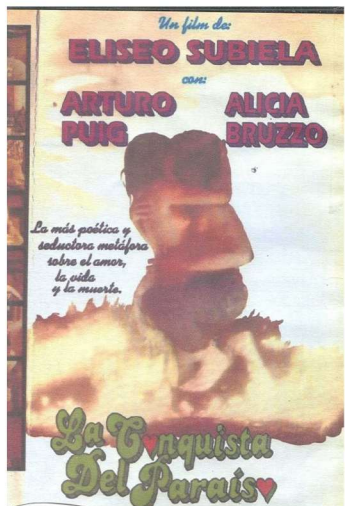
- Guillermo **Kaul Grünwald**
- Hugo **Amable**
- Alicia **Huber**
- Liliana **Daviña**
- Ana **Camblong**
- Ivone **Carissini da Maia**
– entre otros



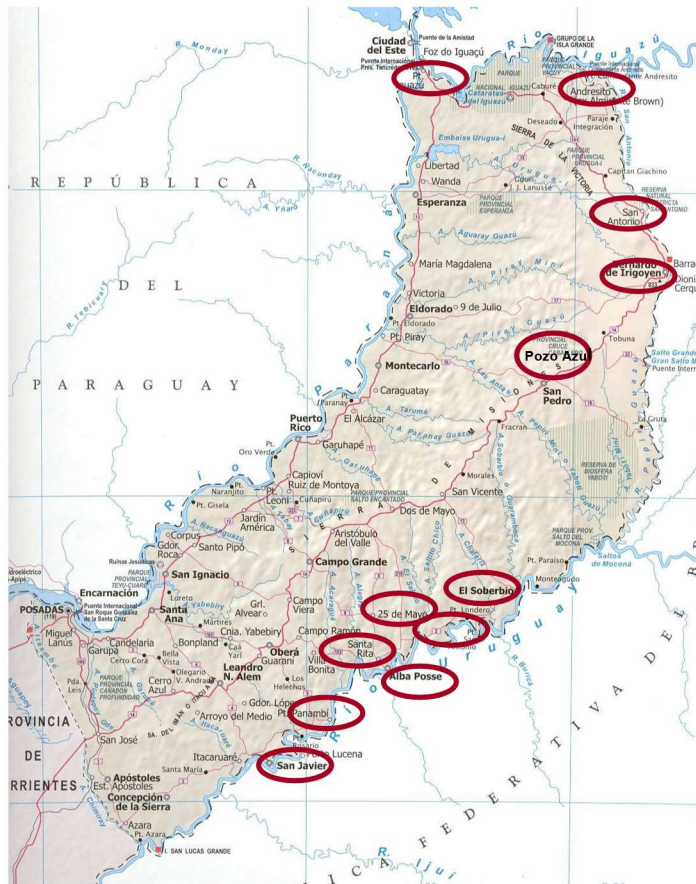
El portugués de Misiones: Reconocido en textos folclóricos



Documentado en obras cinematográficas



<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ENRrptvbyzM>



Agradecimientos

- **Posadas:**
 - Liliam Prytz Nilsson; Liliana Daviña; Viviana Eich; Fabián Ramallo, Ana Zanotti; Ivone Carissini da Maia
- **San Javier:**
 - Roberto Pinto
- **Panambí:**
 - Sergio Czajkowski, Rosendo Fuchs
- **Alba Posse:**
 - Nélide Aguerre
- **El Soberbio:**
 - Norma Ramírez, Ricardo Leiva
- **25 de Mayo:**
 - Elsa Rodríguez de Olivera
- **Colonia Alicia:**
 - Darío Miranda; Manglio Vargas
- **Colonia Aurora:**
 - Carlos Stekierski
- **Santa Rita:**
 - Daniel Ziemann; Carlos Knoll
- **Bernardo de Irigoyen:**
 - Fátima Zaragoza; Juan Carlos Morínigo; Gladys Verón
- **San Antonio:**
 - Isabelino Fonseca
- **Comandante Andresito:**
 - Hugo Cámara Robles
- **Puerto Iguazú:**
 - Sandra Grabe
- **Pozo Azul:**
 - Marcelo Ragotín, Cristina Barchuk, Luis Alberto Vogeli

An unexpected dividend that came from my work in Misiones is my introduction to the Mbyá (Guaraní) communities, their languages and culture. During one of my early trips to Misiones, after spending some time in Posadas (at the southern end of the province), I was preparing to travel by bus to Puerto Iguazú at the northern tip, in order to catch a flight back to Buenos Aires, since there were many daily flights from Iguazú and only one or two from Posadas (later I learned that overnight first-class bus service from Posadas to Bs As was a much better alternative). Vicky Prytz Nilsson asked if I would stop in the town of San Pedro, just over halfway up the province, to meet with Cristina Barchuk, a school teacher who was writing her licenciatura thesis on bilingualism in one of the many nomadic Mbyá communities in Misiones, and was in need of some orientation. When I first met Cristina in San Pedro she wanted to study code-switching in a bilingual school, but the examples she showed me looked more like lexical borrowings, so I asked her to take me to the community of Tekoá Arandú, where we met with the cacique, other community members, and the teachers at the “bilingual” school (Guaraní speakers from the adjacent province of Corrientes). This marked the beginning of a lasting friendship with Cristina and her family, that continues today. We have now visited several Mbyá communities, I have met the first Mbyá speaker to graduate in linguistics, and we even applied some psycholinguistic techniques in field settings.













AGUYJEVETE

REPUĀ ATY RAMÍ'Í

REPUĀ NENDU PORĀ'Í

NAMANDÚ OURE NDEAYU'Í

NDERORY'Í REKORĀ'ÍJUMA

REROPUĀ'Í, KOVAEMA AYEVE'Í

APUĀ ATY RAMÍ'Í

APUĀ NENDÚ PORĀ'Í

NAMANDÚ OURE CHEAYU'Í

CHERORY'Í REKORĀ'ÍJUMA

AROPUĀ'Í KOVAEMA AYEVE'Í



