

1. Linguistic situation in Portugal

Portugal presents, from a linguistic stand point, a situation of almost total monolingualism, making it possible to speak of a “linguistic continuum, which allows those who move from one end of the territory to another to successively cross differentiated dialectal regions in a gradual way, without crossing, at no time, linguistic frontiers that could interrupt this smooth transition of dialectal varieties”¹. Mirandese – already recognized as an official language (alongside Portuguese and Portuguese sign language) – and Barranquenho – not yet officially recognized as a language – are exceptions to this homogeneity. However despite having common aspects, these two varieties are different in many ways.

As common characteristics, we can firstly highlight the fact that they are both border varieties, located in the eastern part of Portuguese territory, with Mirandese being a northern language located in the far northeast and Barranquenho being a central-southern language located in south-eastern Alentejo. In addition, they both have a reduced number of speakers: between 5000 and 10000 in the case of Mirandese², and less than 2000 in the case of Barranquenho³. Genetically and structurally, however, they are very different linguistic realities.

Mirandese, constituted by a “set of non-Galician-Portuguese local varieties, belonging, as we know, to the Leonese domain, although spoken in politically Portuguese portions of that domain”,⁴ is a Romance language dialectally differentiated, from the Asturo-Leonese family. In the Miranda do Douro region, known as Terra de Miranda, three varieties of Mirandese can be identified despite the small territory and the small number of speakers, namely: the northern, the southern and the central, or standard, varieties.

Barranquenho, on the other hand, is only one variety, spoken in the village of Barrancos, and is a mixed language, resulting from the contact between the southern varieties of Portuguese and Castilian, that is, between the Alentejo Portuguese and the Extremenho/Andaluz Castilian.

Thus, although, in both cases, isolation, low number of speakers, the borderline location and the historical circumstances of their populations are at the origin of these languages, in the case of Mirandese, it is a language resulting from the evolution of Latin in that region of the Iberian Peninsula, which, as a result of specific historical circumstances,⁵ survived on

¹ Castro 2006, 15 (“continuum linguístico, que permite a quem se deslocar de um extremo a outro do território ir sucessivamente atravessando regiões dialectais diferenciadas de modo gradual, sem que em nenhum momento uma fronteira linguística interrompa essa transição suave das variedades dialectais”; our translation).

² Ferreira 2010, n. p.

³ Navas 2017, 33, note 2.

⁴ Cintra 1983, 129 (“conjunto de variedades locais não galego-portuguesas, pertencentes, como se sabe, ao domínio leonês, embora faladas em parcelas politicamente portuguesas desse domínio”; our translation).

⁵ The entire Miranda region remained, until the 13th century, under administrative, political and religious, Leonese dominion. Even after the 13th century, it was intensely populated by Leonese settlers and dominated by important monasteries and religious orders of Leonese origin, which remained there at least until the 15th century and even later. The intense relationships between the lands of Miranda and the lands of Leon continues until the present.