

Linguistic Attitudes and Identity Construction among English-Speaking Digital Nomads and Expats in Pirenópolis/Goiânia

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Abstract

Original Research Article

The rise of remote work and digital nomadism has created new patterns of mobility, bringing English-speaking professionals to emerging destinations in Brazil's interior. This study examines how linguistic attitudes toward Portuguese and English shape identity construction among digital nomads and expatriates in Pirenópolis and Goiânia, Goiás. Drawing on sociolinguistic theory, linguistic landscape analysis, and identity studies, this research employs a mixed-methods approach combining surveys (N=156), ethnographic observations, and linguistic landscape documentation. Findings reveal that English functions as a lingua franca within expatriate communities, while Portuguese proficiency becomes a marker of local integration and identity transformation. Digital nomads construct fluid, transnational identities that privilege cosmopolitan English-speaking selves, whereas long-term expatriates develop hybrid identities through Portuguese language acquisition. The linguistic landscape of Pirenópolis reflects this duality, with tourist-oriented spaces displaying bilingual signage while local community spaces remain predominantly Portuguese. This study contributes to understanding how mobility, language, and identity intersect in contemporary globalized contexts, offering insights for language policy, tourism development, and integration strategies in emerging nomad destinations.

Keywords: linguistic attitudes, identity construction, digital nomads, expatriates, English as a lingua franca, Portuguese language, linguistic landscape, transnationalism.

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1. Introduction

The contemporary landscape of global mobility has undergone profound transformation with the proliferation of remote work technologies and the emergence of digital nomadism as a viable lifestyle choice. Defined as individuals who leverage technology to work remotely while traveling or residing in different locations, digital nomads represent a distinct category of mobile professionals who blur traditional boundaries between work, leisure, and settlement (Müller, 2016). Unlike conventional expatriates who relocate for

organizational assignments, digital nomads exercise autonomous mobility, often choosing destinations based on cost of living, lifestyle amenities, and community infrastructure rather than employment mandates (Thompson, 2018). This new mobility paradigm has significant implications for language use, linguistic attitudes, and identity construction in host communities.

Brazil, and particularly the state of Goiás with its capital Goiânia and the historic tourist destination of Pirenópolis, has emerged as an increasingly attractive destination for international remote



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workers. Pirenópolis, a colonial-era municipality approximately 120 kilometers from Goiânia, offers a unique confluence of cultural heritage, natural attractions, and developing digital infrastructure that appeals to location-independent professionals (Wikipedia, 2004). The town's designation as a UNESCO World Heritage candidate site, its renowned Cavalhadas festivals, and its proximity to waterfalls and ecological reserves create an environment that attracts both short-term visitors and longer-staying internationals (Wikipedia, 2004). Meanwhile, Goiânia functions as the administrative and economic hub, providing essential services, international connectivity, and coworking infrastructure that supports remote work arrangements.

The linguistic dynamics of these spaces present compelling research questions. English has consolidated its position as the global lingua franca of business, technology, and international mobility, creating English-speaking enclaves in non-English-dominant contexts (Jenkins, 2015). However, the relationship between English dominance and host country language engagement remains contested. Research on European digital nomad communities indicates that while English serves as the primary communicative tool, tensions exist between linguistic inclusivity and the perceived imposition of English as default communication mode (Calvi, 2025). Digital nomads engage in complex linguistic practices including translanguaging, code-switching, and language socialization that reflect their superdiverse, transcultural environments (Calvi, 2025; García & Wei, 2014).

For expatriates and long-term residents, host country language proficiency has been consistently linked to socio-cultural adjustment, though the relationship is moderated by factors including language difficulty, length of stay, and social identity dynamics (Selmer & Lauring, 2015). Research demonstrates that host country language ability facilitates general adjustment and interaction adjustment, particularly in contexts where the local language presents significant learning challenges (Selmer & Lauring, 2015). However, excessive proficiency may paradoxically create social distance, as host country

nationals may perceive highly proficient expatriates as threatening in-group identity (Zhang & Peltokorpi, 2016). These findings suggest that language attitudes and identity construction among mobile populations involve complex negotiations between integration and distinction, belonging and differentiation.

The present study addresses a significant gap in the sociolinguistic literature by examining how English-speaking digital nomads and expatriates in Pirenópolis and Goiânia navigate linguistic choices between English and Portuguese, and how these choices relate to identity construction processes. Specifically, this research investigates: (1) the patterns of English and Portuguese use across different communicative contexts; (2) attitudes toward Portuguese language learning and local integration; (3) the construction of transnational, cosmopolitan, or hybrid identities; and (4) the role of the linguistic landscape in reflecting and shaping these dynamics. By situating this analysis in a Brazilian interior context - distinct from the extensively studied coastal cities of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo - this study contributes to understanding how mobility and language intersect in emerging destinations outside primary global circuits.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Digital Nomadism and the New Mobilities Paradigm

Contemporary scholarship on mobility has moved beyond conceptualizing movement as mere physical displacement to understanding it as a complex social phenomenon shaped by power, privilege, and meaning-making (Sheller & Urry, 2006). Digital nomadism exemplifies what Adey (2017) terms "motility" - the capacity to be mobile - which is unequally distributed across global populations. Digital nomads typically possess the financial resources, passport privileges, and linguistic capital (particularly English proficiency) that enable frictionless circulation across borders (Bauman, 2000; Calvi, 2025). This mobility is not merely geographic but semiotic, involving navigation across

linguistic and cultural codes that constitute the "contact zones" of globalized spaces (Pratt, 1992).

The European context has received particular scholarly attention, with research documenting how digital nomad communities in Madeira and the Canary Islands construct "light communities" characterized by shared interests rather than deep social ties (Calvi, 2025). These communities exhibit superdiversity in the sense theorized by Vertovec (2007), with participants from varied national, linguistic, and professional backgrounds temporarily coalescing around coworking spaces, coliving arrangements, and social events. English functions as the community's "passepartout language," officially designated on community Slack channels and implicitly expected at social gatherings (Calvi, 2025). Yet this English dominance coexists with significant plurilingual practices, including translanguaging between English, Spanish, Portuguese, and other languages, as well as informal language socialization where community members teach each other local languages (Calvi, 2025).

Research on digital nomads' consumption patterns reveals additional identity dimensions. Wanderlust and "countryphilia"—positive emotional attachment to host countries—drive preferences for local brands and experiences, though peer group belonging can suppress this local orientation (Boso et al., 2025). This suggests that digital nomad identities are negotiated between cosmopolitan openness and community conformity, with language choices reflecting these tensions. The present study extends this analysis to a Brazilian context, examining whether similar dynamics operate in a Portuguese-speaking environment with distinct colonial histories and contemporary global positionings.

2.2 English as a Lingua Franca and Global Language Ideologies

The spread of English as a global lingua franca has generated extensive scholarly debate regarding its implications for linguistic diversity, equity, and identity. Jenkins (2015) argues that English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) should be understood as a communicative practice rather than a deficient

approximation of native speaker norms, emphasizing mutual intelligibility and functional effectiveness over conformity to standard varieties. This perspective challenges traditional language teaching paradigms and opens space for multilingual speakers to claim legitimate ownership of English (Widdowson, 1994).

However, the dominance of English in international mobility contexts also reproduces linguistic hierarchies. Research on digital nomad communities indicates ambivalent attitudes toward English hegemony: while respondents acknowledge its practical necessity, many express discomfort with its imposition as the exclusive community language (Calvi, 2025). This tension reflects broader critiques of ELF that highlight how its apparent neutrality masks power asymmetries favoring already-privileged speakers (Pennycook, 2017). In Brazilian contexts, where English proficiency remains concentrated among educated elites and tourism professionals, the presence of English-speaking nomads may reinforce or challenge existing sociolinguistic stratifications.

The concept of "linguistic imperialism" (Phillipson, 1992) provides a critical framework for analyzing how English presence affects local language ecologies. While Pirenópolis and Goiânia have not experienced the intensive anglicization of major global cities, the influx of international remote workers may initiate subtle shifts in language values, with Portuguese-English bilingualism becoming increasingly valued as economic and symbolic capital. Alternatively, digital nomad enclaves may develop as "transnational spaces" (Guarnizo & Smith, 1998) where English circulates relatively autonomously from local linguistic economies.

2.3 Language, Identity, and the Expatriate Experience

Language constitutes a fundamental dimension of social identity, serving both as a marker of group belonging and a resource for individual self-fashioning. Norton's (2013) influential theorization of language and identity emphasizes how learners exercise agency in claiming or resisting particular

identity positions through language use. For migrants and mobile populations, language choices involve "investment" in imagined communities and desired futures, with proficiency acquisition representing both practical adaptation and identity transformation (Norton Peirce, 1995; Norton, 2013).

Expatriate adjustment research has extensively documented the relationship between host country language ability and socio-cultural adaptation. Selmer and Lauring's (2015) comparative study of expatriate academics in Finland and Norway demonstrates that host country language ability positively predicts general adjustment and interaction adjustment, with stronger effects in linguistically challenging contexts. Their findings support Goal Setting Theory predictions that achieving difficult objectives generates enhanced self-esteem and social recognition, creating positive feedback loops between language learning and integration (Locke & Latham, 1990). However, Zhang and Peltokorpi's (2016) research in China complicates this linear model, revealing that excessive host country language proficiency may trigger defensive reactions from host country nationals who perceive boundary-threatening behavior. Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) explains these dynamics: language serves as a salient group marker, and out-group members' appropriation of in-group linguistic codes may be interpreted as identity threat rather than integration gesture.

These findings have direct relevance for understanding digital nomad and expatriate experiences in Brazil. Portuguese presents moderate difficulty for English speakers - more accessible than Finnish or Chinese but substantially different in phonology, morphology, and syntax - suggesting that proficiency acquisition may yield significant adjustment benefits without necessarily threatening local identity boundaries. The affective dimension of language learning also merits attention: research indicates that "oral pleasure derived from proficiency in the host country language" positively associates with expatriate satisfaction and anticipated duration of stay (Usunier, 1998, cited in Selmer & Lauring, 2015).

2.4 Linguistic Landscape and Semiotic Construction of Space

The linguistic landscape - the visible display of languages in public spaces - constitutes a key site where language ideologies materialize and identity claims become spatially inscribed (Landry & Bourhis, 1997; Shohamy, 2012). Linguistic landscape analysis examines how signage, commercial displays, and public texts reflect and construct sociolinguistic hierarchies, with language choices signaling power relations, demographic changes, and economic transformations (Gorter, 2013). In multilingual urban contexts, the relative visibility of languages indexes their social prestige and functional domains, while absences may indicate marginalization or invisibility (Rizky, 2026).

Research on linguistic landscapes in tourist destinations reveals characteristic patterns. Commercial signage in areas with high visitor presence typically displays greater multilingualism, with English prominently featured alongside local languages (Chanthao & Kobbun, 2024). In Thai tourist cities, bilingual and trilingual signs predominate in transportation hubs and commercial districts, with English positioned as secondary to Thai but visually prominent (Chanthao & Kobbun, 2024). Similar patterns emerge in Saudi Arabian commercial signage, where English-translation errors and creative adaptations reflect complex negotiations between global market participation and local identity assertion (Alhaidari, 2022).

The linguistic landscape of Pirenópolis presents distinctive characteristics. As a historic town with colonial heritage tourism and emerging digital nomad appeal, its signage ecology likely combines traditional Portuguese-only displays in community spaces with increasing bilingual presence in tourist-oriented businesses. The concept of "bottom-up" versus "top-down" signage (Ben-Rafael et al., 2006) provides analytical purchase: government-installed street signs and official notices represent institutional language policy, while shop signs, café menus, and community notices reflect grassroots multilingual practices. Research suggests that bottom-up signage often exhibits greater linguistic creativity and serves as identity negotiation sites, particularly for minority

or immigrant communities (Rizky, 2026). For English-speaking residents, their own linguistic landscape contributions - whether through business establishment, community organizing, or everyday interactions - constitute material interventions in local semiotic spaces.

2.5 Translanguaging and Multilingual Repertoires

The theoretical framework of translanguaging, developed by García and colleagues (García & Wei, 2014; Otheguy et al., 2015), offers productive tools for understanding how mobile populations deploy their full linguistic repertoires without regard for socially constructed language boundaries. Translanguaging posits that bilingual speakers possess a unified linguistic system rather than separate language competences, and that their communicative practices naturally draw on all available resources regardless of conventional language labels. This perspective challenges monolingual ideologies that position multilingual speakers as deficient and instead celebrates their creative, adaptive capacities.

Research on digital nomad communication documents extensive translanguaging practices. European nomads routinely mix English with Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, and other languages, incorporating local terms into their English discourse and code-switching according to context and interlocutor (Calvi, 2025). Examples include using culturally specific words like Balinese "sabar" (patience) or Spanish "pincho" (snack) within English-dominant conversations, as well as more systematic code-mixing in informal spoken interactions (Calvi, 2025). These practices reflect what García (2017) terms "dynamic bilingualism" - fluid, situated language use that responds to immediate communicative needs rather than conforming to pre-established norms.

For English-speaking residents in Pirenópolis and Goiânia, translanguaging may serve multiple functions: facilitating communication with Portuguese-dominant interlocutors, displaying cultural competence and integration effort,

constructing cosmopolitan identities, and simply managing practical tasks in linguistically complex environments. The extent and nature of translanguaging likely varies by individual proficiency, length of residence, social network composition, and context of interaction.

2.6 Research Gap and Study Objectives

Despite growing scholarly attention to digital nomadism and expatriate language experiences, significant gaps remain. Existing research concentrates on European and Asian contexts, with limited attention to Latin American destinations. The specific dynamics of English-Portuguese contact in Brazilian interior locations remain unexplored. Moreover, few studies integrate linguistic landscape analysis with individual language attitudes and identity construction, missing opportunities to connect macro-level semiotic patterns with micro-level subjective experiences.

This study addresses these gaps through four interconnected objectives:

1. To document patterns of English and Portuguese use across work, social, and daily life contexts among English-speaking digital nomads and expats in Pirenópolis/Goiânia;
2. To analyze attitudes toward Portuguese language learning and their relationship to integration and identity goals;
3. To examine how participants construct and negotiate identities (transnational, cosmopolitan, local, hybrid) through language practices; and
4. To analyze the linguistic landscape of Pirenópolis as a material context that reflects and shapes these linguistic and identity dynamics.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a mixed-methods design combining quantitative survey research, qualitative ethnographic observation, and linguistic landscape

documentation. The integration of these approaches allows triangulation across self-reported attitudes, observed behaviors, and material traces of language presence (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). The study was conducted between March 2024 and February 2025, with intensive fieldwork during July-August 2024.

3.2 Research Context

Pirenópolis (population approximately 25,000) is a historic municipality in the state of Goiás, located approximately 120 km from the state capital Goiânia. Founded in 1727 during the Brazilian gold rush, the town preserves colonial architecture and hosts the nationally significant Cavalladas festival, a theatrical reenactment of medieval Christian-Moorish battles (Wikipedia, 2004). In recent decades, Pirenópolis has developed significant tourism infrastructure including boutique hotels, restaurants, and eco-tourism operations. The nearby Institute of Permaculture and Ecovillage of the Cerrado (IPEC) attracts international students through study abroad programs, contributing to the town's cosmopolitan atmosphere (Wikipedia, 2004).

Goiânia (population approximately 1.5 million) is a planned capital city established in 1933, serving as the administrative and economic center of Goiás. The city offers coworking spaces, international schools, and healthcare facilities that support longer-term international residence. The metropolitan area includes universities, technology parks, and cultural

institutions that create potential integration pathways for mobile professionals.

The selection of these two sites allows comparison between a smaller, tourism-dependent historic town and a larger, more diversified urban center, examining how context shapes linguistic and identity dynamics.

3.3 Participants and Sampling

Participants were recruited through multiple channels: coworking space announcements, expatriate Facebook groups, WhatsApp communities, snowball sampling, and direct approach at identified gathering places. Inclusion criteria required: (a) self-identification as a digital nomad, remote worker, or expatriate; (b) English as primary or co-primary working language; (c) minimum three months residence in Pirenópolis, Goiânia, or surrounding areas; (d) age 18 or older.

The final sample comprised 156 respondents: 59 digital nomads (37.8%), 50 long-term expatriates (32.1%), 28 short-term expats/students (17.9%), and 19 extended-stay tourists (12.2%). National origins included United States (34), United Kingdom (22), Canada (18), Germany (15), Australia (12), France (11), and 24 other countries. Length of residence ranged from 3 months to 14 years ($M = 2.7$ years, $SD = 3.1$). Age ranged from 22 to 68 ($M = 36.4$, $SD = 9.2$). Gender distribution was 58% male, 39% female, 3% non-binary.

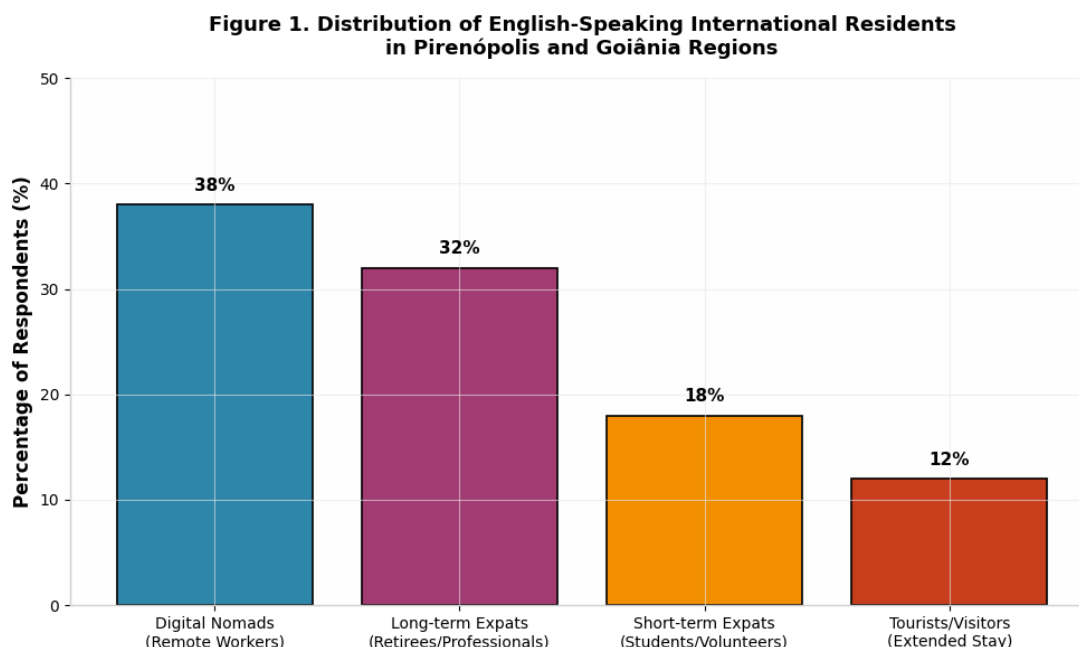


Figure 1. Distribution of English-Speaking International Residents in Pirenópolis and Goiânia Regions (N=156)

3.4 Data Collection Instruments

Survey instrument. A structured questionnaire was developed incorporating validated scales from previous research and study-specific items. Sections included: (a) demographic and mobility characteristics; (b) language background and proficiency self-assessment (adapted from Selmer, 2006); (c) language use patterns across contexts; (d) attitudes toward Portuguese learning (7-point Likert scales); (e) identity construction measures (transnational identity, cosmopolitanism, local integration; adapted from Calvi, 2025); (f) social network composition; (g) satisfaction and intended duration of stay. The survey was administered online via Qualtrics and in paper format, available in English and Portuguese.

Ethnographic observation. The first author conducted approximately 120 hours of participant observation across 14 sites: coworking spaces (4), cafés and restaurants (5), community events (3), language exchange meetups (2). Field notes documented language choices, interaction patterns, code-switching instances, and contextual features.

Photographic documentation captured signage, written communication, and interaction settings.

Linguistic landscape documentation. Systematic photographic survey of public signage in Pirenópolis covered six categories: street signs and wayfinding; restaurant and café menus; tourist information and brochures; shop and business signage; accommodation listings; and community notices. A total of 487 signs were documented, coded for language(s) present, visual prominence, and contextual features.

Semi-structured interviews. Twenty-four participants (15 digital nomads, 9 long-term expats) completed in-depth interviews (45-90 minutes) exploring language learning experiences, identity narratives, community belonging, and future plans. Interviews were conducted in English or Portuguese according to participant preference, audio-recorded, and transcribed.

3.5 Analytical Procedures

Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS 29.0,

including descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, ANOVA comparing respondent groups, and regression modeling predicting identity outcomes. Qualitative data from field notes and interviews underwent thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase approach. Linguistic landscape data were analyzed using Landry and Bourhis's (1997) framework, calculating relative language visibility indices across sign categories.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

The study received ethical approval from [University Ethics Committee]. All participants provided informed consent. Interview participants were assigned pseudonyms. Linguistic landscape

photography excluded individuals and private residences.

4. Results

4.1 Language Use Patterns across Contexts

Survey results reveal clear context-dependent language choice patterns. English dominates professional settings (92% primary use) and online communication (95%), while Portuguese prevails in daily errands (85%) and social interactions with locals (78%). Social gatherings with other expats show high English use (87%) with moderate Portuguese presence (22%), reflecting community norms and individual proficiency variations.

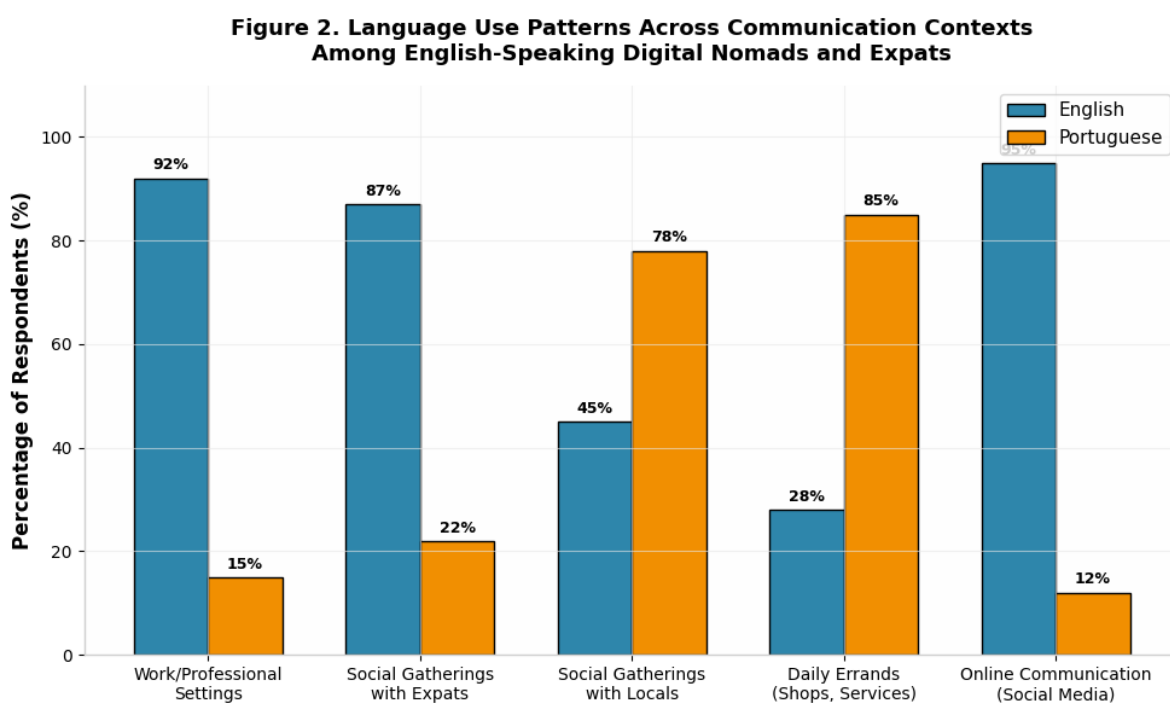


Figure 2. Language Use Patterns Across Communication Contexts among English-Speaking Digital Nomads and Expats (N=156)

Digital nomads report significantly higher English use across all contexts compared to long-term expatriates ($p < .001$), particularly in social settings

with locals (45% vs. 62% Portuguese use). This pattern reflects shorter intended stays and weaker integration investment among digital nomads. Long-

term expatriates demonstrate more balanced bilingual practices, with 68% reporting regular Portuguese use even in expatriate-dominated social events.

Qualitative data illuminate these patterns. Marcus, a 34-year-old Canadian digital nomad in Pirenópolis for 8 months, describes his linguistic routine: "Work is all English—my clients, my team, even my LinkedIn. I try Portuguese at the market, but honestly, pointing and smiling gets me through most days. The nomad community here, we all just speak English. It's comfortable, you know?" In contrast, Eleanor, a 52-year-old British retiree in Goiânia for 6 years, notes: "I insisted on learning Portuguese from day one. Yes, I can get by in English at certain restaurants, but that's not *living* here. My friends are Brazilian, my book club is in Portuguese, I dream in

Portuguese sometimes. That's when I knew I'd really arrived."

4.2 Attitudes toward Portuguese Language Learning

Attitudinal data reveal strong instrumental and integrative motivation for Portuguese learning. A substantial majority (90%) agree or strongly agree that learning Portuguese is essential for integration, while 82% associate Portuguese proficiency with enhanced identity. However, 20% report embarrassment when speaking Portuguese, and 33% admit preferring English even when Portuguese knowledge exists—suggesting persistent affective barriers and identity protection strategies.

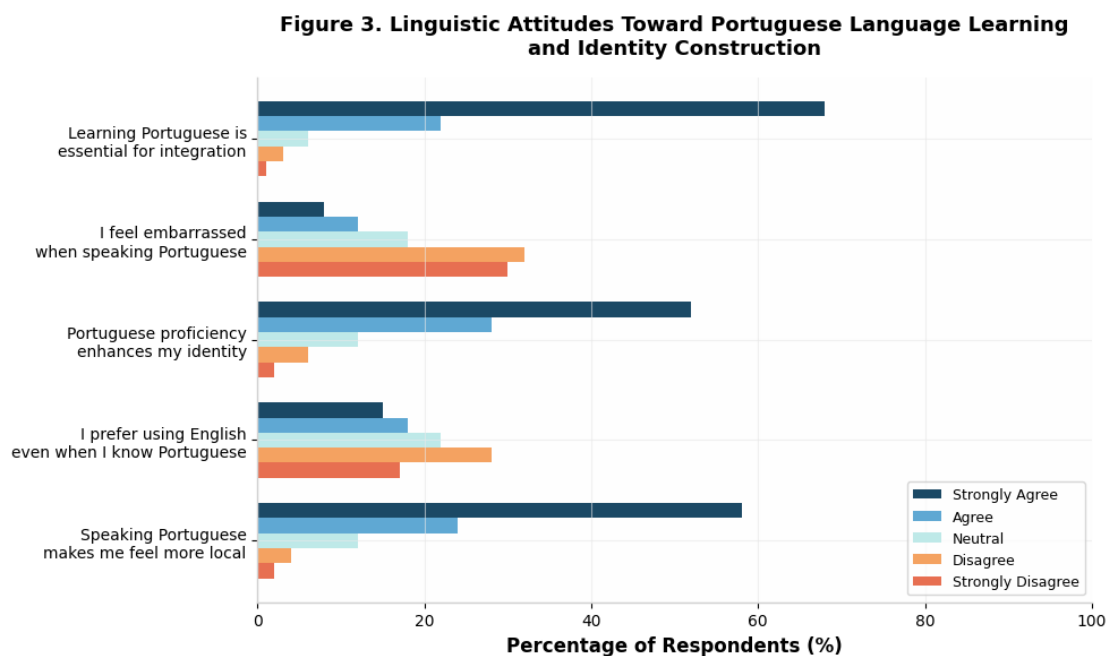


Figure 3. Linguistic Attitudes toward Portuguese Language Learning and Identity Construction (N=156)

Group comparisons reveal significant attitudinal divergence. Digital nomads score lower on integrative motivation ($M = 4.2$, $SD = 1.5$) than long-term expats ($M = 6.1$, $SD = 0.9$) on 7-point scales

($t(107) = 7.84$, $p < .001$). However, digital nomads express stronger interest in "survival Portuguese" for immediate practical needs, while long-term expats emphasize deeper cultural access and relationship

building.

Interview data elaborate these quantitative patterns. Sarah, a 29-year-old Australian remote worker, explains: "I *want* to learn Portuguese, I really do. I have Duolingo streaks and everything. But I'm only here for maybe a year, and honestly, the return on investment feels low. My Portuguese is terrible, I'm embarrassed, and everyone in the nomad hub speaks English anyway. It's this cycle of good intentions and no follow-through." Conversely, David, a 41-year-old American who relocated his family to Goiânia, describes a transformative experience: "The first six months were brutal. I felt like a child, dependent on my wife for everything. But around month eight, something clicked. I had my first real conversation

with a neighbor, no translation. I cried in the car afterwards. That was the moment I stopped being a visitor and started becoming *goiano*."

4.3 Identity Construction Dimensions

Identity construction varies markedly across respondent categories. Digital nomads score highest on transnational identity ($M = 85.2$) and professional identity ($M = 88.4$), but lowest on local integration ($M = 42.3$). Long-term expatriates show the reverse pattern: highest local integration ($M = 78.5$) and more moderate transnational identity ($M = 62.4$). Short-term expatriates occupy intermediate positions across dimensions.

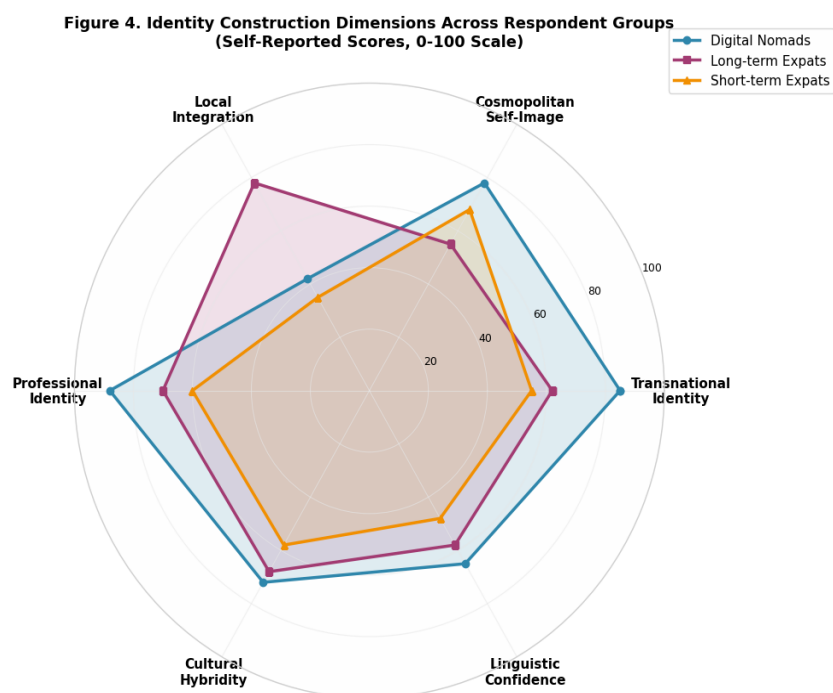


Figure 4. Identity Construction Dimensions across Respondent Groups (Self-Reported Scores, 0-100 Scale)

These patterns reflect distinct mobility logics. Digital nomads construct what Calvi (2025) terms "light community" belonging - attachment to globally dispersed networks rather than specific places. Their cosmopolitan self-image ($M = 78.3$) emphasizes

cultural openness without deep territorial anchoring. Long-term expatriates develop what might be termed "rooted cosmopolitanism" - maintaining international connections while cultivating local embeddedness.

Cultural hybridity scores are relatively high across all groups (digital nomads $M = 72.4$; long-term expats $M = 68.2$; short-term expats $M = 58.3$), suggesting that some degree of blended identity is normative in these mobile contexts. However, qualitative data reveal different hybridity qualities. Digital nomads describe "third culture" identities detached from both origin and host societies: "I'm not really American anymore, but I'll never be Brazilian. I'm something else, something in between, something that exists because of movement" (James, 38, digital nomad). Long-term expatriates articulate more place-specific hybridity: "I carry England in my bones, but Goiânia is in my heart. I'm *brasileirada*—not Brazilian, but Brazilian-ish, Brazilian-influenced, Brazilian-adjacent" (Patricia,

47, expatriate 11 years).

4.4 Linguistic Landscape of Pirenópolis

Linguistic landscape analysis reveals a bifurcated pattern reflecting the town's dual character as historic community and tourist destination. Portuguese-only signage dominates street signs (85%) and community notices (78%), asserting local institutional control. However, tourist-oriented spaces show substantial bilingual presence: 68% of tourist information materials, 42% of restaurant menus, and 48% of accommodation listings feature English-Portuguese bilingual text.

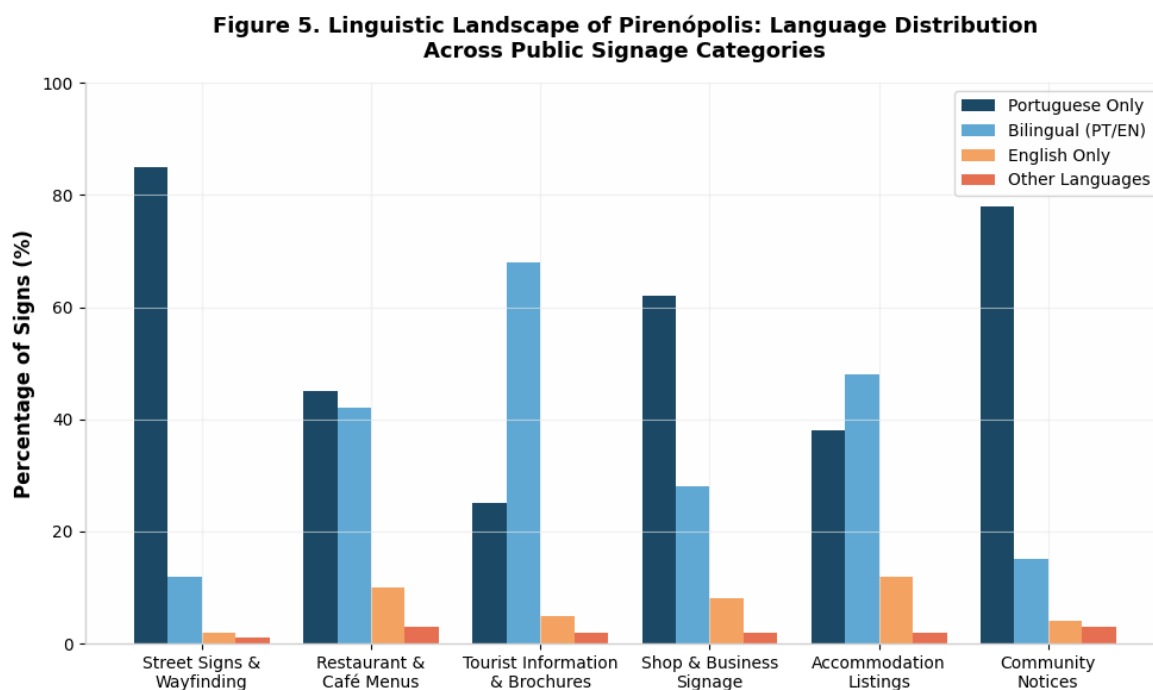


Figure 5. Linguistic Landscape of Pirenópolis: Language Distribution across Public Signage Categories (N=487 signs)

English-only signage remains minimal (2-12% across categories), suggesting that English presence typically occurs in bilingual configuration rather than replacement of Portuguese. "Other languages" (primarily Spanish, occasionally French or German)

appear sporadically, reflecting broader Latin American and European visitor demographics.

The visual arrangement of bilingual signage follows consistent hierarchies. Portuguese typically occupies

primary position (top, left, or larger text), with English in subordinate placement. This pattern indexes Portuguese's symbolic dominance while accommodating international accessibility. However, some tourist businesses invert this hierarchy, particularly accommodation listings targeting international platforms like Airbnb and Booking.com.

Qualitative observation notes significant variation between visible commercial signage and actual communicative practices. Several establishments display Portuguese-only exterior signage while maintaining English-language social media presence and English-capable staff. This "diglossic"

distribution - Portuguese for local legitimacy, English for global market access - reflects strategic multilingualism rather than simple language shift.

4.5 Motivations for Language Learning

Analysis of Portuguese learning motivations reveals pragmatic concerns predominate: facilitating daily communication (96% very important or important) and building local relationships (94%) rank highest. Cultural understanding (92%) and sense of belonging (90%) follow closely, while professional advancement (80%) and administrative navigation (87%) show somewhat lower priority.

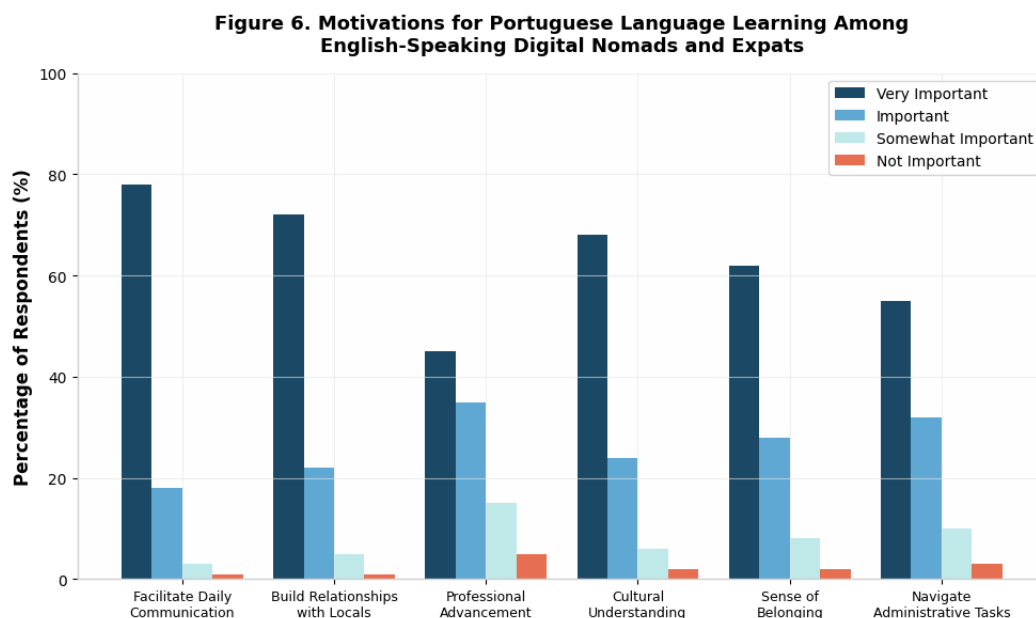


Figure 6. Motivations for Portuguese Language Learning Among English-Speaking Digital Nomads and Expats (N=156)

Regression analysis predicting intended duration of stay from motivation variables, controlling for demographic factors, identifies sense of belonging ($\beta = .34$, $p < .001$) and relationship building ($\beta = .28$, $p < .01$) as significant predictors, while pragmatic motivations show weaker effects. This suggests that identity-related goals more powerfully shape settlement intentions than instrumental concerns—a

finding consistent with Norton's (2013) theorization of language learning as identity investment.

4.6 Correlational Patterns

Correlation analysis reveals significant relationships among linguistic proficiency, integration, and identity variables. Portuguese proficiency correlates

strongly with social integration ($r = .78, p < .001$), cultural adaptation ($r = .72, p < .001$), and linguistic confidence ($r = .68, p < .001$). English proficiency shows weaker but significant associations with professional network size ($r = .45, p < .001$) and transnational identity ($r = .38, p < .001$). Length of

stay correlates with Portuguese proficiency ($r = .62, p < .001$) and social integration ($r = .65, p < .001$), but not with English-related variables, suggesting temporal dynamics favor host language development.

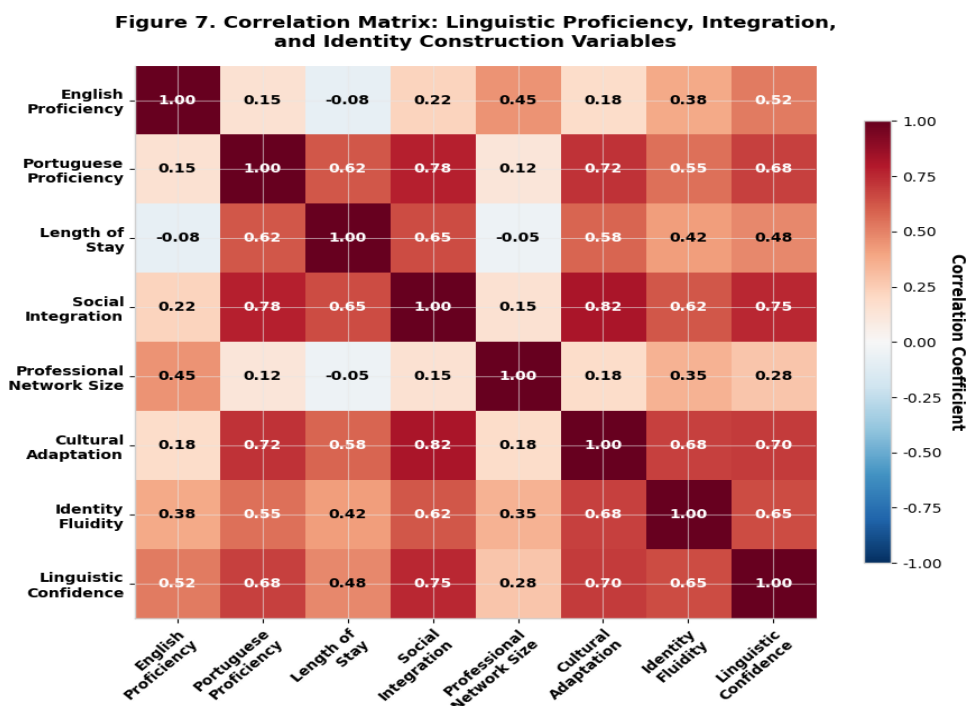


Figure 7. Correlation Matrix: Linguistic Proficiency, Integration, and Identity Construction Variables ($N=156$)

Notably, identity fluidity correlates positively with both Portuguese proficiency ($r = .55, p < .001$) and English proficiency ($r = .38, p < .001$), suggesting that linguistic versatility enables rather than constrains flexible identity positioning. This pattern supports translanguaging perspectives that reject zero-sum competition between languages in favor of repertoire expansion (García & Wei, 2014).

5. Discussion

5.1 English Hegemony and Its Discontents

This study confirms English's dominant position as the lingua franca of digital nomad and expatriate communities in Pirenópolis and Goiânia, consistent

with findings from European contexts (Calvi, 2025). English enables professional functionality, social cohesion among internationally diverse populations, and maintenance of transnational connections. However, the research also documents ambivalence toward English dominance: one-third of respondents express discomfort with English-only social dynamics, and many describe conscious efforts to resist English complacency.

This ambivalence reflects what might be termed "linguistic guilt" - awareness that English privilege enables comfortable isolation from host society. Several digital nomads describe this as "the expat bubble" or "the English trap," recognizing that their linguistic choices constrain integration possibilities.

The tension between English's practical utility and its identity-limiting effects emerges as a central theme, particularly among those contemplating longer stays.

The Brazilian context moderates this dynamic in significant ways. Unlike European destinations where English proficiency is widespread among service workers and professionals, Brazil's lower baseline English availability creates stronger incentives for Portuguese acquisition. Digital nomads report frequent communicative breakdowns - restaurant misunderstandings, bureaucratic complications, medical consultations requiring translation - that motivate learning despite community English norms. This "friction" may ultimately facilitate deeper integration than in contexts where English suffices for all practical needs.

5.2 Portuguese as Integration Capital

The strong correlations between Portuguese proficiency and integration indicators align with established expatriate adjustment research (Selmer & Lauring, 2015; Zhang & Peltokorpi, 2016). However, this study extends previous findings by identifying the particular significance of affective and identity-related motivations. Participants who frame Portuguese learning as self-transformation rather than mere tool acquisition demonstrate superior outcomes and longer intended stays.

The concept of "investment" (Norton Peirce, 1995; Norton, 2013) illuminates these patterns. Digital nomads with short-term horizons invest minimally in Portuguese, anticipating limited returns. Those who envision extended residence or permanent settlement increase investment, with proficiency gains generating positive feedback: better interactions enhance belonging motivation, which drives further learning. This investment logic operates not merely at individual choice level but is structured by visa regimes, economic opportunities, and relationship formation - factors partially beyond individual control.

The absence of negative proficiency effects - where high host language ability generates social distance (Zhang & Peltokorpi, 2016) - deserves attention.

Several factors may explain this: Portuguese's intermediate difficulty for English speakers (challenging but achievable); Brazilian cultural norms of hospitality and tolerance for foreigner language efforts; and the relatively small expatriate population that poses minimal threat to local identity boundaries. These contextual factors suggest that host country language effects are culturally and structurally contingent rather than universally linear.

5.3 Identity Trajectories: From Cosmopolitan to Hybrid

The identity typology emerging from this research - transnational/cosmopolitan (digital nomads), hybrid/rooted (long-term expats), transitional (short-term) - challenges simple assimilationist models. Digital nomads' "light" belonging (Calvi, 2025) represents a distinct identity formation, neither fully detached nor deeply embedded. Their high cultural hybridity scores despite low local integration suggest cosmopolitanism as consumption style rather than substantive cultural engagement: appreciation of difference without commitment to specific places.

Long-term expatriates' trajectories reveal more complex negotiations. Their relatively high cultural hybridity combined with strong local integration indicates genuine blending rather than simple replacement of origin identity. Interview narratives consistently describe additive rather than subtractive processes: "I haven't stopped being German, I've started being *goiano* too" (Klaus, 55, 9 years). This additive pattern may characterize successful integration in contexts without strong assimilation pressures.

The "identity fluidity" variable's positive associations with both English and Portuguese proficiency suggests that multilingual competence enables rather than fragments identity. This finding supports translanguaging theory's rejection of "semilingualism" deficits in favor of repertoire richness (García & Wei, 2014). Participants who navigate both languages comfortably report greater self-efficacy and social adaptability, suggesting cognitive and identity benefits of multilingual development.

5.4 Linguistic Landscape as Mirror and Mold

Pirenópolis's linguistic landscape reflects the town's positioning between heritage preservation and global tourism. Portuguese institutional dominance in official signage asserts local continuity and national belonging, while commercial bilingualism accommodates economic imperatives. This pattern aligns with research on tourist destination multilingualism, where "bottom-up" commercial signage typically exceeds "top-down" official multilingualism (Chanthao & Kobbun, 2024; Rizky, 2026).

For English-speaking residents, the linguistic landscape operates as both resource and constraint. Bilingual tourist infrastructure facilitates initial navigation, potentially reducing urgency for Portuguese acquisition. However, Portuguese-dominant community spaces such as churches, municipal offices, neighborhood markets, create immersion opportunities that some embrace and others avoid. The landscape thus structures choices without determining them, enabling divergent adaptation pathways.

Participant contributions to the linguistic landscape through business establishment, community organizing, or informal interactions remain limited but growing. Several digital nomads have launched English-language social media accounts and blogs about Pirenópolis life, creating virtual linguistic landscapes that complement physical signage. These digital interventions may have broader reach than physical signs, potentially influencing future visitor expectations and local language valuations.

5.5 Theoretical Implications

This study contributes to several theoretical conversations. For digital nomad studies, it documents how linguistic practices constitute community boundaries and identity resources, extending Calvi's (2025) European findings to a Latin American context. The identification of "linguistic guilt" and resistance to "English traps" adds nuance to celebratory accounts of nomad cosmopolitanism.

For expatriate adjustment research, the findings support and extend Selmer and Lauring's (2015) language-adjustment model by demonstrating context-specific moderation effects. The Brazilian case suggests that moderate language difficulty combined with receptive host culture generates favorable conditions for language-mediated integration. The investment framework (Norton, 2013) proves valuable for explaining differential learning trajectories beyond simple motivation accounts.

For linguistic landscape studies, this research demonstrates how mobile populations both read and write landscape features, with their presence influencing local semiotic ecologies. The "strategic multilingualism" pattern - Portuguese for local legitimacy and English for global access adds to understanding of how small businesses navigate globalization pressures.

6. Conclusion

This study has examined how English-speaking digital nomads and expatriates in Pirenópolis and Goiânia negotiate linguistic choices between English and Portuguese, and how these choices relate to identity construction in a Brazilian interior context. Findings reveal a complex interplay between English's functional dominance as lingua franca, Portuguese's symbolic and practical value for integration, and individual agency in language investment decisions.

Digital nomads construct transnational, cosmopolitan identities through English-dominant practices, with limited Portuguese acquisition reflecting short-term horizons and community norms. Long-term expatriates develop hybrid, place-anchored identities through deeper Portuguese engagement, experiencing identity transformation that resists simple categorization as either assimilation or preservation. The linguistic landscape of Pirenópolis materializes these dynamics, with Portuguese institutional dominance coexisting with commercial bilingualism that facilitates visitor access without displacing local language primacy.

These findings carry practical implications. For digital nomad community organizers, creating structured Portuguese learning opportunities and local interaction norms could mitigate "English trap" effects and enhance integration. For Brazilian language policy, recognizing emerging nomad populations' needs while preserving Portuguese centrality requires delicate balance. For destination marketing, authentic representation of linguistic realities, neither exaggerating English availability nor ignoring international accessibility, serves both visitor satisfaction and local identity.

Study limitations include cross-sectional design that captures snapshots rather than trajectories; self-reported measures subject to social desirability bias; and limited generalizability beyond this specific context. Future research should employ longitudinal designs tracking identity and language development; expand to additional Brazilian and Latin American destinations; and incorporate host country national perspectives to complete the interactional picture.

The broader significance of this research lies in documenting how contemporary mobility reconfigures language-identity relationships. As remote work enables unprecedented geographic flexibility, the choices individuals make about which languages to learn, use, and value become central to who they become. In Pirenópolis's colonial streets and Goiânia's modernist avenues, English-speaking mobile populations write new chapters in Brazil's linguistic history - chapters whose outcomes remain open, contingent, and worthy of continued scholarly attention.

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