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Introduction

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From the second half of the fifteenth century through the end of the nineteenth century, hundreds of thousands of sub-Saharan Africans traveled first to Spain, then to Spanish America. Most were slaves, taken as part of the Atlantic slave trade, which displaced millions of Africans to Europe's New World colonies. In the major cities of Spain, particularly in Andalusia, large slave and later free black populations arose, and in some cities remained as distinct ethnic minorities until the late eighteenth century. In Portugal, black communities and neighborhoods continued to exist until the turn of the twentieth century.¹ In Spanish America, Africans were found in every colony, from the highland mines of Bolivia, Peru, Colombia, and Honduras, to the Argentine pampas, the docks of El Callao, the port attached to Lima, Peru, and the streets of Mexico City. Although demographic merger has blurred the traces of these earliest African arrivals, whose forced immigration reached a peak in the mid-seventeenth century, Spanish America underwent a frenzied importation of African laborers at the turn of the nineteenth century, as part of the sugar plantation boom occasioned by the destruction of the world's richest sugar producer, French Saint-Domingue (soon to become Haiti), and the scramble of the Spanish colonies to enter the lucrative sugar market. In contemporary Latin America, the population of African origin is most noticeable where the last wave of slave arrivals touched shore – in the Caribbean islands, and along the Caribbean and upper Pacific coasts of South America. Although living in the most humbling conditions, often physically outside the pale of mainstream Spanish society, black Africans made a lasting impression on the language and culture of the entire Spanish-speaking world. Their use of Spanish was depicted – never flatteringly and often with much exaggeration – from the early sixteenth century to the middle of the twentieth century. Black soldiers were instrumental in the American colonies' wars of independence; black horsemen became some of Argentina's most renowned *gauchos* and *payadores* (song improvisers). Black

¹ Lipski (1994c), Tinhorão (1988).

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dances and songs were the origin for the Argentine *tango*, today a highly stylized European dance form. Throughout southern Spain and Latin America, free blacks for decades dominated small-scale commerce, representing the majority of street vendors and municipal maintenance employees. Descendants of Africans formed the original nuclei around which arose the Mexican cities of Acapulco, Mazatlán, and Veracruz, and were also found in the most remote frontier outposts – from New Mexico and Arizona to Patagonia. Blacks in Spanish America fought against marauding pirates, and some chose to cast their lot with the pirates, to combat their former oppressors.² From the Río de la Plata to Cuba, carnival traditions, religious ceremonies, and vocabulary items attest to the African presence in Spanish America. And yet, despite the central importance of Africans in the development of the Spanish language and its spread throughout the Americas, the African contribution to Spanish is rarely considered on a par with more “traditional” language contact situations. At most, we find lists of lexical items – often uncritical attributions – which in some tropical countries are conceded to be Africanisms. Latin American countries containing visible Afro-American populations tend to adopt the position that any African influence in Spanish is to be found only among the Afro-Hispanic population, in popular songs and ceremonies. Nations which currently lack an ethnically identifiable population of African origin, or where such groups live in remote or little-known areas, find the notion of African contributions to Spanish preposterous. Taken as a whole, the African linguistic dimension has received little serious attention in Latin America, and almost none in Spain. Recently in Latin America, there has been an upsurge in interest in Afro-Hispanic historical and cultural events, an interest not unrelated to the fact that larger numbers of Latin Americans of African origin are receiving higher education and themselves engaging in serious scholarship. To date, the focus has been predominantly regional, and a number of excellent studies and monographs have traced the African populations throughout Latin America. In Spain as well, a series of monographs has begun to outline the full extent of the African presence in areas of Spain for which data had previously been unavailable.

The present study, which adopts a comparative historical perspective, has a relatively modest goal, in comparison with the enormity of the task at hand. In the following chapters, we will trace the first attestations of Africans learning Spanish, as the early stages of the Portuguese slave trade brought large numbers of blacks into southern Spain by the end of the fifteenth century. A study of literary documents, reinforced by comparative reconstruction based on existing Afro-Iberian language forms and known facts about African languages and the historical development of Spanish, will yield a tentative model of the sort of language that might have been used by African- and European-born blacks in

² Lipski (1982).

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sixteenth- to eighteenth-century Spain. Following this, the focus of attention will follow the routes of Spanish colonization of the Americas, and the development of African populations in the New World colonies. Finally, we will offer an assessment as to whether Afro-Hispanic language ever creolized (became – as a completely restructured offspring of Spanish – the native language of a significant speech community), and what permanent imprint – other than purely lexical – the totality of Afro-Hispanic linguistic manifestations may have left upon the Spanish language in various parts of the world.

The contributions of language contact to the history of Spanish

Like other languages that have developed under duress and later spread across the globe, Spanish is the product of language contact. The Roman legions who carried Latin – itself already flavored by Oscan, Umbrian, Ligurian, and Greek – to Hispania (as the Iberian Peninsula was known) set the language upon a course which would rapidly bring it into contact with numerous peoples and cultures. Phoenicians, Carthaginians, and native Basques and Iberians began to leave their imprint on Latin before it began its gradual metamorphosis into Ibero-Romance, thence Spanish and its neighbors. Only a few centuries after the Roman domination of the Iberian Peninsula, Vandals, Suevi, and Visigoths swept down from the north; the latter group in particular had a lasting impact on the culture of what would eventually become Spain, as well as contributing several words to the emerging Spanish language. Following on the heels of the Visigoths were the *moros* – Arabic-speaking invaders from north Africa who continuously occupied parts of Spain and Portugal for nearly 800 years. The contact of early Ibero-Romance and Arabic gave rise to a distinctly flavored Romance language known as Mozarabic, which apparently differed from Castilian in many significant ways – in phonology, morphology, lexicon, and possibly syntax. During the reconquest of Moslem Spain by the Christian Castilians, the Castilian dialect came into contact with Mozarabic and both dialects co-existed in some communities and perhaps even among the same speakers, since Mozarabic language and culture was more prestigious and represented a more highly advanced civilization than that carried by the hard-fighting but poorly educated Castilians.³

In the years following the neutralization and expulsion of the Arabs, at the end of the fifteenth century, the Spanish language in Spain absorbed more French and Italian lexical items (French words in particular had begun to enter the Spanish language in previous centuries). The contribution of the Spanish Jews, a glimpse of whose language is preserved in contemporary Sephardic Spanish (known as *ladino* or *judezmo*), is also a major lacuna. Given the key roles played

³ Penny (2000).

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by Jews both in Moslem-held Spain and during the early Castilian period, it is inevitable that a tangible impact on the Spanish language would ensue. Spanish Jews often spoke Arabic and used Hebrew words and expressions, and especially after being segregated into urban ghettos, may well have developed ethnolinguistically distinct varieties of Spanish.

At this point in the development of Peninsular Spanish, the study of external language contact usually stops, except perhaps to mention the sporadic lexical contributions of Roma/Gypsy *caló*, and the recent influx of Anglicisms. In Latin America, Spanish came into close contact with Native American languages – contact ranging from symbiotic to cannibalistic – and considerable research has been devoted to tracing the indigenous contributions to Latin American Spanish. Although many Latin Americans reject the notion that indigenous contributions go beyond simple lexical borrowings for New World items, serious research has revealed profound and far-reaching substratum patterns in the Spanish language throughout Latin America.⁴ Contemporary observers frequently comment on the incursions of English, even far from the borders of the United States, while in many countries, the linguistic effects of immigrant languages upon Spanish has been noted: Italian in Argentina and Uruguay, Chinese in Cuba and Peru, English in northern Chile, German and Japanese in Paraguay, etc. And yet the picture is still not complete.

Even in their totality, the above-mentioned language contacts are not sufficient to explain both the diversity and the unity of the Spanish language as spoken across four continents. One of the most interesting chapters in the history of Spanish dialect differentiation is the African contribution, the byproduct of hundreds of thousands of African slaves imported first into Spain and Portugal and then to the New World, who spoke a variety of African languages and sometimes also European languages. The African contribution to the Hispanic American lexicon is undisputed, since in addition to the hundreds of Africanisms found in the local level in dialects of Spanish throughout the Caribbean and South America, such words as *marimba*, *mucama*, *guineo*, *congo*, *ñame*, *cachimbo/a*, *merengue*, *mandinga*, *mondongo* and possibly *chévere* are more widely used.⁵ More controversial are the possible African contributions to Spanish American syntax and phonetics, with the latter possibility either overlooked or overemphasized by the principal Africanist theories of Latin American dialectology.

The reconstruction of early Afro-Hispanic language

There exists a tantalizing corpus of literary, folkloric, and anecdotal testimony on the earlier speech patterns of Africans, in Spain and Latin America. Filling

⁴ For example Cerrón-Palomino (2003), Granda (1979, 1988), Lipski (1994d), among many others.

⁵ Meggenney (1983).

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in the pieces of the puzzle is not only important for ethnolinguistic and language contact studies, but is vital to the tracing of the historical development of Spanish in its broadest sense. Only by fully reconstructing the speech varieties used by Afro-Hispanics during the formative periods of Latin American Spanish will it be possible to isolate and evaluate the other influences that shaped the development of Spanish on four continents.

In contemporary Latin America, despite a considerable Afro-American population in many regions, and notwithstanding racial stereotypes in literature and popular culture, there is nowhere to be found an ethnically unique “Black Spanish,” comparable to vernacular Black English in the United States.⁶ In more recent times, the linguistic characteristics attributed to black Spanish speakers have been simply those of the lower socioeconomic classes, without any objective racial connotations. The situation was different in the past, and there exists ample evidence that distinctly Afro-Hispanic speech forms did exist. The greatest obstacle in the assessment of earlier Afro-Hispanic language is the high level of prejudice, exaggeration, and stereotyping which has always surrounded the description of non-white speakers of Spanish, and which attributes to all of them a wide range of defects and distortions that frequently are no more than an unrealistic repudiation of this group.

One group that did use a “special” language were the *bozales*, slaves born in Africa, who spoke European languages only with difficulty. The word *bozal* originally meant “savage” or “untamed horse,” and ultimately came to refer to the halting Spanish or Portuguese spoken by Africans. This term rapidly dropped from usage in Spain once the population of African-born slaves dwindled, but it continued in the Spanish Caribbean – particularly Cuba – well into the twentieth century. *Bozal* language first arose along the West African coast and in the Iberian Peninsula late in the fifteenth century; the earliest attestations come from Portugal. *Bozal* Spanish makes its written appearance in Spain early in the sixteenth century, and continues through the middle of the eighteenth century, being especially prominent in Golden Age plays and poetry. Latin American *bozal* Spanish was first described by writers like Sor Juan Inés de la Cruz, at the beginning of the seventeenth century. Other surviving seventeenth-century documents demonstrate the existence of *bozal* Spanish in the highland mining areas of Peru, Mexico, Colombia, Bolivia, and Guatemala. Few documents representing Afro-Hispanic speech remain from eighteenth-century Latin America; Cuba and Mexico are among the regions so represented. At the turn of the nineteenth century, the last big surge of slave trading, spurred by the sugar plantation boom and by increased urbanization of many coastal regions, resulted in an outpouring of Afro-Hispanic literary representations. The geographical distribution of extant texts mirrors the profile of the

⁶ Lipski (1985b).

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African slave trade in Latin America. The nineteenth-century texts come principally from three regions: Cuba (with a few additional texts from Puerto Rico), coastal Peru, and the Buenos Aires/Montevideo region. The turn of the twentieth century brought a scattering of texts from coastal Colombia, Venezuela, and Ecuador, together with a large corpus of Cuban materials. Contemporary Afro-Hispanic writers who have alluded to possible speech differences within the Afro-American communities come mostly from Cuba (e.g. Nicolás Guillén), Peru (e.g. Nicomedes Santa Cruz), Colombia (e.g. Manuel Zapata Olivella) and Ecuador (e.g. Adalberto Ortiz, Nelson Estupiñán Bass). These last generations (with the exception of the anthropological writings of Lydia Cabrera in Cuba) have not dealt with *bozal* Spanish, but rather with possible ethnolinguistic characteristics of Afro-Americans born and raised in Latin America.⁷

Some important hypotheses regarding *bozal* Spanish

Although most *bozal* Spanish specimens reflect only non-native usage by speakers of African languages,⁸ data from some Caribbean texts have given rise to two controversial proposals, which are of great importance to general Spanish dialectology. The first is that Afro-Hispanic language in the Caribbean and possibly elsewhere coalesced into a stable creole language (i.e. had consistent structural characteristics differing from those of previous varieties of Spanish and was eventually acquired natively). A corollary is the claim that this creole language had its origins in an even earlier Afro-Portuguese pidgin or creole, formed in West Africa and surviving in the contemporary creoles of Cape Verde, São Tomé and Annobón, and in Latin America in Papiamentu (spoken in the Netherlands Antilles) and Palenquero (spoken in the Afro-Colombian village of Palenque de San Basilio).

The second proposal is that this earlier Afro-Hispanic pidgin or perhaps creole language extended beyond the pale of slave barracks and plantations, and permanently affected the evolution of ALL Caribbean Spanish, not only contributing vocabulary items, but also touching syntax and phonology.⁹ The

⁷ Lipski (1999d). ⁸ Lipski (1986a, 1986f, 1998a, 1998c, 2000a).

⁹ Among the researchers supporting the notion that Afro-Hispanic *bozal* language was a creole and/or the universal pidgin Portuguese origin of Spanish-based creoles are Castellanos (1985), Granda (1968, 1970, 1971, 1976), Megenney (1984a, 1985a, 1985b, 1986, 1990a, 1993), Naro (1978), Otheguy (1973), Perl (1982, 1984, 1985, 1987, 1988, 1989a, 1989b, 1989c, 1989d), Schwegler (1989, 1991b, 1993, 1996a, 1996b, 1999), Taylor 1971, Thompson (1961), Wagner (1949), Whinnom (1956, 1965), Yacou (1977), and Ziegler (1981). The opposite perspective, that *bozal* language was merely the imperfectly acquired Spanish spoken by the first generation of African-born slaves, is taken by Laurence (1974), Lipski (1986a, 1986f, 1993, 1998a, 1998c, 1999a, 2000a), López Morales (1980), Martínez Gordo (1982), Reinecke (1937), and Valdés Bernal (1978, 1987), among others.

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present work will draw together the available evidence on the nature of Afro-Hispanic language over a period of more than four centuries, in an attempt to address the questions posed by the prior creole hypothesis.

The reasons for the current scarcity of Spanish-derived creole languages are the subject of debate; McWhorter (1995, 2000) has recently suggested that Spanish-based creoles did not form in Latin America because, according to his analysis, most if not all Afro-Atlantic creoles formed in slaving stations on the West African coast, most of which were controlled by the Portuguese (whence the large number of Afro-Lusitanian creoles). Laurence (1974) and others have pointed to the high demographic ratio of white native Spanish speakers to black slaves in Spanish American colonies, in contrast to French and English colonies in which creole languages developed. In recent work I have proposed that Spanish may indeed have briefly creolized during the nineteenth century in some of the more labor-intensive Cuban sugar plantations, but that the subsequent abolition of slavery and the rapid collapse of the hermetic slave barracks environment precluded extension of such embryonic creoles past the first generation of Cuban-born slaves.¹⁰

Despite the generally negative conclusions about the creolization of Spanish, there is a small but important corpus of written materials, together with fleeting contemporary holdovers in isolated Afro-Hispanic communities, which contain creole-like features that are unlikely to have appeared spontaneously. Moreover, many of the features in these texts are similar or identical to combinations found in acknowledged Afro-Iberian creoles. The elusive nature of creole elements surrounded by unconvincing examples of second-language Spanish makes for a most interesting journey, and will form the basis for the final sections of this book.

Obstacles to historical reconstruction

Several factors contribute to the high level of uncertainty concerning the possible African contributions to Latin American Spanish. Near the top of the list is inadequate demographic information, including the number and distribution of Africans in colonial Latin America, the languages they spoke, their interaction with native Spanish speakers, and the extent to which the speech of Africans was able to influence those around them. Population shifts of Africans from one region of Latin America to another, particularly immediately following the colonial wars of independence, is another fuzzy area, as is the true dimension of the clandestine slave and quasi-forced labor trade that flourished in the Caribbean region in the mid-nineteenth century, largely drawing from New World slave

¹⁰ Lipski (1998c, 2000a).

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depots such as Curaçao and the Lesser Antilles, and including Afro-Americans who already spoke European languages or creoles derived from them. There is even indirect evidence that during the same time period, the Pacific slave raiders who carried Polynesians and Easter Islanders to coastal Peru and Chile and even as far as Guatemala and Mexico may have brought speakers of Pacific languages into contact with Afro-Hispanic speakers, further complicating the picture.¹¹

The reconstruction of early Afro-Hispanic language, from the sixteenth century through the beginning of the twentieth century, is severely hampered by two additional factors. The first is the relative scarcity of non-literary and non-humorous attestations, particularly prior to the late nineteenth century. Nearly all indications of Afro-Hispanic speech are embedded in humorous or satirical literature. These include the racist *sainetes* and *entremeses* (skits) of Golden Age (sixteenth to seventeenth centuries) Spain, the *negrillo* songs sung in “black” dialect in churches in Latin America and Spain, the Cuban *teatro bufo* (theatrical farces) and the *negros catedráticos* (literally “black professors,” referring to pretentious language usage). Additional examples are found in the *cancioneros* (song collections) and *pregones* (street vendors’ calls) of the nineteenth-century Río de la Plata, and the hundreds of anonymous pamphlets and song sheets that spread stereotypical linguistic formulas across several continents and several centuries. Few indeed are the non-fictional representations of *bozal* Africans’ use of Spanish, and fewer still are the accounts which did not depart from the premise of the *negrito* who spoke “bad” Spanish. Before the nineteenth century, purportedly objective observations of Afro-Hispanic speech can be counted on the fingers of one hand, and the total amount of text amounts to a paragraph at best. Matters are little better in the nineteenth century, except for a few travelers’ accounts and a handful of dictionary entries. Work done in the twentieth century by writers such as the Cubans Lydia Cabrera and Fernando Ortiz based on interviews with elderly Afro-Cubans allows for a more accurate reconstruction of Afro-Cuban speech from the middle of the nineteenth century onward.

The second obstacle is that Afro-Hispanic speech was never considered systematically “different” enough from natively spoken Spanish for any particular attention to be paid to this variety. Reconstruction of such creole languages as Sranan Tongo, Negerhollands, Guyanese Creole, Jamaican Creole, Haitian Creole, Papiamentu, etc., is aided by the fact that (white) writers knew that the “negro dialects” were different enough from standard English, French, Dutch, etc. that materials had to be specially prepared, and fragments of speech from speakers of these emergent creoles had to be properly “translated” for European consumption.

¹¹ Lipski (1996b, 2000c).

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When one society dominates and enslaves another, the languages of the enslaved group are automatically placed at a disadvantage, and can only seep into the language of the dominant society to the extent that both demographic weight (a high ratio of slaves to master class) and direct social contact make such transfer possible. Simple demographic ratios are not enough to ensure language transfer. During the early colonial period, Native Americans outnumbered Spaniards by as much as 100,000 to 1, but as long as the Spanish lived in walled cities or fortified coastal enclaves, they might as well have been living on a space station. Mexico City for example was originally walled off from the millions of surrounding indigenous residents, and Spaniards had contact with only a tiny handful of bilingual Indian or *mestizo* (mixed-race) intermediaries. The Spaniards did not learn the indigenous language, and most of the indigenous population learned no Spanish. The bilingual and bicultural individuals who served as bridges between the two societies allowed for a little cross-fertilization, but it was only when the walls came down and a large *mestizo* class came into its own – and moved in among the Spaniards – that serious linguistic influence of indigenous languages on Spanish could become possible. In most instances this meant simply transfer of individual words such as *chocolate*, *tomate*, *zacate*, *tecolote*, *poncho*, *jaguar*, *cóndor*, but when a bilingual population – retaining structural features of the indigenous language while speaking Spanish – became numerically and socially predominant, even monolingual Spanish usage was affected. This occurred, for example, in Paraguay and much of the Andean region, where grammatical patterns derived from the indigenous languages are used by Spanish speakers with no Native American heritage. A key factor facilitating the transfer of structural patterns from the indigenous languages to Spanish was the fact that, in a given area, a single native language predominated. Indigenous residents continued to communicate with one another in their own language, and their approximations to Spanish all shared a common basis, reflecting the patterns of that native language.

For a variety of reasons, the relationship between African languages and Spanish in the Caribbean was substantially different than in the cases just mentioned. First, Africans in Latin America usually did not enjoy the possibility of a shared common language. More by circumstance than by deliberate design, slaving ships typically picked up loads of slaves from several West African ports before traversing the Atlantic, and a shipment of slaves could contain speakers of a dozen mutually unintelligible languages. Moreover, at least six major African language families were involved in the Afro-Hispanic mix (Atlantic, Mande, Kru, Kwa, Congo-Benue and Bantu), each of which has totally different structures, and which share almost no common denominators at all. A typical heterogeneous group of Africans acquiring Spanish could not use

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loan-translations from their native languages that would be widely understood by Africans of different backgrounds.

Until the nineteenth century, Africans in the Spanish Caribbean usually worked on small farms, in placer gold deposits (panning for gold in river beds), or as domestic servants and laborers in cities and towns. In the largest cities, Africans were sometimes allowed to form socio-religious societies based on membership in a specific African ethnic group, which may have facilitated retention of some African languages beyond the first generation, but in general when Africans found themselves together in Latin America, they had to resort to Spanish. This situation predominated throughout the entire Caribbean area, including Cuba, Puerto Rico, Santo Domingo, coastal Venezuela and Colombia, and Panama, until the very end of the eighteenth century. Following the early use of Africans in placer gold mining, pearl diving, and agriculture, the importation of Africans dropped drastically in all of these areas, except for the Colombian port of Cartagena de Indias, through which nearly all slaves destined for the northwestern part of South America passed. Thus although in some regions the population of African origin was considerable, most Afro-Hispanics had been born in the colonies in close contact with native speakers of Spanish. Only in a few of the largest cities, such as Havana and Cartagena, did even a minimal amount of ghettoization take place, which may have fostered the retention of certain ethnically marked words or pronunciation, similar to inner city neighborhoods in the United States, or the townships of apartheid-era South Africa. In the remaining places, the ratio of African-born *bozales* – workers who learned Spanish as a second language – was always small in comparison to the native Spanish-speaking population – black and white.

Matters changed rapidly following the Haitian revolution, which began in 1791. The French half of the island of Hispaniola, known as Saint-Domingue, was by far the world's largest sugar producer at the end of the eighteenth century, and the ratio of black slaves to white masters was as high as 100:1 on some plantations. Following the revolution and the establishment of the free nation of Haiti by the 1820s, sugar production dropped almost to zero, and other Latin American countries which had previously been reluctant to compete against the French near-monopoly rushed to fill the gap. This required the immediate importation of hundreds of thousands of additional laborers, the majority of whom came directly from Africa, with a considerable number also drawn from other established Caribbean colonies. The two largest participants in the new sugar boom were Brazil and Cuba. Nearly 90 percent of the total number of African slaves – a figure of between one and two million individuals – brought to Cuba arrived between 1790 and 1840. Figures are proportionally similar although smaller in absolute numbers for Puerto Rico and Venezuela.