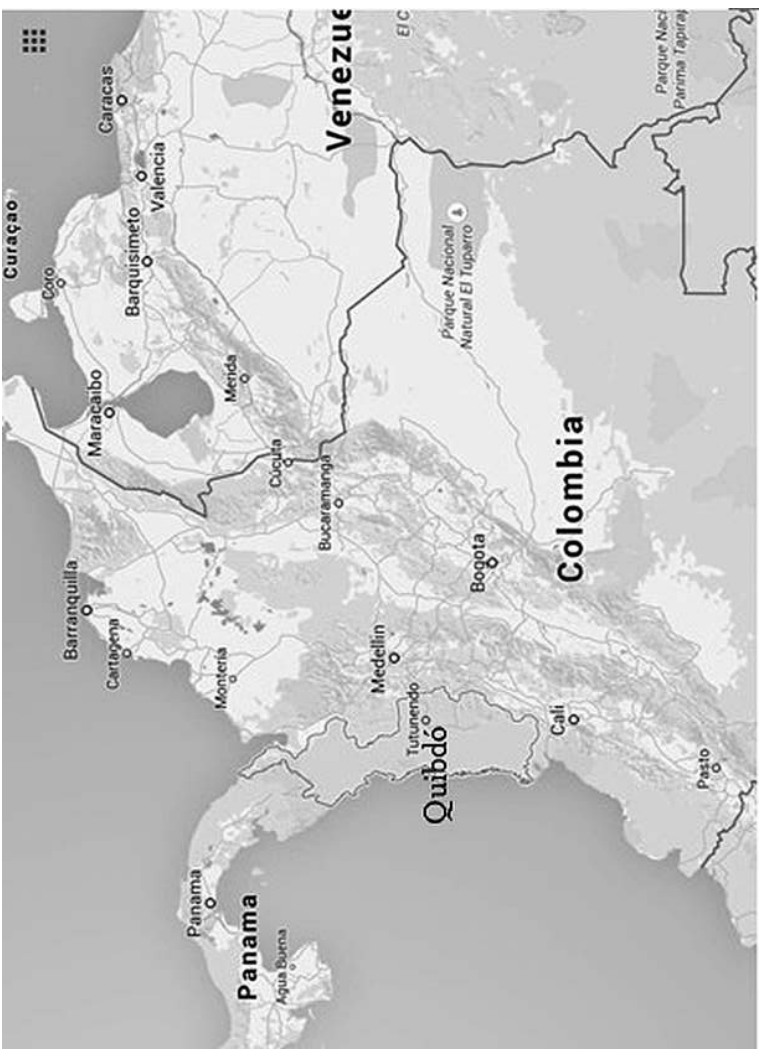
1 Introduction

1.1 Why This Book?

Of all the Afro-Hispanic languages of the Americas (AHLAs), the one that more than any other has puzzled linguists interested in the origin and evolution of these contact varieties is definitively Chocó Spanish (CS) (McWhorter 2000; Lipski 2005). CS is the dialect spoken by the inhabitants of the Department of Chocó (Map 1.1), Colombia, a region where blacks represent more than 90 percent of today's total population (DANE 2005) and consist of the descendants of the slaves taken to this region during colonial times to work the rich gold mines of the area.

Even though CS presents certain morphological and phonological reductions, the grammatical restructuring encountered in this language is not as intense as the one found in Palenquero, a Spanish creole spoken in San Basilio de Palenque, Department of Bolívar (Colombia) or in the many other European-based creoles spoken in the Americas (Jamaican English, Haitian French, etc.). At first glance, this may appear a bit surprising, since the conditions that have generally been held to be responsible for the creolization of other European languages in the Americas appear to have also been in place in colonial Chocó, namely: (a) a high number of African-born slaves proceeding from all over the Western African coast, (b) a huge disproportion of blacks-to-whites, (c) extreme working conditions in gold mines, (d) a difficult-to-access region, isolated from the rest of Spanish-speaking Colombia (McWhorter 2000: 9).

Indeed, it is well known that colonial Chocó became an important mining center during the eighteenth century, when thousands of black slaves were introduced into the region to carry out forced labor (Sharp 1976; Colmenares 1979). Moreover, only a much-reduced number of Spaniards settled the Department, so that the ratio of blacks to whites has always been quite high. For example, in 1782 there were some 340 whites residing in this district, who represented about 2 percent of the total population (Sharp 1976: 19). For these reasons, CS has captured the attention of a number of scholars who have tried to



Map 1.1 Overhead view of the Department of Chocó, Colombia (western coast of Colombia)
Source: Map data © 2019 Google.

account for its nature by offering different hypotheses on its evolution and the development of other Afro-European contact varieties in the Americas.

McWhorter (2000: ch.2), for example, in line with his Afrogenesis Hypothesis of creole formation, claims that the sociohistorical conditions for a creole to emerge were well in place in colonial Chocó, but due to the fact that a Spanish pidgin was not introduced into the Americas from western Africa, the linguistic bases for the development of a full-fledged creole language would have been missing in the Colombian Pacific lowlands, and in the rest of the Spanish colonies overseas. On the other hand, Granda (1977) and Schwegler (1991a, 1991b) indicate that a creole language may have existed in colonial Chocó, as well as in several other Latin American Spanish colonies, and that it would have subsequently decreolized due to more recent contact with standard varieties of Spanish. They suggest that several of today's AHLAs probably went through the same decreolizing path, and that they would have initially derived from one Portuguese-based pidgin/creole, originally formed in Africa and subsequently taken to the Americas.

Besides providing considerable ground for hypotheses on the genesis and evolution of Afro-European languages, CS also has much to offer to linguistic theory. In fact, some common features that have repeatedly been reported for CS (Ruiz García 2009; Rodríguez Tocarruncho 2010), and that in some cases have been identified as potential indicators of a previous creole stage for other AHLAs (Granda 1968 *et seq*.; Schwegler 1991a, 2014; etc.), represent deviations from standard Spanish that are extremely fascinating from a theoretical perspective (Sessarego 2012a), and testify to the instantiation in grammar of certain universal second-language acquisition processes, which appear to be at work in all cases of language contact (Sessarego 2013a, Sessarego & Rao 2016).

This project has two main goals. The first is to provide a linguistic description of CS, while the second is to assess the origin of this language and its implications for creole studies. The questions that this project addresses may be stated as follows: What are the main linguistic differences between CS and standard Spanish and what do they have to say about the nature of this and other AHLAs? What were the sociohistorical conditions in which CS formed? Was slavery in Chocó much different from slavery in other European colonies? How can we use this information to address current debates on the origin of other black communities in the Americas and the languages they speak?

There is plenty of research that has been carried out in other fields such as history and law, to which, so far, not much attention has been paid by linguists. In recent decades, some attempts to combine historical and linguistic data to cast light on the origin of certain AHLAs have been carried out for the Caribbean and the Andean Highlands (Mintz 1971; Laurence 1974; Díaz-Campos & Clements 2008; Clements 2009; Sessarego 2011a, 2011b, 2013b,

2013c, 2013d, 2014a, 2014b, 2014c, 2015a). Nevertheless, for the Colombian Pacific lowlands almost no research of this type has ever been done. This study explores the historical and linguistic evidence available for CS and challenges the traditional posture that would picture colonial Chocó as the perfect place for a Spanish creole to develop.

Findings indicate that the long-assumed creolizing conditions for CS might not have been in place in colonial Chocó and that the grammar of this language can be better analyzed as the result of advanced second-language acquisition processes, which do not necessarily imply any previous creole stage (Sessarego 2013a). In addition, this work provides an analysis of the evolution of CS in relation to the recently-proposed Legal Hypothesis of Creole Genesis (LHCG) (Sessarego 2015a, 2017a). In so doing, this study tests to what extent such a hypothesis makes valid predictions for a dialect like CS, which developed in a region described by many as "remote" and "on the frontier" (Whitten 1974; Sharp 1976), thus far away from legal courts and where the law was not likely to be properly enforced.

This project is meant to make a substantial advance in the frontier of knowledge of creole studies by laying down the foundations of a new, more cohesive, and interdisciplinary research program at the interface of linguistics, legal history, and colonial studies. It is primarily focused on CS and the other AHLAs, but its findings can be easily generalized, applied, and tested to other contact languages and settings. Thus, this will enable future researchers to better address current debates on the origins of other black communities in the Americas and the languages they speak.

1.2 Methodology

Linguistic data were collected during the winter of 2014–2015 in the capital city of Quibdó and in its surrounding areas. In particular, fieldwork was conducted in the village of Villa España, a recently built refugee camp hosting thousands of Chocoanos who escaped from guerrilla warfare taking place in both the northern and southern provinces of the Department. Given the very violent climate in Chocó at the time of my visit, it was not possible to travel across the Department to carry out fieldwork in other areas. Nevertheless, since the people interviewed in Quibdó and in Villa España came from a variety of locations (namely, Istmina, Condoto, Nóvita, Cértegui, Sipi, Opogadó, Iró, San Juan, and Río Sucio), the collected data may be taken as representative of the overall regional dialect. All of the informants were native speakers of their own CS variety and did not speak any other language spoken in the region, such as Emberá.

Sociolinguistic interviews were carried out with forty-five speakers of different ages (ranging from 19 to 95 years old) and levels of education (ranging

from illiterate people to members of the community holding a college degree). Findings indicate – as expected – that the oldest and least educated informants use a variety that is quite rich in stigmatized features, while the youngest and most educated Chocoanos use more standard forms. Nevertheless, while research on other Afro-Hispanic dialects has shown that, even in rural communities, the youngest generations shifted almost completely to their respective regional standard varieties (see, for example, Sessarego 2013b, 2014a, 2015a for Ecuador, Bolivia, and Peru), in the case of CS, it is still possible to observe young speakers proceeding from rural areas who show morphosyntactic features remarkably divergent from what would be classified as "standard" Colombian Spanish.

This book not only presents linguistic data from CS. In fact, the linguistic information collected during the aforementioned fieldwork is here compared and contrasted with data proceeding from other studies, in particular with those analyzing other Afro-Hispanic varieties. In this way, it has been made possible to offer a perspective on where CS stands with respect to similar contact vernaculars. This investigation is also based on secondary literature on colonial history and law, which helped provide a broader and more comprehensive picture of the social background in which CS developed.

1.3 The Book's Structure

This book consists of seven chapters. Chapter 1 is the introduction to this work; it describes its objectives, methodology, and structure. Chapter 2 offers an analysis of the so-called "Spanish creole debate" (Lipski 2005: ch.9), or the pull of different models that have been suggested in the literature to explain the paucity of Spanish-based creoles in the Americas. In so doing, it situates CS within such a context and illustrates the hypotheses that have been proposed to account for the development of this Afro-Hispanic dialect. Chapter 3 provides a sketch of CS grammar. Chapter 4 consists of an analysis of the linguistic features shared by CS and several other AHLAs. It shows that a number of the grammatical elements found in these contact varieties can be conceived as the traces of advanced second-language acquisition strategies, which do not necessarily imply a previous creole stage – contrary to what has been traditionally indicated in the literature. Such phenomena, in fact, impose high processing demands on the linguistic interfaces (Sessarego 2013a; Sessarego & Rao 2016; Rao & Sessarego 2016, 2018; Romero & Sessarego 2018; Sessarego & Gutiérrez-Rexach 2018); thus, they tend to result in non-target-like constructions, commonly found in advanced interlanguages. Chapter 5 is a sociohistorical analysis of slavery in Chocó. It presents a variety of legal, economic, and demographic aspects of blacks' lives in colonial Chocó to show how certain social factors shaped CS grammar. Chapter 6 provides a

new analysis on the evolution of CS in relation to the recently-proposed LHCG, which ascribes a prime importance in the development of Afro-European languages in the Americas to the legal evolution of slavery from the Roman times to the different colonial settings implemented by the Europeans in the "New World" (Sessarego 2015a, 2017a). In so doing, the chapter tests the validity of the LHCG for an isolated region like Chocó, where legal courts have never been present during the colonial period. Finally, Chapter 7 summarizes the content of the book and provides the conclusions.

2 The Place of Chocó Spanish in the Spanish Creole Debate

2.1 Introduction

For more than four decades now, scholars interested in the origin and evolution of Afro-European contact languages in the Americas have tried to figure out why Spanish creoles are only spoken in two very circumscribed regions of Latin America, in contrast to the much more widespread use of their English- and French-based varieties. In fact, it is a well-known fact that contemporary Latin American Spanish creoles can only be found in the former maroon community of San Basilio de Palenque (Colombia) – where Palenquero is spoken – and in the so-called ABC-triangle, the Caribbean islands of Aruba, Bonaire, and Curaçao (Netherlands Antilles), where Papiamentu is used.

If we consider that Spain was the European country that "discovered" the "New World" and that became one among the most influential powers in the colonization of the Americas, it may appear somehow surprising to observe that Spanish creoles are so reduced in number and size. Moreover, according to some scholars (Goodman 1987; Schwegler 1993; McWhorter 2000; Jacobs 2012; among others), Papiamentu and Palenquero should only be classified as Spanish creoles in a strictly synchronic sense, since – in their view – these languages most likely started as Portuguese creoles and only in a subsequent phase went through a process of Spanish relexification.

The relative paucity of Spanish creoles in the Americas has captured the attention of several researchers, who proposed a number of models to account for this state of affairs. The pull of different views on this issue has been labeled in the literature as the "Spanish creole debate" (Lipski 2005: ch.9). One early attempt to provide an analysis of the given facts is the hypothesis initially postulated by Granda (1968, 1970), and subsequently supported by a number of followers (Otheguy 1973; Megenney 1984a, 1984b, 1985, 1990, 1993; Schwegler 1991a, 1991b; Perl 1982, 1985, 1998; etc.). According to these authors, a once-widespread Afro-Iberian creole used to be spoken by the black communities of colonial Spanish America. This language would have derived from one single Portuguese-based creole (Monogenesis Hypothesis), which

originally developed around the fifteenth century from the early contacts between the Portuguese merchants and the African groups found across the Western African coast. This hypothetical Pan-American creole would have approximated to Spanish over time (Decreolization Hypothesis), due to the pressure exerted by the standard norm and the stigmatization of this black vernacular. For this reason, according to the supporters of what may be called "the Monogenesis-Decreolization Hypothesis," besides Papiamentu and Palenquero, which preserved most of the original Portuguese-creole structure, all the remaining Afro-Hispanic varieties of the Americas would have converged towards Spanish to the point of presenting today only a few creole-like features. According to these scholars, such grammatical elements, which can also be found in colonial literary texts depicting black speech, represent a key piece of evidence in support of the monogenetic model, since their parallel existence in these black communities scattered across the Americas would be very difficult to explain in terms of independent developments (Schwegler 1991a: 77).

This early attempt to account for the current paucity of Spanish creoles has faced some criticism. Some researchers, in fact, have objected that due to a concomitance of historical factors, the Spanish Caribbean differed quite significantly from the English and the French Antilles, such that the demographic and socioeconomic conditions in colonial times would not have been ripe for Spanish creolization to take place in Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Dominican Republic (Mintz 1971; Laurence 1974; Lipski 1986, 1994a; Chaudenson 2001; Clements 2009). For these reasons, the grammatical features attested in the colonial Spanish Caribbean for the speech of *bozales* (black captives born in Africa, who did not speak Spanish natively) should not be taken as evidence of a Pan-American Afro-Iberian creole, but rather as the traces of non-target-like, substrate-driven, learning strategies, "which arose spontaneously each time Spanish and African languages came into contact" (Lipski 1986: 171).

McWhorter (1997, 2000) acknowledges that the Spanish Antilles, especially before the sugar boom of the nineteenth century, did not present the conditions that have traditionally been considered to enable creole formation. However, he claims that in the mainland Spanish colonies, and particularly, in Veracruz (Mexico), Chincha (Peru), Chota Valley (Ecuador), coastal Venezuela, and Chocó (Colombia), the conditions for creole formation obtained, but yet Spanish creoles did not develop (2000: ch.2). In his view, the reason why this did not happen should not be sought in the Americas but rather on the other side of the ocean, in Africa, from where captives were shipped to the New World. McWhorter (2000) believes that the creole languages spoken today in the Americas developed out of the pidgins that formed on the Western African coasts from the contacts between European traders and the Africans involved in the slave trade (Afrogenesis Hypothesis). According to this model, the real

cause behind the non-creolization of Spanish in the Americas would be that Spain, unlike the other European powers involved in the colonization of the New World, did not trade directly in African slaves, such that a Spanish pidgin never developed in Africa and, as a result, a Spanish creole could not possibly form in the Americas.

The Afrogenesis Hypothesis has also faced some opposition. Several authors, after taking a closer look at the regions described by McWhorter (2000: 7) as "canonical breeding grounds" for creole formation, have concluded that the sociohistorical conditions postulated by McWhorter were probably not in place in colonial times (see Díaz-Campos & Clements 2005, 2008 for Venezuela; Sessarego 2013b, 2013d, 2014b for Ecuador; Sessarego 2014c, 2015a for Peru). Nevertheless, besides this criticism, McWhorter's proposal has been generally prized for providing a unified account for all the Afro-Hispanic dialects of the Americas (Schwegler 2002: 121; Lipski 2005: 286).

Along these lines of reasoning, in recent works (Sessarego 2015a, 2017a) I have proposed a new hypothesis, which follows a common thread among all these varieties. I called it the "Legal Hypothesis of Creole Genesis" (LHCG). This proposal focuses on an aspect of the European colonial enterprise in the Americas that has never been closely analyzed in relation to the evolution of Afro-European contact varieties, the legal regulations of black slavery. The LHCG ascribes a prime importance to the historical evolution of slavery in the development of Afro-European languages in the Americas, from the legal rules contained in the Roman *Corpus Juris Civilis* to the codes and regulations implemented in the different European colonies overseas. Findings suggest that according to Spanish slavery, in contrast to any other system, slaves were legal persons and not mere "mobile chattel," as in Roman law. The presence of legal personality implied a corollary of rights for the Spanish captives, which were unknown or highly restricted for the slaves living in the colonies of other European nations. This factor, I claim, played a key role in the evolution of Afro-European relations in the New World, and consequently shaped the languages that developed from such a contact. A foreseeable critique of the LHCG regards the extent to which, in colonial time, "law in books" (what was stated in the legal rules) corresponded to "law in action" (the practical application of such rules to a specific social context) (Pound 1910), especially when such regulations concerned slaves living in remote plantations or mines, far away from legal courts and urban centers. Colonial Chocó represents the perfect place to test the LHCG against potential criticism of this sort, since it was a remote region, which never hosted either big cities or legal courts during the colonial period, and where formal legal rules could hardly be implemented by government's authorities (Whitten 1974; Sharp 1976).

The current chapter will provide an overall analysis of the state of affairs concerning the Spanish creole debate by taking a closer look at the linguistic and historical evidence provided in support of, or against, the aforementioned hypotheses, all of which, in one way or another, acknowledge the relevance of Chocó as a region of fundamental importance to their respective models.

2.2 Granda's Monogenesis-Decreolization Hypothesis

Germán de Granda (1968, 1970, 1978a) was the first Hispanist to suggest a monogenetic connection among the Afro-Hispanic varieties of the Americas and the Portuguese-based creoles spoken in Africa. According to his view, an Afro-Portuguese pidgin would have formed in Africa between the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries from the contact of Portuguese traders, missionaries, and explorers and the local African populations (see also Thompson 1961; Valkhoff 1966). This early contact variety would have been exported to different regions of the world during a subsequent period of European colonial expansion, and only in a following phase would it have been relexified with the lexicon proceeding from the European languages spoken in the colonies (viz., French in Haiti, Spanish in Puerto Rico, English in Jamaica, etc.) (see also Whinnom 1965; Bailey 1965). Such a monogenetic evolution would be capable of accounting for the fact that a number of contact languages spoken in Asia, Africa, and in the Americas present similar linguistic features, a fact that could not be easily explained if such languages evolved independently, without sharing a common ancestor or proto-creole (Monogenetic Hypothesis) (Granda 1970). In addition, in Granda's view, the current paucity of Spanish creoles in the Americas should be conceived of as the result of a massive decreolization process, which supposedly took place in the nineteenth century after the abolition of slavery, when the Spanish creoles spoken in the black communities would have entered into closer contact with standard Spanish (Decreolization Hypothesis).

According to Granda (1978: 313), in fact, contrary to what has been suggested by some historians (Tannenbaum 1947; Klein 1967; Hoetink 1967), slavery in Spanish America was not that different from the forced-labor systems implemented by other European powers overseas. He provides four general working hypotheses, which would represent the foundation principles of his Afro-Hispanic research project (1978: 335):

a) Given the parallel social structures found in the Hispanic and non-Hispanic colonies, there is no reason to believe that Spanish creoles did not develop in Spanish America.
b) Spanish America must have had several Spanish creoles, which developed from a common Afro-Portuguese root.