

Language Contact and the Making of an Afro-Hispanic Vernacular

Exploring creole studies from a linguistic, historical, and socio-cultural perspective, this study advances our knowledge of the subject by using a cohesive approach to provide new theoretical insights into language shift, language acquisition, and language change. It compares the legal system regulating black slavery in Chocó, Colombia with the systems implemented by other European colonial powers in the Americas, to address questions such as: What do Chocó Spanish linguistic features say about the nature of Afro-Hispanic vernaculars? What were the sociohistorical conditions in which Chocó Spanish formed? Was slavery in Chocó much different from slavery in other European colonies? Whilst primarily focused on Afro-Hispanic language varieties, Sessarego's findings and methodology can be easily applied and tested to other contact languages and settings, and used to address current debates on the origin of other black communities in the Americas and the languages they speak.

SANDRO SESSAREGO is an Associate Professor in the Department of Spanish and Portuguese at the University of Texas at Austin. He is author of a number of books including *La schiavitù nera nell'America spagnola* (2018), *Afro-Peruvian Spanish* (2015), and *The Afro-Bolivian Spanish Determiner Phrase* (2014).

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Sandro Sessarego

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Series Editor's Foreword

The Cambridge Approaches to Language Contact (CALC) series was set up to publish outstanding monographs on language contact, especially by authors who approach their specific subject matter from a diachronic or developmental perspective. Our goal is to integrate the ever-growing scholarship on language diversification (including the development of creoles, pidgins, and indigenized varieties of colonial European languages), bilingual language development, code-switching, and language endangerment. We hope to provide a select forum to scholars who contribute insightfully to understanding language evolution from an interdisciplinary perspective. We favor approaches that highlight the role of ecology and draw inspiration both from the authors' own fields of specialization and from related research areas in linguistics or other disciplines. Eclecticism is one of our mottoes, as we endeavor to comprehend the complexity of evolutionary processes associated with contact.

We are proud to add to our list Sandro Sessarego's *Language Contact and the Making of an Afro-Hispanic Vernacular: Variation and Change in the Colombian Chocó*. In this book, the author "combines linguistic, sociohistorical, legal, and anthropological perspectives to shed light on Chocó Spanish (CS), an Afro-Hispanic language spoken by the descendants of enslaved Africans brought to the Colombian Department of Chocó during the colonial period to work in the rich gold mines."

Of all the Afro-Hispanic language varieties of the Americas, CS is one of the most enigmatic ones. Offhand, it is spoken in a region that appears to be the perfect colonial context for the emergence of a creole. It has been claimed to have reunited a high disproportion of Africans to Europeans, harsh slave labor conditions, a population growth driven more by massive introduction of Bozal slaves than by birth, and limited interactions with heritage Spanish speakers. Yet, it provides evidence of no drastic divergence from other colonial, non-creole Spanish vernaculars.

Traditional accounts of this evolution of colonial Spanish have invoked "decreolization" or claimed that CS is the logical outcome of language without an African pidgin ancestor. Sessarego rejects them in favor of what he calls the Legal Hypothesis of Creole Genesis (LHCG). According to this, the fact that

the enslaved Africans in Spanish colonies were protected by laws that treated them as integral members of the colonial populations disfavored the emergence of a creole vernacular. Varieties such as Palenquero are exceptions that confirm the rule, because they emerged in contact ecologies in which the Spanish colonial world order did not apply. More specifically, Sessarego argues that there is “a common element, which was shared by all the Spanish colonies but was absent from other European colonies of especially the Americas”: the enslaved Africans had a legal personality that granted them rights to not be abused, to own property, to maintain a family, and to receive Christian education. That is, Spanish American colonies had a population structure that was less segregationist and more culturally assimilationist than other European settlement colonies, which made it easier for the enslaved Africans to learn Spanish without extensive divergence from the lexifier.

This study shows how structural features of CS align with those attested across a number of other Hispanic American vernaculars. All the so-called “creole-like” elements of CS can actually be explained as common SLA features related to processability constraints at the core of linguistic interface processes. The Chocó region apparently never received massive importation of African-born slaves. The *Bozales* and the majority of the Blacks that worked in the mines were *Criollo*, locally born, captives, who, in all likelihood, must have spoken vernacular Spanish varieties. In addition, “due to the pragmatic management implemented by the local *administradores de minas*, manumission was common practice.” Combined with the above factors relevant to the LHCG, the latter favored closer, or less divergent, approximations of heritage vernacular Spanish by the *Bozales*.

The sociohistorical evidence presented in this book suggests that slavery was implemented differently in Spanish American colonies than in other European settlement colonies. Spanish colonial rule apparently fostered more cultural, including linguistic, assimilation, which prevented the formation of creoles. An important strength of this book lies in how the author combines legalistic and sociohistorical approaches to help us understand why, in general, Spanish settlement colonies did not produce creoles, unlike especially their Dutch, English, and French counterparts. It definitely provides more food for thought regarding variation in the ecologies of the transmission of European languages in European settlement colonies that used slave labor.

SALIKOKO S. MUFWENE
Founding Editor, CALC

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xviii Acknowledgments

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