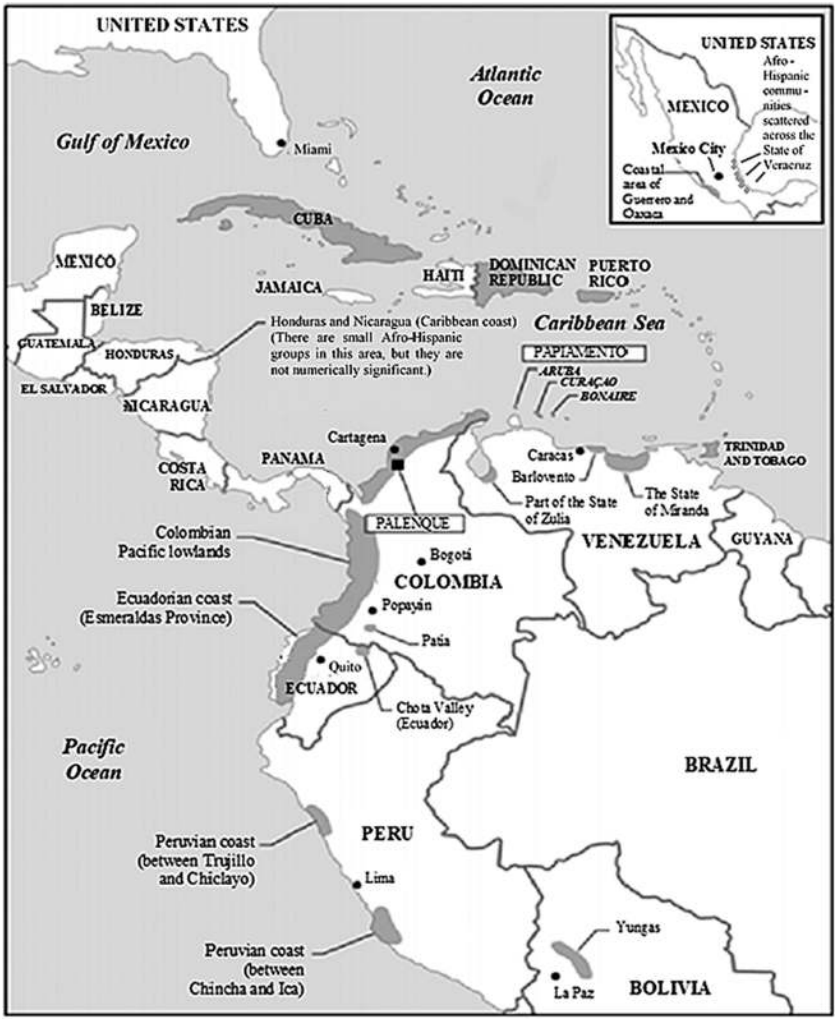
1 *Questioning a Long-Lasting Assumption in the Field*

In accounting for the origins of several of the Spanish and Portuguese contact varieties spoken across the Americas, Africa and Asia, Granda (1968: 202–203) claimed that the grammatical similarities found among all these vernaculars should not be ascribed to the "independent production of exactly the same simplification processes,"[1] since that would be as absurd as the "parallel invention of the same alphabetic system in multiple and distant geographic locations."[2] Thus, according to his view (the Monogenesis Hypothesis), all these contact varieties must have developed from a common root, a proto-language, a once-spoken creole language, in this specific case. In fact, Granda proposed that an Afro-Lusophone creole would have formed around the fifteenth century along the western coasts of Africa, from the early contacts between Portuguese traders, explorers and missionaries, and the local African populations (see also Thompson 1961; Valkhoff 1966). This early contact language would then have been taken to several regions across Asia and the Americas during the following phase of European colonial expansion and, subsequently, its lexicon would have been systematically substituted with words proceeding from the European languages spoken in those colonies, thus essentially preserving its core grammatical structure. This would explain – in his view – why all those contact vernaculars share several linguistic traits.

In his analysis of Afro-European language evolution in the Americas, Granda also tried to address another important question: Why are Spanish creoles only spoken in two highly circumscribed regions of the Americas, in sharp contrast with the relative abundance of English- and French-based languages of this type? Indeed, the only two reported varieties that have traditionally been classified as Spanish-based creoles are Papiamento (spoken

[1] Original version in Spanish: "producción independiente de procesos de simplificación, exactamente coincidentes."
[2] Original version in Spanish: "invención paralela de un mismo sistema alfabético en múltiples y distantes puntos geográficos."



Map 1.1 *The Afro-Hispanic varieties of the Americas*

on the Caribbean islands of Aruba, Bonaire and Curaçao, Netherlands Antilles) and Palenquero (used in the small former maroon community of San Basilio de Palenque, Colombia). In order to account for the paucity of Spanish creoles, Granda (1978) argued that the vast majority of the Afro-Hispanic varieties of the Americas (see Map 1.1, adapted from Klee & Lynch 2009: 6) went through a process of decreolization (Whinnom 1965), an incremental approximation to

Spanish, which would have taken place during the nineteenth century after the abolition of slavery, since the former slaves gradually obtained more and more access to the standard language (Decreolization Hypothesis).

According to what may be described as Granda's Monogenesis-Decreolization Hypothesis, therefore, Spanish slavery would have been quite comparable to the forced-labor systems implemented by the other European powers in the Americas, and, consequently, it must have generated similar creole languages. He summarizes his view on the origin of the Afro-Hispanic vernaculars of the Americas in four main points (1978: 335):

(a) Hispanic and non-Hispanic colonies were characterized by similar social structures. For this reason, Spanish creoles must have formed in Spanish Americas, as they did in other European colonies.
(b) Such Spanish creoles must have developed from a common Afro-Portuguese root.
(c) The current paucity of Spanish creoles in the Americas must be due to a contact-driven decreolization process, which took place during the nineteenth century.
(d) The deviant grammatical features found across these Afro-Hispanic dialects are the remaining traces of such a previous (de) creolization phase.

Granda's Monogenesis-Decreolization Hypothesis had a huge impact on the field of Afro-Hispanic linguistics and, even though today it is unlikely that any linguist would subscribe to its more radical version, which assumes that all Atlantic and Pacific creoles derived from one single proto-language (but see McWhorter 2000 for a somewhat similar proposal for English- and French-based varieties), the idea that the Afro-Hispanic dialects of the Americas developed out of a creole via decreolization is still quite common among linguists.

In fact, such a model has been proposed over and over, by several authors, to account for a number of the linguistic features found in almost every contemporary Afro-Hispanic variety. For example, Schwegler (1993, 1996), Otheguy (1973) and Megenney (1993) support a potential decreolization process for Caribbean Spanish. In this regard, Otheguy (1973: 334–335) could not be more explicit when, after analyzing several grammatical traits encountered across these dialects, he stated:

> In summary, the data presented here strongly suggest that the 'habla bozal' spoken in the Spanish Antilles (and possibly throughout the Caribbean) during colonial times was a Creole … Given this, the sample points of

> coincidence presented here between features which are shared by most Creoles but which are peculiar to Caribbean Spanish cannot be discarded as coincidence and must be taken into account in any explanation of the historical genesis of this major dialect type.

Granda (1977) and Schwegler (1991a, 1991b) propose a similar evolutionary path for Chocó Spanish (Colombia). Álvarez and Obediente (1998) indicate the same for coastal Afro-Venezuelan Spanish, Schwegler (1999) for Chota Valley Spanish (Ecuador), and Lipski (2008) and Perez (2015) do so for Afro-Bolivian Spanish. Schwegler (2014), in a more recent study, has further backed the hypothesis of a now-extinct Afro-Iberian creole for the black vernaculars spoken in Cartagena (Colombia), Chota Valley (Ecuador), Yungas (Bolivia) and Palo Monte (Cuba).

The most recent instance I have encountered of this long-lasting claim on the origin and evolution of the Afro-Latino varieties of the Americas is Guy (2017: 72), who selects Afro-Bolivian Spanish (ABS) to exemplify this hypothetical (de)creolization process, which, in his view, affected many other Afro-Hispanic and Afro-Lusophone vernaculars, including Popular Brazilian Portuguese (Guy 1981, 2004). He states:

> Its history of linguistic isolation implies that ABS must be more basilectal, closer to the speech of the earliest generations of Africans in the Americas, than Brazilian Portuguese and Caribbean Spanish. This in turn implies a historical trajectory by which all of these varieties started out as creoles, or at least restructured varieties tending toward the creole end . . ., and then acquired their present form through differing degrees of standardization.

From a historical point of view, Granda's proposal does not seem to be based on solid ground. Several scholars have shown that the sociodemographic conditions for Spanish creole formation were not present in a number of former Spanish colonies (see, for example, Mintz 1971, Laurence 1974, Lipski 1993 and Clements 2009 for the Caribbean; Sessarego 2011a, 2013a, 2014a, 2015, 2019a for Bolivia, Ecuador, Peru and the Colombian Chocó; Díaz-Campos & Clements 2005, 2008 for Venezuela). Thus, on a case-by-case analysis, the (de)creolization model does not appear to be feasible.

Recent investigations have tried to provide a more comprehensive framework to account for the paucity of Spanish creoles in the Americas. By adding a legal dimension to this debate, it has been claimed that the relative scarcity of Spanish creoles in the Americas is, to a good extent, related to the peculiarities of the Spanish legal system in matters of black slavery, and, in particular, to the fact that the Spanish slave was the only one who was granted legal personhood and all the rights that the status of legal person implied. (See the Legal

Hypothesis of Creole Genesis, Sessarego 2015, 2017a, 2017b, 2018a.) This would have provided the Spanish slave with more access to the colonial language as well as more chances of achieving manumission and integrating into free society. This model has also been used to explain why the only Spanish creoles spoken in the Americas are actually found where Spanish law never applied: in the Netherlands Antilles (where Papiamento is spoken) and in the Colombian village of San Basilio de Palenque, a former maroon community, where, by definition, the Spanish Crown never managed to impose its rule (Sessarego 2018b, 2018c).

Conversely, the literature in support of the Decreolization Hypothesis has, for the most part, paid little attention to the sociohistorical and legal evidence available for colonial Spanish America. Rather, the (de)creolization proposal rests, first and foremost, on linguistic analyses, or on the idea that, since the contemporary Afro-Hispanic dialects of the Americas share several non-standard features, such grammatical elements must have derived from a common creole root. This approach is due to the traditional methodology creole studies inherited from the fields of dialectology and comparative historical linguistics. Schwegler (1991a: 74) provides a very precise picture of the logic behind this way of reasoning when he states:

> When we examine related dialects, such as Dominican Spanish, Cuban Spanish, Chocó Spanish or Cartagena Spanish/Palenquero, . . ., the general dialectological and comparative historical linguistic practice is to assume that such dialects used to belong to an ancient diasystem, and that, for such a reason, they are not the result of independent innovations. As we have just suggested, the Afro-Portuguese creole hypothesis provides such an original diasystem . . .[3]

Examples (1)–(5) and Figures 1.1–1.2 illustrate the most commonly mentioned "creole-like" traits that characterize these contact varieties. These features are exemplified here with data from a number of studies on Afro-Latino linguistics, which indicate their parallel presence across all of these vernaculars (see also Sessarego 2013b, 2019b and references therein).

[3] Original version in Spanish: "Cuando examinamos dialectos relacionados como el español dominicano, el cubano, el chocoano o el cartagenero/palenquero, . . ., la general práctica de la dialectología y la lingüística histórica y comparativa es de suponer que tales dialectos pertenecían a un antiguo diasistema, y que, por lo tanto, no son el resultado de innovaciones independientes. Como acabamos de sugerir, la hipótesis criolla afroportuguesa proporciona tal diasistema de base . . ."

(1) Use of non-emphatic, non-contrastive overt subject pronouns
   a. Yo tando muy pequeña yo conocí a una señora
      I being very young I knew to a woman
      'When I was young I met a woman.' (Barlovento Spanish, Megenney 1999: 117)
   b. Cuando él hace en la casa de él, me llama él
      when he makes in the house of he me call he
      'When he makes it at his house, he calls me.' (Chocó Spanish, Rodríguez Tocarruncho 2010: 61)

(2) Invariant verb forms for person and number
   a. Yo sabe
      I know.3.SG
      'I know.' (Afro-Puertorican, Álvarez Nazario 1974: 194)
   b. Yo quiele sé diputá
      I want.3.SG be deputee
      'I want to be a deputee.' (Afro-Peruvian Bozal Spanish, Lipski 2005: 253)

(3) Lack of subject–verb inversion in questions
   a. ¿Onde tú taba, mijito?
      where you was my-son
      'Where were you, my son?' (Barlovento Spanish, Megenney 1999: 118)
   b. ¿Qué ella dijo?
      what she said
      'What did she say?' (Chincha Spanish, Sessarego 2015: 58)

(4) Lack of gender agreement in the Determiner Phrase
   a. Nuestro cultura antiguo
      our.M culture.F old.M
      'Our old culture.' (Yungueño Spanish, Lipski 2008: 89)
   b. Mugué malo
      woman.F bad.M
      'Bad woman.' (Afro-Puertorican, Álvarez Nazario 1974: 189)

(5) Lack of number agreement in the Determiner Phrase
   a. Tan chicquito puej mij nene
      are little.SG well my.PL baby.PL
      'Well, my kids are little.' (Afro-Mexican Spanish, Mayén 2007: 117)
   b. Cuatro hermano joven
      four brother.PL young.SG
      'Four young brothers.' (Chota Valley Spanish, Sessarego 2013a: 70)

Figures 1.1 and 1.2 depict constructions showing pitch-accent configurations that present early-peak alignment with the stressed syllable (Sessarego 2019a: 120; Rao & Sessarego 2016: 56).

This book is about contact-induced language change. In particular, this study strives to provide a formal account for the parallel presence in the Afro-Hispanic languages of the Americas (AHLAs) of the aforementioned

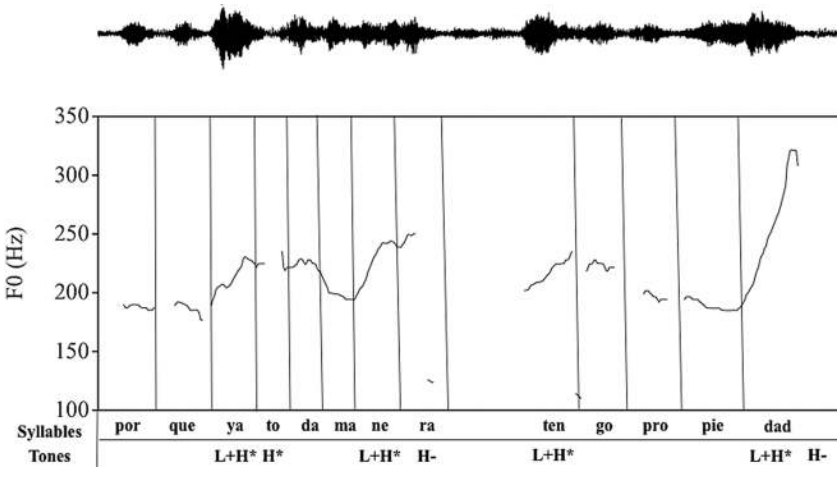


Figure 1.1 *Sample F0 contours for* Porque ya no da manera . . . tengo propiedad *'Because there is no way . . . I own property' in Chocó Spanish*

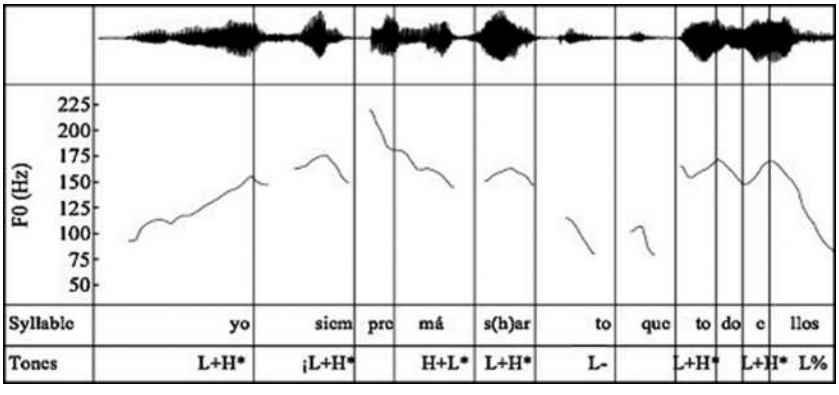


Figure 1.2 *Sample F0 contours for* Yo siempre más harto que todo ellos *'I am always much more than all of them' in Yungueño Spanish*

linguistic features, without falling back on the traditionally assumed proto-creole explanation. The questions to be answered are as follows: How did those features come about? What are the linguistic mechanisms that can account for their parallel existence in several contact varieties? How can we formalize such mechanisms within a comprehensive theoretical framework? How can these new datasets help us test and possibly refine current formal theories, which have primarily been based on standardized language data?

The analyses presented in this study to answer these questions are primarily based on data from three specific AHLAs: Yungueño Spanish (YS), from Bolivia; Chota Valley Spanish (CVS), from Ecuador; and Chincha Spanish (CS), from Peru. These data were collected over the past 10 years during a number of fieldwork visits to the local Afro-Latino communities (Sessarego 2011a, 2013a, 2014a, 2015). In this study, I refer at times to all of these varieties with a single umbrella term, "Afro-Andean Spanish." I do this for the sake of simplicity, even though CS is not technically spoken in the Andes, since Chincha is located on the Peruvian coast. For the same reason, I often refer here to Ecuador, Bolivia and Peru as Andean countries or as territories belonging to the Andean region, and when describing the sociohistorical development of these dialects I talk about "the African Diaspora to the Andes." This is done with the goal of providing the reader with a set of broad terms to refer to these Afro-Hispanic vernaculars and to the regions in which they are spoken as entities belonging to the same group, since they share a common historical and linguistic background.

Given the grammatical parallelisms encountered across these three dialects and the rest of the AHLAs, the model proposed here can be generalized to all such contact varieties, thus accounting for the commonalities traditionally ascribed to the (de)creolization of a hypothetical creole diasystem. Moreover, as we will see in the following chapters, such features are not actually only exclusive of the AHLAs; rather, they tend to appear in most varieties of Spanish in contact with other languages. Thus, this indicates that they are not necessarily the effect of a specific set of African substrate languages. Conversely, these grammatical phenomena are driven by common, contact-induced processes, which are related to processing constraints affecting the interfaces between different language modules; hence, they are universal and depend on the nature of the architecture of the language faculty (Sessarego 2019b).

1.1 The Creole Debate

For the past 30 years the field of contact linguistics has been characterized by a heated debate, recently labeled the Creole Debate (McWhorter 2018a), which focuses on the structural and typological status of creole languages. On the one hand, some scholars have claimed that creoles may be classified according to their structural properties (Bickerton 1981) or as a typological class (Bakker et al. 2011, 2016; McWhorter 1998, 2001; Seuren & Wekker 1986). In particular, McWhorter (1998) proposed a "Creole Prototype," according to

which a creole would be generally characterized by: (1) minimal inflectional affixation; (2) minimal use of tones; and (3) semantically transparent derivation. McWhorter (2001: 5) even claimed that creoles should be seen as "the world's simplest grammars," since, having developed out of pidgins just a few hundred years ago, they would not have had the time to enrich their systems with the structural complexities – often resulting from long processes of grammaticalization – which appear to characterize older languages.

On the other hand, other scholars have rejected these analyses and prefer to depict creoles as by-products of their shared sociocultural history, often related to black slavery and plantation societies (DeGraff 2003; Mufwene 1997), thus claiming that creoles do not show anything exceptional from a strictly linguistic point of view (DeGraff 2005), and that describing them as "simpler" is just a controversial statement, which may be unconsciously derived from the racist bias that the European colonizers had about the Africans' cognitive skills to learn European languages (Aboh & DeGraff 2016: 5).

A recent contribution to the Creole Debate is the proposal offered by Aboh (2015), who conceives of these languages as mixed grammars. In his view, a creole, like any other contact variety, would be the result of a combination of features proceeding from the pool of languages that were in contact, according to a competitive mechanism driven by environmental and/or ecological factors (Mufwene 2001). Aboh (2015: 8), therefore, argues that creoles are not at all "exceptional;" rather they "represent a normal instance of language change resulting from the contact between typologically different and genetically unrelated languages (e.g., Romance/German vs. Kwa/Bantu [Niger-Congo])." This would be the only reason why the structural changes observed in creoles tend to be more contrastive than in other contact varieties.

The most recent study on this ongoing debate has been published by Blasi, Michaelis and Haspelmath (2017: 723), who, after running several R simulations on a database of 44 creole languages and 111 non-creole languages (R Core Team 2016), concluded that "while a creole profile can be detected statistically, this stems from an over-representation of Western European and West African languages in their context of emergence," so that "grammars are robustly transmitted even during the emergence of creole languages," which calls into "question the existence of a pidgin stage in creole development and of creole-specific innovations." Blasi et al. (2017), therefore, echo Aboh's (2015) proposal in that they suggest that creoles are essentially a mix of Western European and West African features, while it also appears to provide quantitative support for the claims against both the simplicity of creole grammars and the loss of grammatical features during creolization.

Deconstructing the notion of "creole" and taking sides in the aforementioned debate is neither the topic nor the point of this book. Nevertheless, I will summarize in a nutshell the problems I see with the way this debate has been carried out and, after presenting my personal opinion on the matter in Section 1.1.1, I will offer a working definition of "creole" in Section 1.1.2 to help readers better understand why I do not think most AHLAs went through any (de)creolization phase.

1.1.1 My Two Cents

First of all, as recently explained in Sessarego (2020), I have to say that I do not think that *grammars are robustly transmitted during the emergence of creole languages* (in contrast with Blasi et al. 2017), since certain core aspects of language (e.g., bound morphology and tones) tend to be reduced during creolization; at the same time, I would not say that *creoles are the simplest languages in the world* (against McWhorter 2001, 2018a), since in other aspects of their grammars (e.g., syntax, phonology and semantics), they may inherit a fair number of overt distinctions, which would make them quite complex, from an overall comparative perspective.

In order to understand why the varieties we call "creoles" today look the way they look, it is of fundamental importance to figure out what cognitive processes were at work in the minds of their creators. Without a serious reflection on such mental processes (and the nature of the grammatical restructuring they imply), counting the number of features that creoles may have inherited from one language or another does not help much. It would be a purely *descriptive exercise*, not an *explanatory analysis*. Even the most recent publication on this topic, Blasi et al. (2017), is quite limited in this sense. In fact, the study tries to provide statistical support in favor of this supposedly "robust" grammatical transmission without offering any possible explanation for why that may be the case. The authors acknowledge this shortcoming. Thus, they conclude by admitting that they do not know the reasons behind their findings (2017: 5):

> Why such a complex human behavior can be successfully transmitted even in the typical (intricate and multilingual) contact situations of creoles is still unclear … Either way, our results reflect the astonishing resilience of language transmission.

In order to cast light on this apparently mysterious issue, it is crucial to acknowledge that creole formation involves – to a good extent – adult second-language acquisition (SLA) processes in a context of intense language contact.