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Review of Afro-Peruvian Spanish

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SUMMARY

Afro-Peruvian Spanish, by Sandro Sessarego, has both a descriptive and a theoretical objective. The first objective is to provide a descriptive study of an Afro-Hispanic dialect from the province of Chincha, Peru, based on the author's fieldwork in several villages. The structural features of this variety, which the author calls Afro-Peruvian Spanish, or APS for short, are then discussed against the background question of why the number of Spanish-based creoles in the Americas is significantly smaller than that of creoles based on other European languages. Addressing this question constitutes the second objective of the book, which is to offer a new hypothesis, "The Legal Hypothesis of Creole Genesis", to help account for the relative lack of Spanish creoles in the region.

The book consists of five substantive chapters and a brief introduction and conclusion. Chapter 1, "Introduction", provides a succinct overview of the book; the stated objectives include documenting the history of slavery in the region and identifying the characteristics of APS in order to properly situate it within the Afro-Hispanic dialect continuum.

Chapter 2, "Spanish creole debate", sets the scene for the theoretical discussion later in the book by revisiting the principal proposed explanations for the small number of Spanish-based creoles, as compared to creoles lexically based on other European languages, that are currently attested in the Americas. The reviewed hypotheses range from those that assume prior existence of creolized Spanish in Spanish America and ascribe the currently small number of Spanish-based creoles to their subsequent decreolization, to those that employ demographic and socio-economic data to argue that creolized Spanish never developed in the areas in question. A special place is accorded to an evaluation of McWhorter's (2000) hypothesis, which assumes that plantation creoles begin their life as pidgins and traces the small number of Spanish-based creoles in the Americas to the absence of a Spanish-based pidgin in West Africa. The latter is linked to the fact that Spain did not participate in the direct transfer of slaves across the Atlantic: since no Spanish posts were established in Africa, no Afro-Hispanic pidgin could have developed and then travel to the Americas. The last section of this chapter outlines the theoretical objective of the book, which is to offer a new hypothesis, "The Legal Hypothesis of Creole Genesis", to account for the lack of creoles in the region by looking at the history of slavery and the laws governing slaves in the Americas.

Chapter 3, "A description of Afro-Peruvian Spanish grammar", outlines the phonological, morphosyntactic, and lexical features of traditional APS. These are found mostly in the speech of elderly speakers, while younger speakers seem to prefer the local prestige Spanish dialect. The methodology of the fieldwork study included approximately

sixty interviews in the rural areas of the province of Chincha, with interviewees being of a wide educational and social background range. Of these informants, only a few, the least-educated elderly, could speak the variety farthest from the regional macro-dialect. The author's fieldwork data are systematically compared with previous fieldwork- and text-based studies of APS and/or other Afro-Hispanic varieties; the phonetic/phonological data are also situated within the Peruvian Spanish dialect continuum, establishing a context for APS. The phonological features noted for APS are not exclusive to this variety but are found in other Afro-Hispanic varieties and/or non-standard Spanish dialects and include (infrequent) raising of mid vowels, lengthening of stressed vowels, addition of paragogic vowels, *yeísmo*, aspiration and deletion of syllable-final /s/, deletion of /r/ word-finally and in /Cr/ clusters, and position-dependent neutralization of /d/ and /r/ and of /l/ and /r/. The grammatical features deviating from standard Spanish are likewise not specific to APS but have been reported from other Afro-Hispanic varieties and/or L2 Spanish. These include lack of nominal pluralization after numerals and plural determiners, variable gender agreement between nouns and determiners and/or adjectives, the use of determinerless nouns, regularization of irregular verb forms, overlap between the uses of *haber* and *tener*, omission or non-standard use of prepositions, variable subject-verb agreement, use of non-emphatic overt subjects, and lack of subject-verb inversion in questions. The vocabulary section contains a list of forty lexical items characteristic of APS.

Chapter 4, "The status of Afro-Peruvian Spanish", advances the hypothesis that APS, in common with several other Afro-Hispanic varieties, may be explainable as "the result of L1 acquisition (nativization) of advanced L2 grammars" (p. 66). This chapter briefly summarizes existing research on connections between creole formation and second language acquisition, including Ingo Plag's Interlanguage Hypothesis of Creole Formation (Plag 2008a et seq.) which posits that creole genesis follows a universal path, independent of the L1 of the speakers, and that creoles could be "conventionalized interlanguages of an early stage". The core argument in this chapter is the proposal that the variations in APS as well as other Afro-Hispanic varieties are indeed due to SLA strategies. The proposed model is one of successive generational nativization, with each following generation retaining fewer features from the previous generation's L1, until the variety more closely resembles the L2. This chapter presents a list of morphosyntactic features shared by different Afro-Hispanic varieties, which in some cases have been previously identified as potentially pointing to a preceding creole stage. The features in question are the use of non-emphatic overt subjects, variable subject-verb agreement, lack of number and gender agreement in the noun phrase, lack of subject-verb inversion in questions, and presence of determinerless nouns. It is then shown that each feature is also found in advanced interlanguages, and thus is not necessarily indicative of decreolization.

Chapter 5, "Black slavery in Peru", breaks down the history of black slavery in Peru into three main periods. The first period (1530-1650) is the introduction of black slaves, black freed persons, and *ladinos* (those who adopted Spanish culture and language) from other Spanish-controlled regions (i.e., not directly from Africa). The second period (1650-1760) involves the increase in the population of *bozales* (slaves imported directly from Africa) who worked mostly in the urban regions of colonial Peru. The third

period (1760-1980) involved the gradual decrease in the import of slaves and the establishment of civil rights laws for black Peruvians. Because of the highly constrained nature of Spanish slave trading laws, owning black slaves, especially skilled ones, was seen as a sign of privilege and wealth. In Spanish Caribbean colonies, there was an industry which involved the buying of slaves and teaching them skills in order to resell them at a higher price. With this education came the working acquisition of the language, so that the slave would have had to learn the language as an L2 rather than learning a pidgin or creole among other black slaves. This supports the author's theory that the Afro-Hispanic varieties were not creoles but rather advanced stages of L2 Spanish acquisition. Continued need for a skilled Spanish-speaking workforce along the rural coast of Peru for sugarcane plantations and the logistic challenges associated with transporting slaves led to a gradual migration of the urban black population to the rural areas of the colony, where the language evidently settled. Because it was not a sudden, massive migration, and because the landowners preferred skilled black slaves who could speak the language, the author argues that the sociolinguistic conditions for the development of a creole language in the rural plantations were not met during any of the stages.

Chapter 6, "Solving the Spanish creole puzzle: the legal hypothesis of creole genesis", contains the main theoretical contribution of the book. In it, the author puts forward the hypothesis that one of the reasons for the small number of Spanish creoles in the Americas, as compared to creoles based on the languages of other European powers, lies in the different legal status of the Spanish slaves. This aspect of black slavery in the Americas has been overlooked in previous discussions of the genesis of Spanish-based creoles. Under the Spanish slave law of the time, grounded in the Justinian *Corpus Juris Civilis*, slaves had a series of legal rights that were denied to slaves in other European colonies including British, Dutch, French, and Portuguese. The essential difference is that slaves under Spanish slave laws were granted legal personality, which resulted in their right to be clothed and fed, to get married, to not be punished too harshly, to take part in legal proceedings, and to purchase their own manumission (p. 124). This set of laws was unique to Spain also in that laws could not be changed locally, unlike the slave laws, e.g., in English colonies, which used no historical precedent and changed from locality to locality. The English slave laws were also much more harsh; slaves were neither granted legal personality which allowed the ability to sue their masters, nor could they pursue their own source of capital. A linguistic aspect of these laws was that masters were not allowed to teach black slaves how to read or write, which severely hindered their social integration. The author adduces witness accounts by contemporary observers, and other types of data, to argue that due to their different legal status, slaves in the Spanish colonies had comparatively better living conditions and more opportunities for social integration and upward mobility, which led them to better integrate with colonial life and adopt the culture and language. Toward the end of the chapter, the Legal Hypothesis of Creole Genesis is tested against three case studies, which include the failure of a creole to develop in colonial Chocó, Colombia or in nineteenth-century Cuba after the development of a large-scale plantation system there, while a creole did develop and/or was preserved in Barbados and South Carolina.

In Chapter 7, "Concluding remarks", the author reiterates the main points of the study, including his conclusion that several Afro-Hispanic dialects of the Americas, among them APS, do not descend from a preceding creole stage but rather represent a fossilized advanced stage of Spanish second language acquisition.

EVALUATION

This study provides valuable first-hand documentation of traditional Afro-Peruvian Spanish and usefully contributes to the evolving research area on the borderline between genetic creolistics and naturalistic second language acquisition (see, e.g., Mufwene 2010). APS is found to share many features with L2 Spanish, and it is argued that this dialect, along with several other Afro-Hispanic dialects in the Americas, does not descend from a preceding creole in either the Americas or the African mainland, but rather is a fossilized advanced stage of Spanish language acquisition, or what the author calls *advanced conventionalized second language*.

An interesting aspect of this hypothesis is spelled out in section 4.3 of the book: APS and several other Afro-Hispanic varieties are hypothesized to have resulted from "L1 acquisition (nativization) of advanced L2 grammars". This study thus helps to identify specific instances of L1 grammars "built on L2 inputs", and is very timely in light of the current discussion over the agents and loci of diachronic language change. In particular, the author's hypothesis appears to resonate with a similar perspective on the role of L2 inputs in L1 acquisition discussed in Meisel (2011: 139). The hypothesis that selected Afro-Hispanic varieties may be characterized as advanced conventionalized L2 Spanish also may open interesting lines of inquiry into a comparative study between these and other conventionalized L2 varieties of Spanish, such as *español indígena* (Zimmermann 2004; Guerrero and San Giacomo 2010).

By drawing attention to a previously overlooked aspect of African slavery in the Americas, this book also contributes a new dimension to the theoretical debate over the "missing Spanish creoles". "The Legal Hypothesis of Creole Genesis", proposed by the author, links the relative lack of Spanish-based creoles with the laws governing slaves in the Americas. This proposal appears well-founded with the evidence provided; further research outside former Spanish colonies is required to clarify the role of the law in the formation or inhibition of creoles in other parts of the world.

Finally, by showing that linguistic facts alone can be used to lend support to a variety of theories, this multi-faceted study of APS also succeeds in stressing the need for cooperation between different fields of inquiry and for basing the study of contact varieties on detailed studies of the demographic and other socio-historical conditions of their development.

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