Book Reviews

Sandro Sessarego

Afro-Peruvian Spanish. Spanish slavery and the legacy of Spanish Creoles, 2015, 184 pages, Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Afro-Peruvian Spanish describes a contact variety of Spanish spoken by Afro-descendants in the province of Chincha, Peru. It sheds light on the variety's linguistic and socio-historical origins and more generally contributes to the debate about the genesis of Spanish creoles in the Americas. Afro-Hispanic people represent the majority of the population in several regions across the Americas: Cuba, Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, parts of Northern Colombia and Venezuela, coastal regions of Central America, the Pacific coastal regions of Colombia, Peru, and Ecuador, and Los Yungas in Bolivia. Smaller historical minorities are also found in Mexico, Belize, and Trinidad and Tobago (Figure 4.2 in the book under review). These varieties have mainly attracted the attention of Hispanic linguists, including Sessarego. The book complements Sessarego's previous work on Afro-Hispanic varieties, as he has previously published volumes on Afro-Bolivian (2011, 2014) and on Chota Valley Spanish in Ecuador (2013).

Scholars in creole studies and Hispanic linguistics have long been puzzled by the scarcity of Afro-Hispanic contact varieties in the Americas. Although the Spanish colonial enterprise was one of the earliest and geographically widest, and Afro-descendant populations are found in numerous parts of the Spanish empire, the number of Spanish creoles in the world is very low compared to Portuguese, French, or English creoles. In the Americas, only two Spanish creoles are known, namely Palenquero (Colombia) and Papiamentu (the Netherlands Antilles). To explain this state of affairs, Sessarego proposes the 'Legal Hypothesis of Creole Genesis'. His hypothesis connects the historical evolution of slavery and legislation in different European colonial enterprises to the genesis of creoles. In the book at hand, the hypothesis is tested on Afro-Peruvian Spanish by describing its linguistic traits and sociohistorical development. In general, Sessarego stands behind an interdisciplinary approach

in the study of creoles and creolization. According to him, “creole studies will benefit greatly of combining linguistic, socio-historical, legal, and anthropological insights” (p. 1).

Sessarego's book is organized into seven chapters, the references, and an index. Some of the chapters are complemented with maps and tables of demographic information. There are two main parts in the book. The first consists of a description of Afro-Peruvian Spanish, and based on the linguistic data, it presents Sessarego's proposal as to their origin and development as an advanced second language. The second is the legal hypothesis about the paucity of Spanish creoles in America. After the introduction, the debate on the Spanish creoles in America is presented. Chapters three and four focus on Afro-Peruvian Spanish grammar and on Sessarego's proposal, according to which Afro-Peruvian Spanish is an advanced conventionalized second language variety. Chapter five gives an account of the history of black slavery in Peru. Before the conclusions, Sessarego addresses the debate about the Afro-Hispanic varieties in America from the point of view of legal analysis. The book is compact and accessibly written, and despite their different theoretical and empirical approaches, the chapters form a coherent collection. The text is occasionally repetitive and some central information is presented in lengthy footnotes, but this might actually help those who read the chapters individually.

Chapter 1 introduces the book and situates Sessarego's study with regard to the debate of the Spanish creoles in America. It includes a description of the objectives of the study and a note on the data collection.

In Chapter 2, Sessarego builds a theoretical framework for his study by offering an account of the main hypotheses on the lack of Spanish creoles in the Americas and their critiques. The chapter discusses a possible decreolization of Spanish creoles, due to normative pressure from standard Spanish. Originally, the creoles would have been formed based on Afro-Portuguese pidgin varieties spoken by Afro-descendants in Latin America. The chapter also presents theories that claim a possible connection between Afro-Portuguese varieties of the African coast and the Afro-Hispanic varieties, as Spanish pidgin was in use on the African coast, due to the lack of direct involvement of the Spanish crown in the slave trade on the African coast. Yet other theories have laid importance on the role of the demographic and economic conditions in the Spanish Caribbean, which differed from other colonies. The different hypotheses are tested later in the book with the Afro-Peruvian data, paying special attention to McWhorter's (2000) Afrogenesis hypothesis.

Chapter 3 contains a description of Afro-Peruvian Spanish grammar based on spoken data collected in the field. These data are compared to other scholars' descriptions of Afro-Peruvian historical *bozal* speech and synchronic spoken data. The chapter starts off with a general presentation of the main

features of Peruvian Spanish dialects from the coast to the Amazonian lowlands. The main analysis of Afro-Peruvian Spanish focuses on phonetics and phonology, morphosyntax, and the lexicon. The phonetic account covers selected traits from Sessarego's corpus. Some features are found in many other Afro-Hispanic varieties, such as paragogic vowels, the loss of word-final /r/, the neutralization of /r/ and /l/ in both onsets and coda, the neutralization of syllable-initial /r/ and /d/, and declarative intonation patterns characterized by multiple early-aligned peaks and minimal downstep. Other features, such as vowel lengthening and mid vowel raising, are also found in rural varieties of Spanish worldwide, while others, such as the weakening of syllable-final /s/, are even more widespread.

The morphosyntactic features of Afro-Peruvian Spanish are in line with those attested in other Afro-Hispanic dialects and second-language varieties of Spanish. Sessarego presents examples of the lack of number agreement across the noun phrase, variable gender agreement (which is typical of the oldest generation), and bare nouns in subject and object positions. In the verb phrase, features discussed include the regularization of irregular forms, archaic forms such as the subjunctive marker – *se* and verbal conjugations such as *vide* 'I saw' instead of *vi* and *vido* 'he saw' instead of *vio*, the use of *ser* 'to be' instead of *estar* 'EX.LOC', *tener* in existential constructions instead of *haber*, and the omission of reflexive pronouns in reflexive constructions. With regard to prepositions, omissions and substitutions with *con* are presented. In phrase-level constructions, Sessarego discusses the "redundant" use of subject pronouns, variable subject-verb agreement, and the lack of subject-verb inversion in questions. The chapter concludes with a list of Afro-Chinchano lexical items.

Chapter 4 builds on the description of the previous chapter by comparing Afro-Peruvian Spanish to other Afro-Hispanic varieties in the Americas, situating the findings in the theoretical discussion about the origins of this variety. Sessarego analyzes certain features and shows that they can be accounted for as the result of a conventionalized advanced SLA strategy, and argues that their occurrence need not be explained by a previous creole stage.

Chapter 5 explores the history and development of black slavery in Peru in order to validate Sessarego's linguistic proposal with socio-historical information. The chapter is divided into three main historical phases, which are characterized by different conditions of slavery and types of African descendants. The first period deals with times before and during the conquest of America, when most slaves in the Andean territory were *ladinos* – slaves who spoke Spanish and were acculturated to Spanish customs. During the second period (1650–1760), the number of *bozal* slaves born in Africa, not familiar with the Spanish language and culture, increased. From 1760 onwards, the African-born slave population decreased, and in later years, Afro-Peruvians were included

in civil rights movements. Based on historical research including personal histories of enslaved individuals, demographic information, and missionary accounts, Sessarego presents an outline of the development of slavery in Peru. The chapter closes with a case study of the sugar plantations of Chincha province, where the author conducted fieldwork, showing that the sociohistorical information does not support the development of a creole language in that region. The number of locally born slave children was high, the slaves' life expectancy was quite long, and the escaped slaves were criollos – born in America.

Chapter 6 presents Sessarego's Legal Hypothesis, which highlights legal patterns that were typical of Spanish colonies in the Americas and could therefore be the missing link in the explanations for the lack of Spanish creoles in different parts of the continent. The chapter first reviews different Afro-Hispanic varieties and theories of their origins, before presenting the Legal Hypothesis in detail: "the relative paucity of creole languages in Spanish Americas may be seen – in part – as the byproduct of differences in the European legal tradition" (p. 119). Throughout colonial history, the Spanish slaves were the only ones who were granted legal personality. When compared to other colonial powers, in Spain the development of the Roman *Corpus Juris Civilis* was very different, causing different socioeconomic and sociolinguistic outcomes in the colonies. These conditions would create a situation in which the black slave population in non-Spanish colonies lived under more brutal conditions, which would have the creolization process as a linguistic outcome. Sessarego explains the historical base of the legal regulations on slavery and their development in Spain, England, France, the Netherlands, and Portugal, and connects these with the living conditions, legal rights, and social life of Afro-descendants in different Spanish territories in the Americas. Besides discussing the case of Peru, Sessarego tests the hypothesis on three case studies: post-sugar boom Cuba, 17th century South Carolina and Barbados, and 17th century Chocó in Colombia. Throughout the chapter, the author stresses that although the Legal Hypothesis binds different settings and cases together, it is not the only reason for the lack of Spanish creoles in America. A combination of demographic, economic, and logistic factors was certainly also at play, and Sessarego adds a new factor to these with his hypothesis.

Chapter 7 concludes the book and offers an overview of the main proposals presented, calling for a more interdisciplinary approach in the study of the genesis and evolution of the Afro-Hispanic varieties.

Sessarego offers a detailed and multifaceted approach to the documentation and analysis of Afro-Peruvian Spanish. More generally, the book contributes

with a fresh approach to the puzzle of the missing Spanish creoles. Besides presenting the Legal Hypothesis of creole genesis, Sessarego takes issue with a number of hypotheses that have been proposed to account for the relative paucity of Spanish creoles in the Americas. Although he refutes a number of other theories, Sessarego seems especially concerned with McWhorter's (2000) work on the Spanish Americas. He takes under scrutiny historical and demographic information of the Peruvian region where the conditions could have been favorable for the birth of a creole language and shows that, after all, the conditions were not necessarily that suitable for creole formation.

The book is an excellent example of how creole studies can benefit from interdisciplinary approaches. This is especially true in cases where the varieties are spoken by marginalized populations, such as the Afro-descendants in the Americas. The different approaches presented in the book tie together rather well, from the levels of general discussion to the particular case of Afro-Peruvian Spanish, and from the creolization models to grammatical description.

If one should look for points of critique, the description of Afro-Peruvian features relies much on previous literature, and one wonders why all the dialectal regions of Peruvian Spanish are introduced, such as the Amazonian lowlands. A presentation of features typical of Afro-Hispanic, rural, and second language varieties could have helped the reader to make sense of the variation in Afro-Peruvian Spanish, although it is true that these categories often overlap. Also, a note on the terminology would have been useful. In general, Sessarego writes in a careful and respectful manner, without romanticizing the sociohistory of enslaved people under the Spanish crown, but the terms *black*, *ladino*, *criollo*, and *bozal* could have been presented in connection to their historical context.

In addition, I would have hoped for a more detailed presentation of the advanced conventionalized second language proposal. The book is not very lengthy, and chapter 4 could have been more detailed. For now, it seems to mostly be in dialogue with creolization situations involving plantation settings or where a pidgin stage has been central. It seems plausible that the first generation of the black slaves already had relatively good access to Spanish, but the exact development based on the founder generation output and later influences remains unclear, as the analysis is based on synchronic features and their correspondence with advanced SLA features. Also, it is not clear how separate advanced SLA and creole features are. For example, variable gender agreement can be found on both SLA Spanish and the Philippine creoles, although to different degrees. However, I am intrigued by the idea of trying to apply this model also to situations outside the typical plantation creoles

that included a large proportion of slaves. For example, it would be interesting to apply Sessarego's model to the fort and trade settings in Asia which, despite early close contacts with Spanish and Portuguese speakers, did develop a Spanish- or Portuguese-based creole.

As the Afro-Hispanic contact varieties exhibit a particularly high degree of variation on a continuum between rather standard-like and more vernacular features, one should pay special attention to data collection procedures. As we have jointly shown with Sessarego (Perez et al. forthcoming), data collection and coding affect the analysis and the classification results. In our study, several grammatical features of Afro-Hispanic varieties were coded based on data collected by different researchers, resulting in more creole-like grouping of certain datasets and a grouping more akin to other second-language varieties of Spanish (e.g. Spanish in Ecuatorial Guinea and the Philippines) for others. The description of the data collection for this book, which consisted of two months with about sixty participants, is very brief. Despite the general lack of detail in the presentation of the sociolinguistic background of the participants, however, it is encouraging to find initial quantitative analysis on gender agreement in the analysis of Afro-Peruvian grammar (pp. 44–45).

Sessarego's work offers an important contribution to the documentation and description of the Afro-Hispanic varieties and can be recommended to students and expert scholars alike. It is especially strong in the inclusion of socio-historical information in the explanations of the formation and development of these varieties. The case of Afro-Peruvian Spanish also has a wider theoretical importance, as it demonstrates the value of an interdisciplinary approach to creole studies. Sessarego puts this into practice in his own work. The author also shows that a new socio-historical hypothesis or explanation does not necessarily have to exclude previous proposals, but can contribute to a common cause of trying to unravel the questions about the origins and development of creoles.

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