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1. Structural overview

Nicolas Quint’s book, *L’Élément Africain dans la Langue Capverdienne // Africanismos na Língua Caboverdiana*, explores the presence of (West-)African elements in the Cape Verdean Creole (Santiago variety—henceforth, CVC). The main goal of this book is to examine the relevance of the African stratum of CVC, deciding which African-based Capeverdean words and/or structures determine, in particular, the origins of this Creole language and of the Afro-European Creoles, in general.

In the literature on CVC, two main varieties of the language are typically considered: (i) the Sotavento variety, spoken in the leeward islands of Brava, Maio, Fogo and Santiago, represented by the island of Santiago; and the Barlavento variety, spoken in the windward islands of Boavista, Sal, Santo Antão, São Nicolau and São Vicente, identified with the island of São Vicente (cf. Veiga 2000; Baptista 2002). Quint’s option for the Santiago variety is based on three (strong) reasons. First, Santiago variety is the one the author assumes to know better; second, the island of Santiago is taken to be the cradle of CVC and is the variety that is more basilectal (i.e. more africanized); third, the demographic figures show that Santiago is the most populated island, given that over 50% of the population of the country lives there.

The book begins with a long and inspired preface from Manuel Veiga (former Minister of Culture, linguist and native speaker of the Santiago variety), who acknowledges Quint’s contribution for the research on CVC, enhancing the African nature of the language, and, according to Veiga, deviating from the scholars that claim that the ‘European influence’ on the Lexicon and the main components of the grammar of Creoles is very relevant. Veiga’s desire to show the African influence on CVC leads him to add to Quint’s arguments one of his own, suggesting that the monophthongization that CVC exhibits is a process of innovation probably due to African influence (e.g., Portuguese *baixo* > CVC *baxu* ‘low’; *caixa* > *kaxa* ‘box’; *peito* > *petu* ‘chest’; *deitar* > *deta* ‘lay’; *beijo* > *bejhu* ‘kiss’; *feijão* > *fíxun* ‘beans’; *Europa* > *orópa* ‘Europe’; *noite* > *noti* ‘night’; *dóido* > *dodhu* ‘crazy’; *louco* > *loku* ‘insane’; *poupar* > *popa* ‘save’; *coice* > *koxi* ‘kick’; from table in pages 10-11). Note, however, that the very same diphthongs in bold in the words given as examples are monophthongs in some varieties of contemporary Portuguese.

Quint’s book is organized in three main parts: Chapter 1 presents some historical facts about the origin of the black slaves that were taken to Cape Verde during the Portuguese settlement in the 15th century, stressing on the fact that in the second half of the 16th century there were thirteen thousand individuals living in Santiago island, 87% of which were black slaves (probably brought from a limited area in the West Africa coast, namely, between the peninsula of Dakar, in Senegal, and Freetown, in Sierra Leone). Assuming the hypothesis that the archipelago was inhabited when found, the African features of the contemporary Capeverdean culture (and language) must have their roots on other continental African cultures/languages.

Chapter 1 also looks to methodological issues related to the African languages that the black slaves spoke and to the collection of African etyma. Particularly, Quint remarks that one of the methodological problems for the research on the African elements in CVC is the diversity of African languages that might have been at the origin of this Creole. Those languages belong to two linguistic branches of the Niger-Congo family: the Atlantic branch (especially languages such as
Wolof, Themne and Fula), and the Mande branch (represented by Manding, Mandinka, Soninke, Susu, Loko and Mende). Although these languages seem very distinct from each other, they share similar properties, given that they belong to branches of the same phylum. Another methodological problem reported by Quint is the lack of documentation on the West-African languages referred to above. Some of them have been poorly described and the best known languages, such as Manding and Wolof, have dictionaries with little more than ten thousand words. A third methodological problem is related to the unavailability of diachronic data for the Atlantic and Mande languages at stake here and for some languages that might have existed in the 16th to 18th centuries but have disappeared (in fact, there is no documentation for the languages of these groupings prior to the 19th century), and, therefore, researchers can only speculate about their grammar and sociolinguistic influence.

Chapter 2 analyzes Quint’s corpus of seventy African-based Capeverdean words (listed in appendix 1) concluding that three fifths of the corpus are Manding etyma (note that languages like Mandinka, Maninké, Soninke, Bambara and Diula belong to this language sub-branch). The relevance of Manding languages over CVC is not surprising if we consider that they are spoken in all West Africa by over twenty million people (ten of them as native speakers and the rest as lingua franca) and they were used since the beginning of the Portuguese settlement in Cape Verde. Historically, there is some evidence that a significant part of the ancestors of the Capeverdeans are black slaves captured and sold by Mandinka speakers from the kingdom of Gabu (which corresponds to contemporary South of Senegal—Casamance—and Guinea-Bissau).

In this chapter, Quint also explains that the influence of the Atlantic language grouping over CVC is not as rich as the Manding sub-grouping probably because after the 16th century the Portuguese confronted with their European rivals (such as the French, the Dutch and the British), who push them away from the area between Senegal river and the mouth of the river Gambia (were Wolof was lingua franca), being confined to the area between the rivers Casamance and Componi (the contemporary coast of Guinea-Bissau) in the 17th century.

Quint looks at the Bantu presence in CVC words as well, claiming that some of them are derived from Kimbundu and Kikongo. This Bantu evidence may be explained by the Portuguese trade, since the 16th century, within the Portuguese colonial empire (namely, in Angola) and with the kingdom of Congo.

The analysis of the corpus of African-based Capeverdean words reveals that the main West-African languages involved in their origin are Manding (60%, table 1, 32-33), Wolof (16%, ibd.) and Themne (6%, ibd.). Quint also concludes that there are no African functional words in CVC, such as prepositions, conjunctions and pronouns, but only content words. However, it is possible to find some traces of African affixes in few CVC words, such as the word class marker ma-/min- (e.g., mafáfa ‘yam’, mankara ‘peanuts’, minkoko ‘taro’, pp. 50-53) and the verbal suffix expressing iterative events (e.g., korkoti ‘to clean the dish with a spoon’, rukuti ‘to carve out a piece of something’, tchuputi ‘to peck, to get something with the beak’, pp. 52-55). Quint observes likewise that the African-based Capeverdean words belong to the most diverse semantic domains, such as cooking, breeding, animal names, etc., but the African-based words cover a more restricted semantic field than the Portuguese-based ones. Nevertheless, Quint argues that 99 out of 100 lexical items of the nuclear vocabulary of CVC are Portuguese-based and, hence, the African-based Capeverdean words occupy a very peripheral area in the Lexicon of CVC.

The chapter ends approaching a possible rational explanation for the presence of African-based words in the Lexicon of CVC, given that they are the living testimony of the languages that the Capeverdeans ancestors spoke. Considering that the black slaves did not speak Portuguese, they had to learn the language because of their Portuguese owners and because they were native speakers of different West-African languages, none of them being a lingua franca. Consequently, the black