Angela Bartens and Philip Baker, eds.


From its very title, this volume promises to be an original collection of chapters that account for African-influenced words and calques in Creole languages. Black through white, was actually borrowed from Professor D. Dalby’s 1969 Hans Wolf Memorial (Indiana University) lecture: Black through White: Patterns of Communication in Africa and the New World. The term ‘transplanted European languages’ is used loosely, such that the reader is free to interpret it broadly. In fact, only the introduction, which hints at ‘overseas varieties of European languages’ and Bartens’ Chapter 4 make use of the designation.

In their two-paged introduction, the editors outline a highly ambitious project with a threefold aim: expand our knowledge about how putative and confirmed Africanisms relate to selected semantic domains in the languages studied; examine the connection between proportions of slaves, their linguistic origins and the proportion of Africanisms that have survived; investigate what the distribution of word classes and proportions of Africanisms therein tell us about the contact situations that gave rise to the varieties.

Fourteen chapters of four to 18 pages follow, nine of which have appended word lists of four to 12 pages. Three of the articles are co-authored with one of the editors. The eight-paged index serves as a general thematic, names and languages index. What the volume lacks is an introduction that satisfactorily expounds the subtitle and announces the goal of each chapter. I will briefly summarise what, from my understanding, each chapter sets out to achieve.

In Chapter 1, Nicolas Quint analyses 70 Africanisms that are attested in the Santiago variety of Cape Verdean Portuguese-based Creole (CV). Quint makes use of historical data to show that the African influence came directly from the continent, that a multitude of contenders vied, and that only two language families (Manding and Atlantic) left significant contributions. Quint laments the scarcity of documentation and draws our attention to the likelihood of inaccuracies when tracing African etyma. Notwithstanding this caveat, the author ventures to categorise the variety as an Afro-Portuguese language, based on the observation that there are 300 potential African-based candidates, chiefly Manding. The author uses a remarkable comparison between the core/periphery in a variety of Occitan and that of CV to demonstrate what he calls infiltration from outside (French into Occitan) and infiltration from inside (resulting in Portuguese constituting the core of CV). The author
suggests that retention of Portuguese and African words was conditioned by frequency of usage and acculturation and that, towards the end of the slave trade, the transmission of African words into the core lexicon became more common. The author extends the investigation to morphology since he intends to show that morphology and semantics have relied heavily on Africanisms. In essence, what is African-derived is not so much CV's lexicon than its internal structure.

In Chapter 2 John Ladhams provides a background to the intense debate on article agglutination and the discrepant interpretations of data previously pointed out by Baker (1984), Grant (1995), Parkvall (2002) and Chaudenson (2003). This comprehensive introduction, which focusses primarily on French creoles, sets the pace for establishing possible links between African substrata and article agglutination in Portuguese-based creoles, particularly in the Gulf of Guinea. The article falls within the precepts of the perfect 'black through white'. One expects to find Africanisms in these creoles and one does, chiefly in the Principe variety, which has more items fitting the category. I commend the author for taking the pain to show, through the brief account of trading procedures and practices in the defined zone, how these Africanisms are a result of Edo input.

There are a few shortcomings in this contribution. Firstly, the data provided in Figures 1 and 3, which the author announces as being identical, are in fact discordant. Likewise, it is not clear how the figure in square brackets for 'other input' in Principe changes from 0% to 4% in Table 6. Finally, in Appendix 1, I question whether words with initial /i/ can qualify as candidates for article agglutination. One would expect to find some explanation for the change from Portuguese 'o dente' or 'a cinza' to 'idintxi' and 'ixize' respectively in Principe. Is it vowel harmony, hinted at in footnote 17?

Angela Bartens’ chapter decries the unreliability of inventories of African words in Spanish and Portuguese varieties and suggests that one way of improving the quality of future studies is collaborative work between Africanists and Romanists. The author conjectures that the common core of Africanisms shared by Latin American Spanish and Brazilian Portuguese can be attributed to the fact that the Spanish depended on the Portuguese to supply slaves, chiefly from Bantu-speaking zones. From the author's vantage point, Kimbundu was a stronger contender than Kikongo since the former may have served as a lingua franca in parts of Brazil around the 17th century. The author examines instances of innovation but also retention of Africanisms, which, oddly enough, she likens to conservatism, then illustrates that a large proportion of Africanisms retained in Brazilian Portuguese are of Bantu origin, with a portion of others identified as originating in Yoruba-dominant religions.