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From *bozal* to *boricua*: Implications of Afro-Puerto Rican Language in Literature

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Abstract : The nature of Afro-Hispanic language as depicted in Caribbean literature is the subject of considerable controversy. In addition to the fact that nearly all texts were literary imitations written by white authors, the documents themselves exhibit considerable heterogeneity and inconsistency. Central to the debate is whether Afro-Hispanic language used by African-born slaves and their immediate descendents ever coalesced into a stable creole—i.e. a restructured Spanish learned natively by subsequent generations—and whether such Afro-Hispanic language ever re-entered mainstream Caribbean Spanish, leaving a permanent imprint. This study examines Afro-Puerto Rican literary texts, some well known, most quite obscure, and concludes that in most instances there are few signs of incipient creolization, only the speech of second-language learners of Spanish. Moreover, in some instances other Afro-Caribbean creole languages brought to Puerto Rico, for example Papiamentu from Curaçao, may have contributed creole-like traits to the Afro-Puerto Rican literary texts.

Key words : Afro-Hispanic language, creole languages, Afro-Puerto Rican literature, contact languages, bozal language, restructured Spanish, Spanish-based Creoles

Introduction

The African contribution to the Latin American Spanish is beyond question, particularly in the Caribbean region, but assessing any further African influences on regional Spanish dialects is hampered by conflicting theories, racial prejudice, and the scarcity of credible documentation. There exists a tantalizing corpus of literary, folkloric and anecdotal testimony on the earlier speech patterns of Africans, in Spain and Latin America. In contemporary Latin America, despite a considerable Afro-American population in many regions, and notwithstanding racial stereotypes in literature and popular culture, there is nowhere to be found an ethnically unique "Black Spanish," comparable to vernacular Black English in the United States (Lipski 1985). The situation was different in the past, and there exists ample evidence that distinctly Afro-Hispanic speech forms did exist, particularly among the *bozales*, slaves born in Africa, who spoke European languages only with difficulty. *Bozal* language first arose in the Iberian Peninsula late in the fifteenth century; the earliest attestations come from Portugal. *Bozal* Spanish makes its written

appearance in Spain early in the sixteenth century, and continues through the middle of the eighteenth century, being especially prominent in Golden Age plays and poetry. Latin American *bozal* Spanish was first described by writers like Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, at the beginning of the seventeenth century. Other surviving seventeenth-century documents demonstrate the existence of *bozal* Spanish in the highland mining areas of Peru, Mexico, Colombia, Bolivia and Guatemala. Few documents representing Afro-Hispanic speech remain from eighteenth-century Latin America; Cuba and Mexico are among the regions so represented (cf. Meggenney 1985b, Lipski 1995). At the turn of the nineteenth century, the last big surge of slave trading, spurred by the sugar plantation boom and by increased urbanization of many coastal regions, resulted in an outpouring of Afro-Hispanic literary representations. The geographical distribution of extant texts mirrors the profile of the African slave trade in Latin America. The nineteenth-century texts come principally from three regions: Cuba, coastal Peru, and the Buenos Aires/Montevideo region. No credible *bozal* texts come from the Dominican Republic, where

the population of African-born slaves diminished greatly as the neighboring French colony of Saint-Domingue prospered and eventually collapsed through the use of slave labor. Prominent in "Afro-Dominican" literature are imitations of the halting Spanish spoken by Haitians and subsequently by Creole English-speaking West Indian laborers (Lipski 1994). Particularly in Cuba, many *bozal* texts appear to exhibit a degree of consistent restructuring so as to suggest that Afro-Cuban language may have been a stable Creole language, similar to Haitian or Jamaican Creoles, and that the eventual incorporation of former slaves and their descendants into Cuban society in general led to the gradual decreolization of Afro-Cuban Spanish, all the while leaving some traces on the most vernacular forms of Cuban Spanish (Granda 1968, 1971; Megenney 1984a, 1984b, 1985a; Perl 1989a, 1989b, 1989c, 1989d). The majority of Afro-Cuban literary attestations, and even the memories of elderly or recently deceased Cubans, suggest that most *bozal* Spanish was simply a second-language-learners' variety, not substantially different than what is heard today when foreigners struggle to learn Spanish with little motivation to attain perfection, except possibly that some regional African language traits may have shaped some of the deviations from natively spoken Spanish. Lipski (1993, 1998a, 1998b, 1999a) has suggested that those few Afro-Cuban texts exhibiting incontrovertible Creole features also reflect the presence of workers from other Creole-speaking Caribbean islands imported to Cuba beginning in the second half of the nineteenth century, and speaking Afro-European languages with considerable similarity with one another. Papiamentu, the Afro-Iberian language of Curaçao, whence came many workers to the Spanish Caribbean, is among the Creole languages so implicated in the debate surrounding Afro-Cuban *bozal* language. The distinction between spontaneous or locally creolized *bozal* language and transplanted Creole languages from elsewhere in the Caribbean is thus blurred, and while not all Creole-like features of *bozal*

Spanish find a facile explanation as imported crossovers, the road to an eventual accounting is not as unobstructed as might first appear. The debate is far from closed, and new evidence continues to come to light as additional texts are discovered, and fieldwork and archival research uncovers more evidence of earlier Afro-Hispanic speech.

2. Africans in Puerto Rico

And what of Puerto Rico, whose population of African origin rivals that of Cuba, and whose regional Spanish dialect exhibits such similarities with neighboring Cuban and Dominican varieties? Only a handful of texts (little more than a dozen) represent the Afro-Hispanic speech of Puerto Rican *bozales*, and only three are long enough to allow even a glimpse into what Africanized Spanish might actually have sounded like. By the nineteenth century, when most literary *bozal* imitations were produced in Latin America, the vast majority of black slaves in Puerto Rico were island-born and speaking Spanish with no second-language traits, although some ethnolinguistic markers such as key words or pronunciation variants may have remained:

Es obvio suponer que en cuanto a los negros y las negras nacidos en la isla, su lengua se cimentaría sobre las bases del lenguaje popular puertorriqueño, con sus variaciones. Los negros de tala o los trabajadores de suelo adquirieron el español del campesino, mientras que los de la casa grande tal vez desarrollaron una modalidad, más refinada, de acuerdo con la manifestación de los amos en el ámbito doméstico. (Ortiz Lugo 1995: 14)

Several key Afro-Puerto Rican texts were analyzed by the masterful Puerto Rican linguist Alvarez Nazario (1959, 1974), who offered the most penetrating analysis of any variety of Afro-Hispanic language published to date. Some important additions to the corpus have come to light since Alvarez Nazario carried out his research, and comparative Creole studies have also advanced considerably, all of which warrants an overall assessment of Afro-Puerto Rican literary language, and its relationship to the development of Spanish in Puerto Rico.

The history of black slaves in Puerto Rico is rather similar to that of Santo Domingo. Puerto Rico remained as a backwater during most of the Spanish colonial period, and slave importation only became important towards the middle of the nineteenth century, as Puerto Rico took a small piece of the sugar plantation boom that followed the uprising in French Saint-Domingue. According to Alvarez Nazario (1974: 72), some 6,000–8,000 African slaves were taken to Puerto Rico during the sixteenth century, some 8,000–12,000 in the seventeenth century, between 20,000 and 30,000 in the eighteenth century, and between 20,000 and 30,000 in the nineteenth century, for a maximal total of 75,000 African slaves taken to Puerto Rico. These figures do not show the huge nineteenth century “boom” experienced by Cuba, although there were times when the African population of Puerto Rico was considerable, particularly in some urban and agricultural areas. In Puerto Rico it is still possible to find remnants of African cultural elements, but there is none of the ethnically homogeneous ceremonies and songs found, for example in Cuba, where Yoruba, Efik and KiKongo carryovers survived slavery to form the basis for Afro-Cuban religious practices. The demographic figures tell the story: there was never a large enough number of African *bozales*, much less a group of slaves from a single ethnic or linguistic area of Africa, for an African culture to be transplanted to Puerto Rican soil. At any given time, and particularly during the last century of the slaving period, from which comes the only documentation of Afro-Puerto Rican language, African-born *bozales* were always outnumbered by locally-born blacks, and towards the end of the slaving period also by blacks from other Caribbean islands, who knew little or nothing of African languages, but who spoke languages born in the African diaspora. These demographic facts account in part for the scarcity of Puerto Rican *bozal* texts, as well as the appearance of elements from other Caribbean creoles in some of the Afro-Puerto Rican texts.

3. The Most Creole-like Afro-Puerto Rican Text

Depicting the life and language of African slaves and free workers never achieved the status in Puerto Rican literature that it enjoyed in neighboring Cuba, and though black characters and references abound in Puerto Rican novels, stories, and poems, only the tiniest fraction of these works yields any insight into the speech of Afro-Puerto Ricans, and even fewer documents reveal anything beyond brief accounts of foreigners' blunders and malapropisms. The Puerto Rican text which shows the greatest evidence of a systematically reconstructed Afro-Hispanic language is the skit *La juega de gallos o el negro bozal* by Ramón Caballero, originally published in Ponce in 1852, and first brought to the attention of linguists by Alvarez Nazario (1974). Little is known about the author of this play, other than the fact that he was born in Venezuela, and eventually moved to Ponce (Girón n.d.). Nor do we learn about his familiarity with the speech of African-born *bozales*, except to note that the latter were certainly present in Puerto Rico during the time in which the play was written. *La juega de gallos* combines scattered structures reminiscent of other Afro-Iberian creoles, set against a generally unremarkable *bozal* pidgin or learners' variety:

Ja, Nazaria, ¿tú mirá señorita anoche cómo taba miringando? Y niña Fererica también... qué duce.

Ah Nazaria, no son tú corazóná. Tú siempre ta jablando a mí con grandísima rigó. Yo ta queré mucho a ti, grande grande así son mi sufrimienta, aquí yari yari mucho, si tú ta queré mi corazóná... yo ba libetá a ti Nazaria. Yo ta trabajando, y ta juntando dinero pa ti...

No Nazaria, no ta gritando así hombre, ¿brángaman Dio!

Mirá, yo tiene uno becerro en casa ño Juan de Dio, yo tiene dinero juntando y niña Fererica ba a da a mí pa comprá uno llegua.

Nazaria, brángaman Dio turu me ta morotificá.

The play contains such attested Afro-Caribbean Spanish elements as the use of *ta* + INFINITIVE (Lipski 1987b), the invariant copula *son* (Lipski 1999b), the use of the bare infinitive minus final /r/ as invariant

verb, the West African Pidgin English form *yari yari* ("cry"), and intrusive nasalization as in *brángaman* < *válgame* (Lipski 1992). These forms appear against the backdrop of imperfectly-learned Spanish such as might be found in any foreign language classroom. On the basis of this text the Spanish linguist and proponent of the Afro-Caribbean Spanish Creole theory Granda (1968: 194, fn. 4) declared that "...es fácil demostrar el carácter igualmente 'criollo' de la modalidad lingüística puertorriqueña" From this point forward the claim that an Afro-Hispanic Creole was once spoken in Puerto Rico has never been seriously challenged, despite the fact that the case rests on such a small corpus. In particular, since Ponce was the site of a large colony of Papiamentu-speaking workers in the nineteenth century, the possibility that such Creole-like verbs as *yo ta queré* might be influenced by Papiamentu (which has identical constructions) warrants further exploration.

4. Papiamentu Language in Puerto Rico

In the first demonstration of the former presence of Papiamentu in Puerto Rico, Alvarez Nazario (1970, 1972, 1974) reproduces a poem written in what is clearly a partially Hispanized Papiamentu, published in Ponce. The text in question comes from a pamphlet describing festive activities realized in the south of Puerto Rico in 1830, celebrating the birth of the heiress to the throne of Fernando VII, who would become Isabel II. Among the songs and dances described in the pamphlet is the following song, attributed to the "mulatos holandeses que residían en el Sur" (Pasarell 1951: 124):

Tutur genti de Corsó
 Celebrado Rey Fernandu
 Mambatindu ha tambur
 Di contentu boy bailandu.
 Comparsa di Julandés
 Celebra a Reyna Cristina
 Nan Princesa naroyna
 Novo astro boy miré.

For Alvarez Nazario (1970: 4), the text

"ofrece pruebas de primera mano que establecen el arraigo definitivo y claro en nuestro suelo por entonces de sectores poblacionales usuarios del papiamento, con raíces que se remontan posiblemente en el tiempo a los siglos XVII y XVIII...cuando este instrumento expresivo va definiendo y consolidando históricamente sus caracteres de lengua criolla del Caribe..." According to him, the language in question represents the vestiges of Papiamentu transplanted to Puerto Rico several generations prior to the attestation in question, and partially remodeled through contact with evolving *bozal* and *criollo* Spanish of Puerto Rico. The most significant aspect of this discovery, amply recognized by Alvarez Nazario, is the fact that the language of these *genti di Corsó* was familiar enough to observers in early nineteenth-century Puerto Rico so as to require no special introduction or translation. Alonso (1975: 57), in the classic work *El jibaro*, also referred to the presence of "criollos de Curazao" in nineteenth-century Puerto Rico, evidently an unremarkable phenomenon in his day. Girón (n.d.) also describes the presence of Papiamentu-speaking natives in Puerto Rico (cf. also Vicente Rosalía 1992).

5. Other Afro Puerto Rican Texts

Alvarez Nazario (1974) also gives fragments of another skit, *Tío Fele* by Eleuterio Derkes, published in 1883. There are several scenes in which *bozal* fragments occur; these do not suggest a systematic Creole, but rather the imperfect learning of Spanish:

Salí, señó. Mala cara pone mí. Yo no quisió di con elle...l'olla acia y bota comía...
 Yo tiene calalú, java...
 Gassa, l'amo, ja! ja! gassa.

These extremely brief fragments do little in the way of reconstructing *bozal* language in colonial Puerto Rico, but they do indicate some awareness of Africanized Spanish during the nineteenth century.

In 1883 Rafael Escalona published two humorous skits, inspired by the Cuban lit-

erary stereotype of the *negro catedrático*. The title of *Flor de una noche* (Escalona 1883b) was intended to be a spoof of the romantic Puerto Rican poem "Mi flor de un día" by José Gautier Benítez, who in turn had derived his title from the play by the Catalan writer Francisco Camprodón *Flor de un día*. Escalona's play was first performed in 1881. *Amor a la pompadour* (Escalona 1883a) was first performed in 1882. The second play contains dialect imitations of *jibaros* and *negros catedráticos*; the first, of *catedráticos* and *bozales*. The *catedrático* examples represent vernacular Puerto Rican Spanish, with typical phonetic reductions and hypercorrections, together with the heavy dose of malapropisms that formed the basis for this literary stereotype. Some of the *bozal* examples from *Flor de una noche*, spoken by Diego, the "negro congo," are:

Yo ta aquí, señó...
Eso cosa lee...Baron...
Yo te boy á traé uno traje pompadú...
Eso cosa no comprendo...Eso cosa dise a mí...
Lo corason se me safa, uno cosa grande me fata que me jase arremiyá...
Mientras la suete perruna me yeba fuera de ti tú obidá á mí, Lola?...
Eso mimo dise yo.

In addition to the dramatic pieces, an odd and completely unexplained *décima* referring to the Spanish-American war of 1898 was published in a folklore collection (Mason and Espinosa 1918: 361), containing what appears to be Afro-Hispanic language. A few examples are:

Nanqui toy ma mákinley...
Negro nalla en Africa vivía
limbre como mariposa...
Nanllí lan día se curía
tran de tiguiri y lión,
limbre como el mismo sol...
Vine aquí nan Poto Rico
de una borega nanfondo,
me llevaron lo nemonios,
nontron se jicieron rico...

This poem contains a number of Afro-Hispanic elements, such as the use of the generic article *lan/nan* (Lipski 1987a), but given the lack of information regarding its

composition, one can only speculate as to the authenticity of the language.

There are a few other short Puerto Rican poems that purport to represent *bozal* language. The "Décima de negros" (Cadilla de Martínez 1953: 111), which according to Degetau (1925: 44) was "una canción de los negros bozales," contains some non-agreeing conjugated or infinitive verbs, as well as popular non-Africanized Puerto Rican Spanish:

yo sé que siño Rafé
ej guardia de tu bují
que ta namorao de tí
y tú le correpondé...
mi corasó sin felí
por eso yo va murí...

The poem "Yo so un negrito angolo" (Cadilla de Martínez 1953: 308) also contains a few suggestions of non-native *bozal* Spanish, but not of a stable Creole:

y quiere mi amita blanca
pa onde yo quiere dí.
si su mercé a mí me vende
yo de casa no me va...
yo compra mi libertá...
si su mercé a mí me juzga
de la mala condición
toca que toca, toca, toca

In the poem "Buscando dinero," Llanos Allende (1962: 31–3) offers a dialog between a *brujo* and a *congo* although the latter, presumably an African-born *bozal*, in reality uses vernacular Puerto Rican Spanish devoid of specific second-language traits, for example, "¿Y cuando bengá Sataná ande debo yo de dil?"

A little-known but important literary representation of Afro-Puerto Rican speech comes in the story "Tate" by María Cadilla de Martínez (1945: 49–60). The protagonist is an elderly black woman, a freed slave of the writer's grandfather, who was apparently born on a Puerto Rican plantation of an African father captured on the African coast and taken to the Caribbean by European slavers. The author gives no further information about this presumably real-life character (including the background of the mother, who was supposed to have died when Tate was very young), nor does she

comment on the unusual speech, except to give glosses of words which no Puerto Rican or Spanish speaker from another region would recognize today. This lack of metacommentary is itself suggestive that *bozal* or hybrid *bozal*-Caribbean Creole speech was not unusual enough in Puerto Rico as late as the early part of the twentieth century so as to require extensive explanation. Some fragments of this strange quasi-*bozal* language, with the author's glosses interspersed, are:

Balao [buenos días] señoritos...
 Me mambá [mi vestido de cuadros] costó tesorirrial [tesoro real]
 Quía ser [qué ha de ser], niño...
 Bellá [tengo] mi cuento. Su mercé el magarrón [patrón] doná muchos bellos chicos isabelinos [dió muchos buenos medios pesos] pa el Patrón nel la chimbá [hacienda] e Montigrandi pa compralme dejpuej de cristiana. Nel jabeque [casa] de la chimbá me dieron el Tate. Ma la Iglesia, ar cristianá, me apropió Monsirriate, com'me tocaya la Visne [virgen]...
 ¡Qué parrá (e)su mé! [qué dice su merced]. Ej Monsirriate achiquitao...
 Mi paire jué bambí [oubanghi] coartao. Me primé megarrón jué D. André...
 (Bamó! Parrar [hablar] de nobios! ¿Queré, niño)?...
 La negra, banalde macucano megarrón, parrá al nobio [la negra, por detrás del astuto amo, hablaba con el novio]. Eya taba zamuquita [enamorada] e Dámaso...
 Nel dentril e bombala, nel candungué...nel guateque dej Santo Patrón [these are different dances]

Tate then recites some *coplas*, which include verses such as:

Me gusta la gente branca orguyosa como son tú...
 Tú dise, nego macumunao, que yo no pueo bailá...
 Yo sé que siño Manué está jabrando 'e mí que 'ta enamorao e mi y no le correspondé.

This language contains several legitimate Afro-Hispanic phenomena, as well as general learners' errors. Among the former are (1) the form *dona* "give," essentially equivalent to Papiamentu *duna*; (2) the invariant copula *son*; (3) the reduction *negro* > *nego*, a common process in much Afro-Hispanic and Afro-Portuguese language; (4) the shift *branca* < *blanca*, found in Portuguese, but also in early Afro-Hispanic language. Moreover, the word *esu* may not be a contraction of *su merced*, but rather a vestigial African pronoun; *enú* is the (now archaic) second person plural pronoun in Afro-Colombian

Creole language Palenquero, derived from KiKongo or similar Bantu languages.

A few Puerto Rican texts document the former presence of Creole French speakers, particularly from the Lesser Antilles. For example in his novel *La llamarada*, Enrique Laguerre (1935: 323-4) has black characters singing couplets with words in French Creole (which, however, is not glossed in the text):

Aguedá, dime lo que quieres;
 Dime lo que quieres, Aguedá,
 Dime lo que quieres;
 Si es *cunyá* dimeló.
 Si es *leró* dimeló.

Cunyá is a fair realization of the Haitian (and lesser Antillean) French Creole word for "now"; *leró* seems to mean "later," containing Creole French *lè* + *heure*, "time, hour." This is more indirect evidence of the presence of Creole French among Afro-Puerto Rican communities. The "Poema dedicado a la gran recitadora señora Dominga de la Cruz" by Victorio Llanos Allende (1962: 93) contains the chorus: *Oh danzé...muá ...* This line, in a poem about dancing, appears to contain the Creole French elements *dansé* "dance" and *mua* (i.e., French "moi," more often *mué*) "I, me." The same poem also contains the lines: *¿Qué importa que diga la gente que/yo baila bomba, ja, ja?* There appears to be a lack of subject-verb agreement typical of *bozal* speech as well as of speakers of other Caribbean Creoles; later in the poem the line is repeated, but with a subjunctive, which may mean that one of the lines was misprinted, although the poem evidently intends to portray an "African" tone: *¡Qué importa que diga la gente que/yo baile bomba!*

During the nineteenth century, other texts appeared in Puerto Rico that purported to represent the speech of black slaves, although not using *bozal* language. An interesting series of articles appeared in the newspaper *El Ponceño* in the period 1852-53 (Curet 1986). The articles claimed to be "Dialogos grotescos," conversations between a white master and his slave Pablo Congo. Congo is portrayed as a sensitive,

thinking individual, and perhaps for this reason is not depicted as speaking anything other than standard Spanish. The articles were published anonymously, although Curet (1986: 37f.) believes the author to have been one Benito Vilardell. The articles are of interest more for their social value than for their linguistic content; at a time when other authors, in Puerto Rico and Cuba were making full use of *bozal* language for humorous purposes, the author behind Pablo Congo found it appropriate to have an African slave speak reasonable Spanish.

6. The Afro-Puerto Rican Text That Never Was

Perhaps the most important *bozal* text from Puerto Rico was never published at all, but rather appears in an unpublished first draft of an abolitionist play. In 1884, the poet/playwright Ramón Méndez Quiñones (1847–1889) wrote the play “¡Pobre Sinda!” which was never published. This neo-Romantic drama is set in Puerto Rico, in the “época de la odiosa esclavitud—1864.” Among the characters is an “esclavo viejo, congo,” who in the definitive version of the manuscript speaks in normal, even sublime, Spanish, as he delivers his impassioned denunciations of the cruelties of slavery. In unpublished notes, discovered by Girón (1991: 399–411), Méndez Quiñones gives his reasons for not having this African-born slave use *bozal* language: “Hablando en su jerga, no convencería, y en los momentos más patéticos no haría sentir, produciendo con sus exclamaciones de dolor la hilaridad del público” (Girón 1991: 400). To demonstrate his point, the author adds examples of several scenes that he had originally written in *bozal* Spanish, “y de las cuales prescindí por los conceptos antes expresados.” These fragments show great similarity with *bozal* texts from elsewhere in Latin America, and when combined with the author’s obvious concern for the situation of blacks in Puerto Rico, converge on a positive evaluation of the linguistic value of the unpublished notes:

yo no puere aguantá ma eta vía tan rastrera;
Si güeté trabaja, malo, si no trabaja, pió...
Si lo da sueño güeté lo jase fueete sesina...
Nelle son mala cabeza y no se jayá remedio...

This text contains the independently verified *güeté* for *usted*, the invariant copula *son*, and the invariant third-person pronoun *nelle*, abundant in Afro-Cuban literature and still used among a few elderly Afro-Cubans (Ortiz López 1998). However, the most important aspect of this text is the fact of its expurgation from the final edition of the play, since its seeming authenticity would be at cross-purposes with the author’s depiction of nobly suffering Africans.

7. Analysis: Earlier Afro-Puerto Rican Spanish

The texts surveyed allow for some tentative conclusions regarding the speech of African slaves and their immediate descendants in colonial Puerto Rico. First, it is clear that most if not all the authors in question had actually heard some form of *bozal* Spanish, since their imitations are too consistent both with one another and with attestations of Afro-Hispanic language from other countries to be due to mere chance. Although some instances of imperfect Spanish could be attributed to general learners’ speech, most cases point to authentic interference from one or more African languages, or—in a few texts—of other Creole languages such as Papiamentu. Awareness of *bozal* Spanish among the general population was not as high as in Cuba during the same time period, since the proportion of African-born slaves and free blacks in Puerto Rico was much smaller. Imitation of Afro-Cuban texts by Puerto Rican authors is also unlikely, since the most telling Cuban texts, such as those of Lydia Cabrera, were written well after the Puerto Rican documents, while Cuban literature representing *bozal* Spanish contemporary with the Puerto Rican works surveyed above were obscure and probably unknown in Puerto Rico. Does this mean that Afro Puerto Rican Spanish was part of a larger Caribbean Spanish Creole, as suggested by

pro-Creole advocates? In general, the answer is negative, since the total Afro-Puerto Rican intertext exhibits too much variation in its fundamental elements—verb phrases, noun phrases, agreement—to represent any completely coherent natural language. Found instead was a series of common denominators forged in the collision between West African languages and Spanish, and reinforced by the fluent but ethnically tinged speech of island-born slaves and slavedrivers, the *capataces*, *mayorales*, *contramayorales*, and *mayordomos* who constituted the linguistic and cultural interface between African slaves and their white masters. A few special forms such as the pronouns *elle/nelle* and the invariant copula *son* traveled freely between Cuba and Puerto Rico, occasionally reaching other corners of the Spanish Caribbean; in the absence of a true pan-Caribbean Spanish Creole—and available evidence overwhelmingly disfavors such a hypothesis—the only plausible model for the appearance of these selected Afro-Hispanic words on more than one island is the transfer of slaves and slavedrivers. The presence on both islands of speakers of other Creole languages such as Papiamentu and French Creole may have contributed to Afro-Hispanic common denominators not easily derived from regional Spanish, but these Creole language speakers were few in number and regionally confined, while Afro-Hispanic *bozal* language is attested throughout Puerto Rico and Cuba. In any event, there is absolutely no evidence to suggest that any Afro-Hispanic language was learned by Puerto Rican slaves prior to arriving in the Caribbean, e.g., as part of a West African Creole Portuguese, as suggested, e.g., by Granda, Megenney, and Perl, among others. There is also no evidence that native Spanish speakers ever deliberately simplified their speech or used distinctively Afro-Hispanic elements such as *elle* or *son* when speaking with African slaves or their descendents, in some version of “baby talk” or “foreigner talk” theories of creolization. White disdain for Africans’ speech precluded any incorporation of identifiably “black” traits, except when mocking

bozales’ presumed ineptitude, as in the former Cuban imprecation *Tú eres un negro de “yo va dí, yo va vení,”* referring to highly non-standard and even non-native Spanish. The few non-standard elements common to *bozal* Spanish in Cuba and Puerto Rico reflect geographical, social, and economic proximity during colonial times; the Afro-Puerto Rican data are simply insufficient to warrant any more wide-reaching conclusions.

8. Conclusions

Despite the small size of the Afro-Puerto Rican corpus, these texts tell a fascinating story of the formative period of Caribbean Spanish in all its ethnic nuances. Puerto Rico sat athwart the Caribbean slave routes, all the while absorbing linguistic and cultural influences from neighboring Afro-Creole islands. Although deriving its origins from captives’ struggle to learn Spanish from their tormentors, Afro-Puerto Rican *bozal* language outlasted and outgrew slavery and oppression, to add its subtle touch to the life, literature, and language of all Boricuas.

■ NOTE

* This article is dedicated to Estelle Irizarry, a superb editor, colleague, and friend. Access to materials in the Puerto Rican collection of the Universidad de Puerto Rico Río Piedras Library was facilitated by a Title VI library collections grant in July 1999.

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