FROM THE EARLIEST DAYS OF THE AFRICAN SLAVE TRADE, THE FIGURE OF THE BLACK AFRICAN bozal (born in Africa and speaking little or no Spanish) appears in Spanish literature, nearly always in the role of buffoon or at best unwilling victim of cruel fate. Long before the massive importation of slaves to the New World, southern Spain (Sevilla, Huelva, Cadiz) had a significant population of black slaves and freedmen, many of whom had arrived via Lisbon, where in the late 15th century nearly half the metropolitan population was black. Writers such as Gil Vicente, Henrique da Mota and Antonio Ribeiro de Chiado depicted the deformed pidgin Portuguese spoken by bozales in Portugal beginning in the 15th century, and by the end of the following century the phenomenon of the habla de


John M. Lipski

Afro-Caribbean Spanish

and from the 15th century to the 20th, it is difficult to establish definitive conclusions as to the prior existence of widespread and homogeneous Afro-Hispanic creoles, but certain common patterns exist which continue to defy adequate explanation. The present note will deal with one such case, the curious item las and its variant nan, as found in 19th century Cuban and Puerto Rican literary and folkloric texts.

Beginning around the turn of the 19th century, literary attestations of bozal Spanish in the Antillian region (especially Cuba and Puerto Rico) take a dramatic turn, away from the chaotic dispersion of pidgin variants (incorrectly conjugated verb forms, errors of grammatical concordance, phonetic deformations, etc.) and in the direction of a more stable and homogeneous set of structures which suggest the formation of a creole dialect. One of the principal features of the “new” bozal speech is the introduction of the verbal particle ta in the combination ta + V inf: siempre ta regaló dinero a mi “he always gives me money”, horita ta bensi pa’á “soon she will come here.” Although this feature forms the cornerstone of many monogenetic theories of Afro-Romance creoles, its usage is sporadic in the Caribbean, and this combination is not found in other examples of Latin American bozal speech. In a detailed study, I have traced the appearance and development of the ta + V inf construction in Caribbean bozal speech, and have suggested that this combination may be due to the importation of Papiamentu- and other creole-speaking slaves from Curaçao to Cuba and Puerto Rico at the beginning of the 19th century, to meet the labor demands caused by the sugar plantation boom. Evidence exists that Papiamentu was spoken in both Cuba and Puerto Rico in the early 19th century, and on the origins of pidginization”, Language 54 (1978), 314–47; for an opposing point of view, cf. Humberto López Morales, “Sobre la pretendida existencia y pervivencia del 'criollo' cubano”, Anuario de Letras 18 (1980), 85–116. The major study of Colombian Palenquero is by Nina de Friedemann and Carlos Patiño Rosselli, Lengua y sociedad en el Palenque de San Basilio (Bogotá: Instituto Caro y Cuervo, 1983); one seminal study is by Derek Bickerton and Aquiles Escalante, “Palenuguero: a Spanish-based creole of northern Colombia”, Lengua 32 (1970), 254–67. A major study of the origins of Papiamentu is by John Bingham, “The Papiamentu language of Curaçao”, Ph. D. dissertation, University of Virginia, 1970; cf. also Dan Munteanu, “Observaciones acerca del origen del papiamentu”, Anuario de Letras 12 (1974), 83–115; H. Van Wijk, “Origenes y evolución del papiamentu”, Neophilologica 42 (1958), 169–82.

Alvarez Nazario, El elemento afroamericano, 384.

Moraes, Poesia afroamericana, 188.


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the presence of the *genti di corsou* may have profoundly affected the prevailing Afro- 
Hispanic language patterns, or at least the literary representations, this accounting for 
the significant shift in linguistic structures beginning around the turn of the 19th cen-
tury. Santo Domingo was barely affected by this last wave of slave trading, although 
another phenomenon influenced Afro-Hispanic speech of the Dominican Republic: the 
presence of French creole speakers from Haiti, whose attempts at speaking Spanish 
appear from time to time in Dominican literature.  

A less frequently commented but equally radical formation in 19th century Caribbea-
bosal speech is the use of *lan/man*, which is not found in earlier texts from this region, nor 
in other Afro-Hispanic dialects, and which became a key feature of literary represen-
tations of *bosal* language in Cuban and Puerto Rican literature. Most instances of *lan/man* 
are used as a portmanteau definite article, masculine or feminine, singular or plural; at 
times, the exact semantic values of this particle can only be determined from the sur-
rounding context. Typical examples include:

me garró po nan pásaa “He grabs me by the [curly] hair”
nan cañón hasa – pum! “the cannon went boom!”
ranllí lan día se curía “there the days went by”
ma que lan tiempo si pie “even if the time is wasted”
cuando lan galla cantá “when the roosters crow”
como lan gallo cuando pelée “like roosters when they fight”
burujé jerejene menemuerí “métet comiendo y lon diablo”
méet llevando “fleas and ants are biting me everywhere, and the devil is carrying me off”

In other instances, *lan/man* apparently replaces a preposition (usually *de*) + article: 
Señó Redató lan Faro Sinditrúa la Bana “dear editor of the 
Faro Industrial de La Habana”
gallo ta nan so “the roosters are in the sun”
nunca se quita nan so “I never get out of the sun”  

10 Cf. Emilio Rodríguez Demuzio, *Poesía popular dominicana* (Santiago de los Caballeros: 
Universidad Católica Madre y Maestra, 1973, 3rd ed.), 260–86; Samanda: *pasado y porvenir* 


12 J. Aldén Mason and Aurelio Espinosa, “Porto Rican folklore: décimas, Christmas carols, 
nursery rhymes and other songs, *Journal of American Folklore* 34 (1918), 143–208 [pp 
387, 361].

13 Antonio Bachiller and Morales, “Desfiguración a que está expuesto el idioma castellano al 
contacto y mezcla de razas”, *Revista de Cuba* 14 (1883), 97–104 [p. 104].


15 Mary Cruz, *Creo Ganga* (Havana: Instituto Cubano del Libro “Contemporáneos”, 1974), 
118.

16 Lydia Cabrera, Francisco y Francisco: *chascarrillos de negros viejos* (Miami: Editorial C. R. 
1976), 15.

17 Cruz, *Creo Ganga*, 157.


vinea aquí nan Porto Rico “I came here to Puerto Rico”

no lo salí lan Guinea “I didn’t come from Guinea”

The use of *lan/man* has occasionally been noted in studies of Afro-Hispanic language, 
but has rarely been the object of serious attempts at locating this unique element. Be-
fore reviewing the possible explanations, it must be reiterated that *lan/man* consistently 
appears only in Cuban and Puerto Rican *bosal* Spanish, beginning in the 19th century; 
moreover, in no text is use of *lan/man* categorical, but rather alternates with correct and 
correct use of articles and prepositions. This limited geographical and temporal exten-
sion of *lan/man*, and the coexistence with forms such as verbal particles and construc-
tions _ta + V inf._, use of *(a)ripe to mean “in, on” etc. suggests a common and extra-
Antillean source for such styylectural *bosal* elements.

In the only serious attempt to account for the form *lan/man*, Alvarez Nazario postu-
lates that the original form was *nan*, and that the change *nan > lan* took place through the 
influence of the definite article _la_. In Puerto Rican _bosal_ Spanish, both *lan* and *nan* 
are found, but in extant Cuban texts, only *lan* (with occasional variant _lon_) occurs; 
there are a few instances of _ne_ as an apparent substitute for a preposition plus article, 
which may conceivably comprise a related development: *yo tua ne rio “I was in the 
river”.*  If the occurrence of *lan/man* in Cuba and Puerto Rico stems from a common 
extraterritorial source, then the existence of both forms in Puerto Rico and of only the 
former in Cuba would suggest an evolution _lan > nan_, initiated and only partially com-
pleted in Puerto Rico. The opposite development would be suggested only if it could be 
demonstrated that *lan/man* was attested in Cuba significantly before appearing in Puerto 
Rico, having undergone the autovive evolution _nan > lan_ before the latter form was 
transferred to Cuba, via an as yet unattested route of linguistic transplantaion. How-
ever, there does exist one attestation of _lan_ in Latin America which considerably antedates 
those of _nan_: in 17th century poems by Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz; *a lan Dios que se yoranda “to God who is crying” (1678); qui viin lan fieta “for the fiesta is coming” 
(1880). Although Sor Juana lived in Nueva España (Mexico) and presumably described 
_bosal_ speech as found in that region, she also had contact with slaves from Puerto Rico, 
who appear in some “villancicos”. Since _lan_ is so rare in Sor Juana’s portrayals of Afro-
Hispanic speech (which in other respects is quite consistent with other contemporary 
literary accounts), it appears that this element was infrequent in the _bosal_ language of 
Nueva España, and may well have been noticed by Sor Juana in the speech of slaves 
arriving from the Antilles. At approximately the same time period as Sor Juan’s ex-
amples, in Peninsular Spanish literature, a few examples of _lan_ with similar value are also 
found; for example from Quiñones de Benavente’s *El negro hablador y sin color anda la 
niña* (1664); *la trena yama ú lan cárzel “the jail is called _trena_”; in Lope de Ve-
ampliando sus alcances funcionales para servir también como artículo de singular.” The use of an African or creole Portuguese element as partial replacement of Spanish or Portuguese articles is apparently due to the lack of definite articles in the African languages presumed to have influenced Caribbean bozal Spanish. The extension of lan/nan to incorporate the meaning of preposition + article is not explained by Alvarez Nazario, although possibly parallel structures involving the particle na in some West African languages are noted in passing.68

Whereas the examples adduced by Alvarez Nazario represent a thoroughly researched cross-section of Afro-Hispanic speech, the proposed analysis of lan/nan is not entirely satisfactory for several reasons. First, it has not been adequately demonstrated that this form combines the values of singular and plural definite article, since the majority of attestations of lan/nan used solely as an article are either clearly plural in reference (e.g., lan gallo, lan día, lan tiempo) or ambiguous in reference (lan diábro, lan cañón). If a plural reference is present in most cases, and if at the same time lan chronologically precedes nan in Antillian bozal Spanish, then the final /n/ of lan might be attributed to the frequent process of nasalization of syllable-final /n/ found in several Spanish dialects and well represented in bozal Spanish: ¿qué comió m’ín gallito? “what did my roosters eat?”; despares > dimparate “foolish remarks”; pescezo > pinceoso “neck”; desparchar > dimpachá “to wait on”; despracidados > dingrásió “miserable” etc. and the omnipresent negren/negrito < negro. At times, a final /n/ appears apparently as a hypercorrection: la niña sen va, probre cravo lloirá “when the lady leaves, this poor slave will cry.”39 The change lan > nan, which appears to have spread only in Puerto Rico, may in turn be the result of retrogressive nasalization and/or non etymological addition of word-initial/n/; the latter process is particularly well represented in Antillian bozal Spanish, in the portmanteau third person pronoun nelle (variant elle), which may have masculine or feminine, singular or plural reference, and at times also includes the semantic value of a preposition: yo me legra que nelle jue fujuna “I am glad that they are doing well”; ya nelle se lo fue pu su tierra “she went back to her land”

elle estaba en un mortuary “he was in a mortuary.”40

The apparent use of lan/nan as a preposition or as a combination of preposition + article is more difficult to resolve, since in none of the Afro-Portuguese creoles cited as comparative evidence does the element m(m) include the value of a preposition. If lan/nan is either a direct transference from an Afro-Lusitanian or a calque of a creole Portuguese form, then the extension to include a prepositional value represents a serious divergence from the originally postulated base, which finds no parallel among other Afro-Romance creoles. If all instances of lan/nan in bozal speech are derivable from a single source, then it is preferable to interpret examples like gallo ta nan so, yo vine lan Poto Rico, no comoco, etc. as the result of the general loss of prepositions in creole Spanish, combined with the portmanteau article lan/nan. One of the principals characteri-

26 Obras de López de Vega, t. III. (Madrid: Real Academia Española, 1893), 368.
27 Obras de López de Rueda. t. I. (Madrid: Real Academia Española, 1908), 187.
28 Emilio Cotarelo and Moris, ed., Colección de extremosas, loas, bailes y mozajangas desde fines del siglo XVI a mediados del XVIII. t. I. (Madrid: Nueva Biblioteca de Autores Españoles, 1911), 231, 234.
29 Obras de López de Vega, t. X (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Españoles, 1905), 139.
30 López de Rueda, op. cit., 184.
31 El elemento afronegroide, 176.
33 Cabrera, Francisco y Francisca, 65.
34 Cruz, C. G. Boj. 103, 117–8, 170.
36 Cruz, C. G. Boj. 108, 73, 89; Villaverde. Cecilia Valdés, 137; Alvarez Nazario, El elemento afronegroide, 190.
It is noteworthy that the majority of attestations of lan/nan occur with nouns beginning with /g/ or /d/, and moreover with a possibly closed subset of such words. This lopsided distribution suggests another hypothesis as to the origin, or at least spread and reinterpretation of lan/nan in Caribbean bosal Spanish: perasalization of word-initial mop consonants. West African languages, particularly of the Niger-Congo family, are characterized by a large number of perasalized or coarticulated word-initial consonants (bh, nd, nk, ng, etc.), which are frequently interpreted by Europeans as /f/ + /NC/; thus in Equatorial Guinea, Mbim is pronounced Embi, Ngueima is Enquema, etc. Among Afro-American dialects, retention of African lexical items with perasalized initial consonants is found in Gullah, Nduka, Saramacca, Sranan Tongo, Palenquero, etc., while in other dialects (including Black American English), phonological reinterpretation has taken place, usually in favor of a single non-nasal consonant: nguba > goba “peanut”. Also found, particularly in Colombo palenquero, is the perasalization of word-initial stops in Spanish lexical items, extending prevailing African phonotactic patterns. In Palenquero, it is significant that perasalization occurs almost exclusively with word-initial /d/ and /g/: dejar > djea “to let”, gritar > griat “to scream”, ganar > gnant “to earn”, dolor > ndol “pain”, doce > ndome “twelve”, duro > ndulo “hard”, etc.

It is likely that perasalization was frequent in bosal Spanish of all periods, although since Spanish writers would have no ready way of representing this pronunciation, it does not usually appear in written texts; such texts do, however, indicate word-internal nasalization, in forms such as nemre, dimperare, etc. Also found is the loss of word-initial vowels in Spanish words beginning with /VN/: (ya que ngodò [engordar] mi cuerpo viejo ya! “why should I fasten up my old body”, nemo [enfermo] tu rentac “the sick person has burst”; niento [invento] mi grande que tragafía y ferrocarril som buey “the ox is a greater invention than the telegraph and the railroad”; noco [encoge] la pat y “to curl up the foot”.


43 Friedemann and Patiño Roselli, Lenga y sociedad, 99–100.

If certain Spanish words were pronounced in Caribbean bozal Spanish, with prenasalized initial consonants, this configuration could give rise, among Spanish writers unaccustomed to African phonotactics, to phonological misidentification and incorrect morphological division. The change *gallina > *ngallina, *diablo > *ndiablo, gato > *ngato, etc., could result in combinations like *In(s) ngallina(s), *l0(s) ndiablo(s) being interpreted as lan gallina, lon diablo, and so forth. Such stereotyped combinations could give rise to the impression that lan/lon actively combined with all nouns, resulting in the sporadic appearance of this form in bozal literary texts.

In summary, the attempt to identify the element lan/lon with a putative West African creole Portuguese subject pronoun *nan < the(m) encounters serious difficulties. The following observations have emerged from the preceding survey: (1) The form lan/lon is found only in Cuban and Puerto Rican bozal Spanish, generally beginning in the 19th century; (2) lan appears to be the original form, with the evolution lan > nan found only in Puerto Rico, and always in alternation with lan; (3) it is unlikely that all instances of nan, na, etc. with prepositional value are etymologically related to lan, although in certain cases perceived analogy may have influenced the evolution of lan; (4) it seems that lan/lon was used in combination with a small, possibly closed set of nouns, most of which contain initial /d/ or /g/; (5) it is likely that the literary variant lan arose among non-black Spanish-speaking writers, upon hearing some form of definite article combined with a prenasalized initial consonant, in words like diablo, gallina, gato, etc.; (6) further examples of lan/lon may have arisen from nasalization of final /s/ in the articles los and las. Given the lack of first-hand testimony on 19th century Caribbean bozal Spanish and the equivocal nature of literary and folkloric documentation, it is impossible to offer definitive conclusions as to the origins of lan/lon; the preceding remarks have been offered in the spirit of stimulating further research on the much-commented but little-studied Afro-Hispanic language of Latin America.

historia (Valencia: Imp. de Francisco Vives Mora, 1894, p. 138) notes that in that country, “cinaronos bozales” frequently said na-coeina, ne-pueblo, na-casa, etc. for en la cocina, en el pueblo, en la casa, thus indicating another possible source for combinations involving /an/.


Die im folgenden veröffentlichten Briefe wurden unter dem Gesichtspunkt ausgewählt, drei für die wissenschaftliche Biographie und intellektuelle Haltung der Briefpartner auf unterschiedliche Weise bestimmende Stationen und Erfahrungen in ihren Beziehungen zueinander zu dokumentieren, die zugleich auch Kapitel deutscher Universitätsgeschichte prägnant beleuchten.

Es sind dies erstens Briefe, die sich auf die Habilitation von Krauss und auf die Vorbereitung des Exils von Auerbach beziehen. Krauss hatte sich nach der Promotion 1929 bei Karl Vossler in München Ende 1931 bei Auerbach in Marburg mit der Arbeit Die