

Afro-Bolivian language today: the oldest surviving Afro-Hispanic speech community

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1. Introduction

The first sub-Saharan Africans taken to Spanish America as slaves arrived early in the 16th century, and worked in the highland mines of Nueva España (Mexico) and especially in the Viceroyalty of Peru. Early in the colonial enterprise, the enormous mineral deposits of Potosí was discovered, and after failing to engage indigenous laborers in sufficient quantity, Spain began its first massive importation of African slaves, to the region first known as Alto Perú, then the Audiencia de Charcas, and after colonial independence, as Bolivia.¹ Judging by indirect comments on the nature of labor to be performed, as well as lists of slaves, Africans taken to Bolivia were predominantly male (e.g. Leons 1984c:28), at least during the first century, when they worked in the Casa de la Moneda in Potosí and possibly also in the surrounding mines.² Many reports describe severe weather (cold and heavy snow) and harsh working conditions in Potosí and other highland areas, all of which would yield a high mortality rate (e.g. Angola Maconde 2000:29-36). In any event, the African slave population in Bolivia was never large, many mixed with indigenous or European residents, and the cultural, linguistic, and demographic profile of Afro-Bolivians declined steadily from a high point in the early 17th century, when Africans represented nearly 5% of the population (Crespo 1977:28). Despite the overwhelming adversities and the time span of more than four centuries, in this primarily indigenous and mestizo nation, a tiny but vibrant Afro-Bolivian community has survived to the present day, including many Afro-Hispanic cultural and linguistic retentions. In the area of language, the speech of some of the oldest and most isolated Afro-Bolivians offers the biggest surprise of all:

a fully intact restructured Afro-Hispanic language (spoken alongside highland Bolivian Spanish) that represents the only known survival of what was once the language of some nine million *bozales* (African-born second language speakers of Spanish). In the following sections the key features of Afro-Bolivian Spanish will be presented, together with an interpretation of these data in the broader context of the contributions of the African diaspora to Latin American language and culture.

2. Afro-Bolivian demographics and contemporary communities

Although individuals of African descent can be found in many parts of Bolivia, those *afrodescendientes* (the term preferred by Afro-Hispanic activists) who have retained traditional Afro-Hispanic language and culture live in scattered communities in the provinces of Nor Yungas and Sud Yungas, in the department of La Paz.³ The most important Nor Yungas black communities are Tocaña, Mururata, Chijchipa, followed by Dorado Chico, Coscoma, and Khala Khala. The two *municipios* of NorYungas province, Coroico and Coripata, are also home to many Afro-Yungueños who have moved from their original communities. Other communities contain more Aymara-Afro-Bolivian mixture. In Sud Yungas the principal black community is Chicaloma (now less than 50% black but once the principal Afro-Bolivian community in the region), with black Bolivians scattered in many neighboring communities. As nearly as can be determined, the traditional Afro-Bolivian dialect only survives in a subset of these communities, principally Mururata (where Afro-Bolivians still acknowledge a hereditary king, the “rey de Mururata”), Tocaña, Chijchipa, Dorado Chico, and Khala Khala). Only a few traits are found outside of this region, for example in Chicaloma, the principal Afro-Bolivian nucleus in Sud Yungas province.

The Yungas are tropical valleys no more than a few thousand feet above sea level, surrounded by some of the most forbidding mountain terrain in all of South America, with peaks reaching more than 15,000 feet. The torturous terrain, nearly vertical geography, lack of safe roads, and frequent mud and rock slides, have cut off the Yungas communities from the rest of Bolivian society. Most communities are less than 150 miles from La Paz, but to reach even the closest communities one must travel upwards of six hours along what is locally known as *la carretera de la muerte*--a one-lane muddy mountain road with steep dropoffs, no guard rails, and a high accident rate. The region is principally inhabited by an Aymara-speaking indigenous population, while the black Yungueños usually live in scattered houses on the mountainsides. Although there are some differences among the Afro-Bolivian communities, the basic life style and daily activities are nearly identical in the entire region. The Afro-Bolivian communities derived from former haciendas consist of scattered family dwellings perched on the steep hillsides; a typical community may have anywhere between 25 and 50 families, many of which are related. Some communities have only a dozen or so families, while there is a scattering of larger communities with a significant Afro-Bolivian presence, such as Mururata, which is actually a rather large village. Houses are of adobe or a mixture of adobe and wood, with roofs of metal or occasionally traditional thatching. There are no plumbing facilities of any sort; some of the larger communities have individual or community latrines, but these are not found in the smaller settlements. Only in a few settlements near larger towns is the occasional electrical line found; most Afro-Bolivians continue to rely on lanterns, cook with firewood, and draw water from streams or community *pilas*. Most residents do not travel to La Paz or other highland areas, due—in the residents' own words—to the bad road, the discomfort caused by the high altitude and cold temperatures of the *altiplano*, and the lack of funds to pay even the very modest cost of

transportation (the cost of a one-way trip from La Paz to the Yungas or vice versa is around US\$4). Although the region produces excellent coffee, oranges, and other tropical products, the prohibitive cost of bringing these products to urban markets precludes the development of significant cash-crop agriculture. In desperation, most residents have turned to growing coca, cutting terraces into the steep slopes and drying the leaves on slabs of local slate in between the frequent rains. The coca is purchased at low prices by brokers, ostensibly for the legal Bolivian tradition of chewing coca leaves and brewing *mate de coca*. Coca growers are aware of the illegal cocaine trade, but repudiate any participation in this activity and proudly affirm an ancient agricultural tradition. As a result of the social and geographic isolation, residents of the Yungas communities have retained cultural and linguistic traits that have faded from more populated urban areas. In the Nor Yungas communities, where Afro-Bolivian speech still survives and where the present research was conducted, black Bolivians remain linguistically and culturally separate from Aymaras; they learn enough Aymara to function efficiently in the Aymara-dominant local markets, but maintain a completely separate life style through networks of extended families.

Tracing the demographic profile of Afro-Bolivians entails a considerable amount of extrapolation, since neither colonial nor post-colonial governments took pains to achieve accurate counts, and for more than a century official census data do not include Afro-Bolivians as a separate category.⁴ During the colonial period by 1650 there were some 30,000 Africans (the majority African-born *bozales*) in the Audiencia de Charcas out of a total population of 850,000. Of the later figure some 700,000 were considered indigenous, and presumably spoke little or no Spanish, so that Africans represented 20% of the Spanish colonial population. By the time of the official post-colonial census of 1846, 27,941 “black” residents were counted in a total

population of nearly 1,400,000, although the accuracy of a census in 19th century Bolivia is open to question. After the abolition of slavery in 1851 blacks were no longer officially acknowledged and counted in Bolivia, thereby complicating the reconstruction of Afro-Bolivian culture. The last census to list a black population separately was the 1900 census, in which 3,945 Afro-Bolivians were officially counted, out of a total population of just over 1.8 million (some 0.2% of the total population). Of this total 2056 were in La Paz department (mostly in the Yungas), and another 930 were in Santa Cruz, with the remainder distributed throughout the nation. A description of the Yungas from the 1940's—that is, before land reforms following the 1952 revolution resulted in black families occupying former haciendas in the Yungas—estimated the black population of Bolivia as “6.700 individuos de **raza negra**, que cultivan productos tropicales en los pocos valles donde habitan”; for the Yungas region, there were some 8,800 “blancos y mestizos” (i.e. native Spanish speakers), 16,700 Aymaras, 600 members of indigenous groups from the Amazonian region of Bolivia, and some 900 Afro-Bolivians (Meneses 1945:67-8). According to the sources summarized in Powe (1998:815), by 1883 there were between 5,500 and 6000 black residents of the Yungas. Zelinsky (1949:175) estimated the number of Afro-Bolivians at 6,000 half a century ago, while Leons (1984c) cites a figure of only around 2,000. In recent decades many Afro-Bolivians have migrated from the Yungas to Santa Cruz, eastern Bolivia's lowland boom-town. At least 3000 Afro-Bolivians are estimated to live in or around Santa Cruz (Anon. 2003), although there is no indication that any unique speech forms have been maintained outside of the Yungas. Another article (Anon. 2002) asserts that some 30,000 Afro-Bolivians live throughout the country, although without documentation of this figure, since no recent census has included this category. Spedding (1995:320) suggests, based on personal observations, that there may be between 10,000 and 15,000 Bolivians with at least

some visible African ancestry in the Yungas region. Afro-Yungueños are clearly aware of their separate status as *negros* (the term normally used by Afro-Bolivians), and have recently begun systematic attempts to draw national attention and to obtain the legal and social recognition as a long-standing (and long-suffering) ethnic minority in Bolivia. The remoteness of this region (currently visited only by mostly foreign “eco-tourists” and mountain bikers, most of whom speak little Spanish and have no interaction with Afro-Bolivians) and the traditional marginality of black Bolivians has resulted in a nearly total lack of documentation of their speech and culture.

There is no accurate information on the regional origins of Afro-Bolivians. Crespo (1977:32-4) presents very sketchy data from the late 17th century that suggest the Congo and Angola region as the largest single source of slaves, but the total numbers are so small as to inspire little confidence. As shown in a later section, a few uniquely Afro-Bolivian words may originally come from Kikongo. Significantly, the only “African” surnames in Bolivia are Angola and Maconde (the latter apparently of Kongo origin). Such toponyms used as surnames were given by ship captains and slave dealers to indicate the coastal African areas from which the respective slaves were drawn (Crespo 1977:39). Montaña Aragón (1992:265f.) claims to have interviewed elderly Afro-Yungueños who vaguely recognized the names of Yoruba deities such as *olarún*, *yamanyá*, and *opatalá* but without specific knowledge of their meaning. In my own interviews with dozens of Afro-Yungueños I have been unable to confirm the former presence of such words in the region, and in a personal conversation Prof. Montaña was unable to recollect any additional details.

Tracing the arrival of black Bolivians in the Yungas is hampered by the almost total lack of historical documentation. According to Leons (1984c), the first official records (deaths,

marriages, and other accounts) date from just after 1700. Most 18th century records are of house slaves in the Yungas. By the end of the 18th century the historical record is more substantial as regards black field slaves on the *haciendas* of the Yungas and other central Bolivian regions. Research by Lema (2005) and Aillón Soria (2005) among others situates black Bolivians in the Yungas and other agricultural regions by the end of the 18th century, but there still remain considerable gaps in Afro-Bolivian history, including routes of migration and the chronology of arrival in the various communities. Oral tradition in the Afro-Bolivian communities converges on the late colonial period (late 18th or early 19th century) as the probable time of arrival of the majority of the black population to the Yungas. By the end of the colonial period (early 19th century), Afro-Bolivians were already well established as *peones* on large *haciendas* owned by usually absentee landholders. Even then the main cash crop was coca; coffee and sugar cane were grown on some estates, and there is occasional mention of oranges or other tropical fruits and vegetables being grown for sale. At least until the second half of the 19th century Afro-Bolivians were chattel slaves, held under the same working conditions as black slaves in other Spanish American colonies. The first Bolivian constitution, of 1826, officially abolished new slavery and provided a means by which existing slaves could purchase their freedom—at prices that very few would ever attain. Following protests by large landowners, an 1830 law effectively reinstated slavery, although new slavery was again officially denounced in the new 1831 constitution. Once more landowners protested; it was felt that only black laborers could work effectively in the Yungas, by then an area closely identified with Bolivia's black population (Llanos Moscoso and Soruco Arroyo 2004:66). The situation remained largely unchanged until the agrarian reform process begun in 1952.

Until the second half of the 20th century, black Bolivians in the Yungas still worked as virtual slaves on the haciendas. All adults were required to work (without compensation) three days a week for the benefit of the landowner; the remaining four days produced food for the family. There were no rest periods built into this system. Children began working on the hacienda from around the age of 12-15 years. When their parents were temporarily incapacitated, children could work to partially offset the debt created the adults' inability to work. All work was conducted under the supervision of a *mayordomo* or overseer, often an Aymara speaker, who was the trusted employee of the landowner. The *mayordomos* would then appoint a *jilacata* or assistant from among the peons. Both the overseers and the *jilacatas* employed physical punishment to enforce working hours. Whipping with leather bullwhips was the usual punishment, which could result in receiving an *arroba* (25 lashes) or more as punishment. Particularly cruel were the corporal punishments inflicted by the *jilacatas* on members of their own suffering long-community. Women and elderly peons were also whipped, a punishment which occasionally extended to children.

In addition to the requirement to work three days out of seven for the benefit of the landowner, peons on the hacienda were also required to participate in the systems of *pongo* (for men) and *mitani* (for women); this entailed work in the plantation house, such as providing firewood, cooking, cleaning, and other household chores. In most haciendas peons were forbidden to attend school or study; most older Afro-Bolivians are therefore nearly or totally illiterate. On some haciendas all peons were reportedly required to speak to the overseers only in Aymara, although by all accounts such communication was usually limited to receiving orders and punishments.

After 1952 the hacienda system was abolished. Most Afro-Bolivians remained on the parcels of land that had once belonged to the haciendas, without land titles but free from the requirement to work for a landlord. Many of the Afro-Bolivian communities retain the names of the former haciendas: Dorado Grande, Dorado Chico, Chijchipa, Khala Khala, Coscoma, etc. Beginning shortly thereafter, public education began to arrive in the Afro-Yungueño communities, although to this day some communities only have schools that cover the first two or three grades. To finish elementary school children often must walk for several hours to reach the nearest community in which a more comprehensive school is located. With the arrival of education, Afro-Bolivians in the Yungas were exposed to national varieties of Spanish, as well as with the written language. According to all the individuals interviewed, there were no explicit comments from teachers against the unique Afro-Bolivian dialect, but through the process of hearing and studying Spanish most Afro-Yungueños began to drop the use of the traditional dialect, assuming by inference that it was inferior to the language of the schools. Many elderly Afro-Yungueños refer to themselves as *civilizados* as a result of education and literacy, and when pressed, also equate the traditional dialect with “uncivilized” behavior.

Ironically, considering the lack of official recognition of Afro-Bolivians and their long-standing marginalization, the Bolivian government and many private tourism companies have produced posters and postcards with smiling Afro-Bolivian faces, all the while that the official censuses and ethnic classifications ignore the presence and contributions of black Bolivians. However as the Afro-Bolivian writer Fernando Cajías warns (Anon. 2002): “No hay que musicalizar la cuestión afro.” To this day residents of La Paz recall the greeting *¡suerte, negrito!* said when encountering a black person in the street. This greeting—still occasionally heard but no longer socially acceptable in public—converted a black face into an amulet to be touched

verbally for good luck. Pinching a black person “for good luck” is a variant of this practice. This is culturally homologous to the *estornudo* or feigned sneeze practiced by white residents of Spain during the 16th-17th centuries whenever a black person passed by (i.e. equating a black face with a black peppercorn, the infamous “Guinea grains” which gave the Grain Coast its name).

Most Bolivians have never visited the Yungas, but even those who describe the region from personal experience almost never mention the black population. Thus, for example Cortés (1875:26) declares that “Bolivia está poblada de tres razas principales: la española, los aborígenes i la que resulta de la mezcla en estas dos”; when speaking of the Yungas (pp. 87-8), he mentions only the indigenous population. In a recent panoramic study, incorporating several official organisms, Plaza Martínez and Carvajal Carvajal (1985) fail to mention Afro-Bolivians as an ethnic group, although they describe several indigenous communities with fewer members. Nor are Afro-Bolivians mentioned in any of the previous ethnolinguistic surveys reviewed by the above-mentioned authors. In his studies of the town of Chicaloma in Sud Yungas more than a quarter century ago, the anthropologist Leons (1984b:23) notes that “... Negros are culturally close to Hispanic patterns and [...] Spanish is their primary language ...” Bridikhina (1995:100-1) states that many black women from the Yungas region have migrated to La Paz and maintain more contacts outside of the region; as a consequence, she asserts that it is the women of this group who have greater opportunities for racial and cultural mixture than the men, who largely remain in the region to work. Newman (1966:48) indicated that in Mururata, Nor Yungas “the [Afro-Yungueño] is strictly endogamous”; significantly, this is one of the villages in which the Afro-Yungueño dialect has been maintained by older residents. Hudson and Hanratty (1991:xxvii, also 62) mention only that “African slaves ... became an Aymara-speaking subculture in the Yungas, which they colonized for coca cultivation.” Meneses (1985a)’s

detailed account of Nor Yungas mentions only indigenous inhabitants, including the sharecroppers under the control of *mayordomos*; this despite the fact that many Afro-Yungueños still alive vividly recall working for these same *mayordomos* during the time period in question, just over 50 years ago. In describing Sud Yungas, Meneses (1985b:196-7) does mention the small black populations in both Nor Yungas and Sud Yungas.

3. Early Afro-Bolivian literary examples

Although Africans and their descendents have been living in Bolivia continuously since the 16th century, their representation in literary and folkloric texts is quite sparse, and is limited to a couple of 17th century songs and a few 20th century stories. The songs follow the *habla de negro* literary stereotypes established in Golden Age Spain and employed by such writers as Lope de Rueda, Lope de Vega, Góngora, Simón Aguado, Sánchez de Badajoz, and in Spanish America Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz (Lipski 1995b, 2005). The first song is the anonymous “Esa noche yo baila” (Claro 1974:lxxv-lxxvii), and begins:

Esa noche yo baila
con Maria lucume
asta sol que amanece
Plo mi Dios que sa acuya
esa gente comensa
aunque pe la buesa fe
su hichito ya nace.

Yet another anonymous text from Alto Peru, apparently written in the late 17th or early 18th century, and which contains the *estornudo* that has metamorphized into the *¡suerte negrito!* shout of modern Bolivia is the *villancico* “Afuela apalta (Negros al portal)” (Fortún de Ponce 1957: 122f.), which begins:

Afuela, afuela apalta apalta
que entlamo la tlopa Gazpala
apalta, afuela

que entlamo la gualda re reye Guineya.
e lo pífalo soplal
e mandamo echal plegon
respetamo ro branco
tenemo atención.

These texts contain numerous phonetic modifications, all of which probably occurred to a certain extent in early Afro-Hispanic language; these include substitution of *r* for *l* (a trait typical of Bantu languages), pronunciation of *d* as *r*, addition of final vowels to words ending in a consonant, elimination of final consonants, especially *-s* and *-r*, and intrusive nasal consonants (e.g. *nenglo* < *negro*). Some of the traits are common to most second-language learners of Spanish, others suggest areal traits of specific African language families, and some are idiosyncratic and possibly pure inventions by the white racist authors of these *negrillo* songs. Grammatical modifications are more typical of second-language learners, and include lapses in noun-adjective and subject-verb agreement, use of disjunctive object pronouns instead of clitics, and a generally simplified syntax, with few subordinate clauses. These texts could have been produced anywhere, and do not reflect the inevitable three-way linguistic and cultural contacts involving Spanish, African languages, and Andean languages. Indeed, there is no confirmation that the songs were actually composed in Bolivia (or even in America), although they were presumably performed there.

4. 20th century Afro-Bolivian literary representations

Despite the relatively small size of the Afro-Bolivian population, a few 20th century folktales and regionalists novels offer imitations of what is presumed to be the speech of Bolivians of African ancestry. Paredes Candia (1984:299f.; 1987:146f.) provides fragments such as:

Mile patloncito, costal lleno no puede doblarse ...

me voy pa el pueblo, vas a vigilar bien a tu comagre porque el Pedrito está por acá. Si le pego en el pote, mi lo meto más adentro, si li pego en la cabeza mi lo besa mejor dejaré que terminen ...

Mañana mismo, negrito flegado, compra una frazada. Calentate perno con el sol bendito, qué frazada ni que merda ...

These texts bear the characteristics of the Bolivian *oriente* (e.g. the region around Santa Cruz), where a number of Afro-Bolivians have resettled from the Yungas in the past half century.

Linguistic traits of these texts includes aspiration of syllable-final -s and the diminutive suffix –*ingo*, not found elsewhere in Bolivia but typical of the Santa Cruz dialect. The most prominent non-Bolivian feature—implicitly associated with “black” Spanish—is the pronunciation of *r* as *l* (e.g. *fregado* > *flegado*), a pronunciation not found anywhere in Bolivia, not even among Afro-Yungas speakers. The formulaic use of the change of *r* to *l* to represent “black” speech, in the absence of other phonetic, grammatical, or lexical traits, has been a mainstay of the literary parodies of the *habla de negro* since the Spanish Golden Age. Quevedo (1988) remarked that in order to speak *guineo*—as he called *bozal* Spanish—it sufficed to change all instances of *r* to *l*: ‘sabrás guineo en volviendo las rr ll, y al contrario: como Francisco, *Flancico*; primo, *plimo*.’

Although some African language families do produce this type of interference (most particularly the languages of the Bantu family), others distinguish *l* and *r* perfectly. Even speakers of African languages that do not distinguish *l* and *r* normally acquire Spanish and Portuguese with little confusion of these sounds (e.g. the Spanish of Equatorial Guinea and the Portuguese of Angola and Mozambique), although early borrowings from Portuguese into these Bantu languages, based on the briefest contact with Romance languages, did embody this change. That this stereotype can persist through the end of the 20th century in a country where this sound change has probably not been heard for 400 years attests to the strength of racist parodies and their transmission in popular culture. The substitution of *r* for *l* in the absence of any other second-

language traits is also found in Paredes-Candia's own novel *Zambo Salvito*, set in colonial times and in the highlands, where this phonetic change has never prevailed (Paredes Candia 1988):

¡Salvadol!, vení a vel lo que han hecho con tu padle el malvado del patlón, y el tigre de Pompeyo. (p. 14)
Ya no puele hijito, t'amos muy lejos, mejol que descansemos un rato y comamos estas racachitas que tlaigo. (p. 17)

Pizarroso (1977:111-115) provides a story in which Afro-Bolivians speak in a dialect more reminiscent of Aymara speakers, a not unrealistic portrayal for some areas of Sud Yungas and even the Aymara-dominant Nor Yungas communities, where a few Afro-Bolivians have married Aymaras, speak the language, and consider themselves to be essentially Aymaras. Some examples are:

Cayá, cumadre, no yoris. Todo arreglari yo. Pero tienes qe darme tu ternero.
Gueno, ti lo voi hacer--il tal es, quil promesa lo cumplas. Il ternerito prieto ... mi lo darás in cuanto il obra ti lo haga.
Mamita, el obra te loi cumpliu. Loi matau con macheti, a cumpadre in chumi, nada minus. Istá bien matau. No es quién velva! El ternero prieto lo llivaré. Loi hecho feliz al cumpadre.

These fragments contain the neutralization of *i-e* and *o-u* typical of Aymara-influenced Spanish, as well as occasional loss of definite articles. This text is perhaps a reasonable approximation to Afro-Bolivian speech in areas where the residents speak Aymara and identify with the Aymara culture, but does not coincide with the unique Afro-Bolivian language found in Nor Yungas.

5. Informal accounts of contemporary Afro-Bolivian speech

Although to date there have been no studies of the unique Afro-Hispanic dialect spoken in the Bolivian Yungas—nor has this dialect appeared in literature—occasional comments in newspaper articles and travelers' descriptions acknowledge the existence of a “special” language among some Afro-Bolivians. In dialectological studies by Bolivian linguists there is no mention of linguistic traits peculiar to Afro-Bolivians; in fact the presence of a black population in contemporary Bolivia is never mentioned in such works. Bolivia is always cast as a multilingual

mestizo nation, with Quechua and Aymara being the two indigenous languages that have the greatest contact with Spanish nationwide. Thus Coello Vila (1996:172-3) divides Bolivia into three dialect regions, “determinados, en gran medida, por la influencia del sustrato, por el bilingüismo y por las consecuencias emergentes de las lenguas en contacto.” The Yungas subdialect is simply described as a “variedad del castellano paceño [...] influencia del aimara.”

Mention of Afro-Bolivian speech is found in a few unexpected places. When speaking of Afro-Yungueños’ purported disdain for indigenous inhabitants, Meneses (1948b:198) quotes the phrase *eyos son di otro Dios; andan cayaos siempre, mascando su oca*. This phrase is unremarkable except for the apparent *yeísmo* use of *y* instead of the distinct *ll* still maintained in all Bolivian Spanish dialects. Paredes Candia (1967 t. II:129), asserts that blacks have disappeared from Bolivia “excepto en ciertas parcelas de los yungas cordilleranos,”⁵ but vestiges of folklore remain, such as the *negrito* and *morenada* songs and dances.

Recently, Afro-Bolivians (whose community leaders now prefer the term *afrodescendientes*) have received coverage in the Bolivian press. One interesting allusion to speech is (anon. 2004): “Hasta la manera de expresarse es diferente. Su lengua es el español, mas lleva modismos que sólo los negros comprenden. Los jóvenes investigan y creen que su acento es una herencia de los primeros hombres llegados de otro continente para ser sometidos como esclavos.” This affirmation is likely to be true, although the present investigation encountered few Afro-Bolivians who actively comment on the history of their speech modes. A black resident of Mururata (Nor Yungas) laments that “Hemos ido cambiando muchas costumbres de nuestros abuelos, nosotros mismos ya tenemos vergüenza hasta de habla nuestro modismo que es tan bonito. Por ejemplo *jay*, era una palabra que enriquecía nuestro hablar. La juventud actual, ya no quiere seguir practicando nuestra cultura que es muy rica” (Anon. n.d.).

Of the speech of the Afro-Yungueños, Spedding (1995:324), who has spent considerable time with this community, declares—accurately—that “they speak a dialect of local Spanish with an accent and styles of expression different from those used by Aymara-Spanish bilingual speakers.” This assertion is true even of the unmarked Spanish of Afro-Yungueños, which contain little of the Aymara interference traits found among indigenous speakers. In a description of the largely Afro-Bolivian village of Chicaloma (Sud Yungas) it is said that “El idioma de varias familias negras actualmente es el aymara y el castellano con ciertas variantes fonológicas” (Gobierno Municipal de La Paz 1993). It is true that in Sud Yungas the Afro-Yungueño dialect has little presence, while most speakers are bilingual Aymara speakers, but there are no empirically verifiable “phonological variants” separating black and non-black speakers in this region. Powe (1998:816), who traveled through the region and visited most of the small Afro-Bolivian settlements, comments that “a curious aspect of Black (and Aymara) speech in this region is the pronunciation of the Spanish “rr” as an English `z’”; this pronunciation in fact stems from indigenous influence and characterizes the entire Andean region, from southern Colombia to northwestern Argentina. At another point Powe (1998:850-1) gives a reasonably accurate transcription of some fragments of Afro-Yungas dialect (in this case from Chijchipa), written in non-Spanish fashion and inaccurately described as Aymara code-mixing: “...Blacks sometimes use Aymara words or grammar when speaking. For instance instead of saying “*Dónde estás yendo*”? (“Where are you going?”) they say “*Andi po teta ondo*?” and for “*Qué estás haciendo aquí*”? (“What are you doing here?”), they say “*ke po teta asi akí*”.” In fact both expressions contain only patrimonial Spanish words, although with considerable restructuring:

andi [< *onde* < *dónde*] po(h) [< *pos* < *pues*] oté [*usted*] (eh)ta(h) ondo [< *yendo*]?

qué po(h) [< *pos* < *pues*] oté [*usted*] (eh)ta(h) así [< *hace*, instead of *haciendo*]

The use of *ande* for *onde* (the archaic form of *donde*) is found in many rustic Spanish dialects, including the Canary Islands, northern New Mexico, and parts of Central America, among others. It is widely represented in Bolivian *costumbrista* literature for rustic speech throughout the country. Similarly *pos* (the archaic form of *pues*) survives in all of rural Mexico, much of Central America, and sporadically elsewhere in the Spanish-speaking world. Nowadays whereas Afro-Bolivians may incorporate Aymara words and expressions into their Spanish, they derive their vernacular Spanish features not from contact with indigenous speakers but from earlier colonial sources.

Montaño Aragón (1992:268) notes that :En cuanto al habla típica de los negros, el castellano pronunciado por ellos recuerda al empleado en el Río de la Plata y también en otras áreas de Latinoamérica' and again (Montaño Aragón 1992:272): 'un castellano deformado en la pronunciación y a veces en lo semántico.' No examples accompany these statements, which probably refer to the combination of aspirated *s* and *yeísmo* (merger of *ll* and *y*), although Afro-Yungueños do not pronounce *y* as in the Río de la Plata region).

6. Linguistic features of contemporary Afro-Yungueño speech

In the Afro-Bolivian settlements in Nor Yungas, the oldest community residents, and many of the middle-aged members, speak a unique Afro-Hispanic dialect that differs systematically from any other variety in the Spanish-speaking world.⁶ All speakers of the traditional dialect are bidialectal, also speaking vernacular highland varieties of Bolivian Spanish, with little of the Aymara interference patterns found among their Aymara-speaking neighbors. Afro-Bolivians and their neighbors have no word or expression for the distinct Afro-Yungueño dialect, except by imitation of short stereotypical expressions like *cho* or *jay* or with

circumlocutions like “nuestra manera de hablar” or “como hablábamos antes.” I have chosen the term Afro-Yungueño dialect for descriptive purposes, but no such word is used among Bolivians. Among all the people interviewed for the present study none appeared to be truly aware of how “different” their dialect is from regional highland dialects, or from other varieties of Spanish around the world. The Afro-Yungueño dialect has been highly stigmatized, and when community members have used this variety in the presence of other Bolivians they have frequently been mocked and criticized. As a result this dialect—now rapidly declining and shunned by younger Afro-Yungueños—is used only in private settings or in inconspicuous conversations held in public spaces. As far as can be determined no authentic specimen of this dialect has ever been written (except for the brief fragment at the opening of Angola Maconde 2000⁷ and the misinterpreted notes of Powe 1998:850-1), and folkloric stories purporting to represent “black” Bolivian speech either lean toward the Aymara-influenced speech of Sud Yungas or embody historical stereotypes such as the shift of *r* to *l* that are not part of any contemporary Afro-Bolivian dialect.

The traditional Afro-Yungueño dialect exhibits the following consistent features of pronunciation, many of which are shared with other second-language varieties of Spanish, and with other Afro-Hispanic dialects:

(1) Aspiration or loss of syllable- and word-final *-s*. This stands in stark contrast to highland Bolivian Spanish, in which final *-s* is pronounced strongly. The pronunciation of final *-s* is the most noteworthy indicator when Afro-Yungueños switch between highland Spanish and their own dialect.

(2) In Afro-Yungueño Spanish all verbal infinitives lack final *-r*; this consonant is also lost at the end of some frequent nouns such as *mujé(r)*, suggesting that the process was originally

phonetic in nature. The contemporary Afro-Yungueño dialect is not characterized by widespread loss of final *-r* in other words; it may be that verb stems lacking final *-r* were inherited from earlier *bozal* language in which the verb stems were on the way to being restructured.

(3) Unlike all other Bolivian Spanish dialects, the Afro-Yungueño dialect has merged the phonemes *ll* and *y*, following the pattern of *yeísmo* begun in Spain by the early 16th century. The combination *li* followed by a vowel, most particularly *familia* > *juamía*, was apparently also reanalyzed as *ll* and further subject to *yeísmo* in the Afro-Yungueño dialect.

(4) Conversion of *f* to *ju* before unrounded vowels: *juamía* < *familia*, *juiscal* < *fiscal*, *cajué* < *café*. The shift of *f* to *ju* before unrounded vowels is found among Afro-mestizo communities in southeastern coastal Mexico, in Esmeraldas province in northwestern coastal Ecuador, and in the Colombian Chocó, where the African presence was especially strong, and where other linguistic vestiges of earlier Afro-Hispanic language may still be found (Lipski 1995a). Among Afro-Yungueños the change *f* to *j* also occurs in word-initial consonant groups: *fruta* > *jruta*.

(5) There is some addition of final vowels to words ending in a consonant, particularly at the end of phrases: *ele* < *él*, *ayere* < *ayer*, etc. The addition of final (paragogic) vowels to Spanish and Portuguese consonant-final words ending in a stressed syllable was a common feature of early *bozal* language, as well as of borrowings into African languages. The scattered appearance of these added vowels in Afro-Yungas Spanish suggests that this process was once more widespread, affecting numerous consonant-final words ending in stressed syllables.⁸

As striking as the phonetic features of traditional Afro-Yungueño speech are the grammatical features, which separate this dialect from any other contemporary variety of Spanish,

while bearing great similarity with *bozal* representations from previous centuries. These traits include:

(1) Invariant plurals (*lo peón < los peones, lo mujé < las mujeres, persona[s] mayó < personas mayores*, etc.). This is one of the few Afro-Yungueño traits that at times persists even when Afro-Bolivians speak neutral *castellano*, although they attempt to form standard Spanish plurals.⁹

(2) Invariant plural article *lo/lu*: *lo mujé* [las mujeres], *lo peón* [los peones], *lu negociante* [los negociantes], *tres mes, cuatro mes*. When employing the Afro-Bolivian dialect, speakers use only the plural article *lo/lu*, irrespective of grammatical gender. Afro-Yungueño clearly derives from *los*, combining the dialect-general loss of final *-s* and the instability of the *o-u* distinction typical of Aymara speakers. Occasionally, *lo/lu* is used with singular reference: *era lo secretario generá*.

(3) Retention of plural *-s* only on first element of plural noun phrases: *recordando esos fiesta; loh dirigente; en idioma antiguo di mis abuelo; a los juiscal todito; loh guagua jóven; no hay catres harto; siempre contaba algunos cosa*. The use of “bare plurals” in Afro-Yungueño alternates with the invariant plural article *lo/lu*. As with invariant plurals, the use of bare plurals often persists when Afro-Bolivians use neutral varieties of Spanish. There are clear parallels with other Afro-Iberian dialects, past and present. Among the early Afro-Hispanic *bozal* imitations, beginning with the mid-17th century poems of Sor Juana, we find some of the first consistent cases of loss of plural *-s* in nouns when preceded by a plural article: *las leina* [las reinas], *las melcede* [las mercedes], *lus nenglu* [los negros], *lo billaco* [los bellacos], *las paja* [las pajas], etc. The same configuration is also typical of vernacular Brazilian Portuguese, Angolan *musseque* Portuguese and of 16th-18th century *bozal* Portuguese (Lipski 2005).

(4) Elimination of definite articles: *tiene su mujé, mujé aprendió tomá; bueno, carro es ciento cuarenta; expreso entra cuarenta mil; mujé murió año pasao; la una, gallo iba cantá; mayordomo pegaba gente, patrón atrás de mayordomo; negro muy poco fue [a la guerra]*.

Articles are not systematically dropped in Afro-Yungueño speech, but there are many instances of zero articles in constructions that would require definite articles in other dialects of Spanish. The definite article is used in subject position only when definite reference is required, but not when the subject is generic. In the behavior of definite articles, Afro-Yungueño Spanish once more aligns with vernacular Brazilian Portuguese.

(5) Lack of noun-adjective gender agreement: *las mujeres altos; siempre contaba algunos cosa; esos fiesta; loh persona mayó; los hombre con camisa blanco; han quedao hartos viuda; unos quince mula; comunidad entero iba*. Currently no Afro-Bolivian consistently fails to effect gender agreement; agreement sometimes occurs, but extrapolation from the oldest Afro-Yungueño speakers suggests an earlier time when little agreement was present.

(6) Elimination of the prepositions *de*, *en*, and *a*: *[yo] nació [en] Mururata; tengo un hermano allá [en] Coroico; aprendió [a] tomá; en este tiempo di cosecha siempre nojotro va [al] trabajo; he ido [a] Caranavi seis año; cuando gallo canta [a las] seis de la tarde*.

(7) Use of the 3rd person singular as invariant verb: *nojotro tiene jrutita; yo no entiende eso de vender jruta; yo creció junto con Angelino; nojotro creció loh do; ello vivia, ello salía mi avisá aquí; ¿de qué nojotro pobre va viví? nojotro trabajaba hacienda; lo patrón siempre tenía partera; leña no cargaba como nojotro cargaba*. This combination recurs frequently in Afro-Hispanic language as well as other second-language varieties of Spanish and Portuguese, due primarily to the fact that the 3rd person singular verb form is by far the most frequent manifestation of the Ibero-Romance verb paradigms. When speaking neutral *castellano* Afro-

Bolivians strictly maintain subject-verb agreement; the use of invariant verbs is one of the most striking features of the Afro-Yungueño dialect.

(8) Partially restructured subject pronoun system. In the traditional dialect the second person singular pronouns *tú* and *vos*, both of which are normally used in highland Bolivian Spanish, do not appear. Only *oté* < *usted* characterizes the traditional dialect, although most Afro-Yungueños also use *tú* and *vos* in their contemporary speech. The plural of *oté* is *otene* < *ustedes*. In the third person *ele* refers to both 'he' and 'she,' while *eyu(s)* combines the function of Spanish *ellos* and *ellas*.

In terms of vocabulary, Afro-Bolivian speech scarcely differs from other highland varieties, except in the reduced use of Aymara words. When asked about the words most closely identified with their community, Afro-Bolivians mention *cho* and *jay*. Both items are instantly identified with Afro-Yungueño speech, and are used to mock the speech of Afro-Bolivians who use their dialect outside of their own communities. *Cho* is used as a greeting, similar to the use of *che* in the Guaraní-speaking area and in the Rio de la Plata; it derives from Aymara *cho* or *chuy*, used in similar fashion. *Jay* (an Aymara particle meaning essentially *¿qué cosa?* or *¡oye!* and used in informal speech to indicate that one is paying attention) is considered by Afro-Yungueños to be their own creation, and is used to punctuate utterances. It has no inherent semantic value, but rather behaves like the equally frequent *pue(h)* in Afro-Yungueño speech. Typical examples are: *yo no fue jay*; *aquí levantamo jay temprano*; *ahora días jay corto, hay que avanzar trabajo di madrugada*; *ya murí [murió] jay hace tiempo*; *cuando mis hermana vivía, hacían jay semana ellos cada uno tenía que hacer semana* [los quehaceres de la casa]; *ustedes deben tener jai algo que recordar*; *no sé ustede cómo jai hacían en casa.*¹⁰

Other items used in Afro-Yungueño speech but not when speaking *castellano* are the Aymara-derived *chaypu* and *churauhui* ‘cloudy, overcast.’ The only Afro-Yungueño lexical items that have at times been regarded as Africanisms are *mauchi*, a traditional funeral song, and the typical dances *saya* and *zemba*. Rey Gutiérrez (1998:188) suggests a Kikongo origin for the word *mauchi*: “MA: prefijo Kikongo que indica la preteneicia. UCNI: es la deformación de UNSI que significa dentro de la tierra, U: dentro, NSI: tierra. Mauchi se refiere a la tierra [...].” She also derives *zemba* (a traditional dance) from a kikongo word meaning “navel” and *saya* (the most famous Afro-Bolivian dance) from Kikongo *nsaya* meaning communal labor. These etymologies have not been independently verified.

7. The future of Afro-Bolivian speech

In terms of the criteria used by linguists studying minority speech communities, Afro-Bolivian Spanish is not only an endangered language, it is a moribund language (in the sense of Crystal 2000). A language is considered to be endangered for example if parents are no longer teaching the language to their children and are not using it actively in everyday matters. Endangered languages with only a few hundred remaining speakers, all of whom are middle-aged or older, are considered to be seriously endangered or moribund; in the absence of deliberate intervention, the language will disappear in less than two generations. Most endangered languages disappear while surrounded by majority languages that are genealogically unrelated or at least mutually unintelligible; this is the case of vanishing Native American languages throughout the Americas, as well as the remaining endangered languages of Europe and central Asia. When the endangered language—typically existing only through oral transmission and with little or no written production—is surrounded and overpowered by a related language, the process of attrition usually passes through a stage of mixing in the majority

language even when attempting to speak exclusively in the minority language. This occurs not only with words not found in the minority language (reflecting the technology and culture of the dominant society), but even at the level of essential core vocabulary and grammar. Such smooth crossovers can be seen, for example, in the less tenacious regional languages of Spain (Aragonese, Asturian-Leonese), and in many regional languages of France, Germany, and Italy. Language erosion occurs more rapidly when the minority language has no distinctive referent, but is assumed to simply be a “dialect” or “sloppy form” of the majority language. A comparison of surviving Afro-Yungueño speech and early attestations of *bozal* Spanish suggest that the Afro-Bolivian dialect was once more consistent in its departures from patrimonial Spanish grammar: no subject-verb or noun-adjective agreement, only invariant plurals, and a radically altered sound system. Despite the fact that the differences between the basic Afro-Yungueño dialect and standard Spanish (even in its highland Bolivian varieties) are as systematic as those between Spanish and, e.g. Galician, Asturian, or even Catalan, Afro-Bolivians do not recognize it as a separate language or even dialect. This unique speech is regarded both within and outside of the Afro-Bolivian community as simply “bad” or “old-fashioned” Spanish, an attitude that has contributed to its imminent demise. In the past decade, Afro-Bolivian activists have begun to demand minority rights of the Bolivian government, but issues of language maintenance and the status of the group as a linguistic minority have not formed part of the discourse. A few older black Bolivians nostalgically regret that younger community members no longer use the language, as witnessed by the comments quoted earlier, but there is no move to encourage the retention of this language, which the same as indigenous-influenced Bolivian Spanish varieties, have historically been further impediments to upward socioeconomic mobility. Like Sephardic Spanish, Afro-Yungueño speech has survived several centuries against all odds,

only to be threatened with extinction in the course of a single generation. Recently Juan Angola Maconde has begun to write poetry in the traditional dialect (temporarily available on the present writer's web site: <http://www.personal.psu.edu/jml34/Angola.htm>), and it is hoped that other Afro-Bolivians will take up the challenge of committing the traditional dialect to written form. In an attempt to document and legitimize what appears to be the oldest surviving Afro-American speech community, Juan Angola Maconde and I are creating a digital recording archive (audio and video recordings), copies of which have been given to the participants and their communities. Ultimately these materials will be placed at the disposition of all Bolivians and all members of the African diaspora worldwide. Such an archive will in itself do little to end the marginalization of Afro-Bolivians and the lack of respect for their culture and language, but it is our hope that an appreciation for linguistic expression becomes part of the *afrodescendientes*' struggle for recognition. The language and culture of what is arguably the oldest surviving Afro-diaspora community anywhere in the Americas hang in the balance.

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¹ For a composite history of Africans in Alto Perú, see Bowser (1974), Crespo (1977), Cucho (1981), Harth-Terré (1971, 1973), Pizarroso Cuenca (1977), Portugal Ortiz (1977). Lipski (1994) for the linguistic history of Afro-Hispanic language in Peru and Bolivia.

² In urban areas, male and female slave populations were more nearly equal, according to figures gleaned by Crespo (1977:30-40).

³ The traditional Afro-Bolivian population lives in small agrupations ranging from five to twenty or thirty families, each scattered over large expanses of mountainside. This results both from the nearly vertical geography and from the fact that almost all occupy former hacienda lands, which they have parceled out among themselves. Terms such as *hamlet*, *village*, and even *settlement* suggest more compact masses than found in the smaller spots, such as Chijchipa and Dorado Chico. The official Bolivian military geographical and census bureau term for these small settlements is *comunidad*, which is also the term used by Afro-Bolivians themselves. The term community will therefore be used generically for all except the largest Afro-Bolivian population masses.

⁴ Census data are quoted liberally in Montaña Aragón (1992:2125-16), Spedding (1995), and others, all without reference to primary sources. I verified the figures for Afro-Bolivian citizens in official censuses up to 1900 at the Instituto Nacional de Estadística in La Paz, Bolivia's census bureau (www.ine.gov.bo).

⁵ Paredes Candia (1967: t. I, 306-7) mentions other Bolivian folk traditions attributed to the former presence of black slaves.

⁶ In order to evaluate the importance of Afro-Bolivian Spanish for theories of Afro-Hispanic language, fieldwork was conducted in June, 2004, and in August and October 2005; the latter trips were co-sponsored by the African Research Center at Penn State University, whose

support is gratefully acknowledged. Accompanied by Lic. Juan Angola Maconde, a native of Dorado Chico, municipality of Coripata, I visited Coroico, Arapata, Coripata, Coscoma, Khala Khala, Dorado Chico, Dorado Grande, Tocaña, Mururata, and Chijchipa in the province of Nor Yungas, and Chicaloma in the province of Sud Yungas. During these field studies, a total of thirty five Afro-Yungueños were interviewed, men and women, with ages ranging from 50 to 92. The conversations were conducted first in neutral Spanish, by Juan Angola Maconde and me; interviews in the Afro-Yungueño dialect were conducted by Mr. Angola Maconde. Given his stature in the Afro-Bolivian community, as an activist and civil rights advocate, speakers demonstrated no inhibitions about speaking their normally hermetic dialect in front of a stranger, nor to having their conversations recorded and subsequently analyzed. The results of these interviews were compared with taped interviews conducted in Mururata in 1995-6 by Mr. Angola Maconde and another Afro-Bolivian fieldworker. No substantive differences in style or linguistic usage were noted, thus providing an additional authentication of the field data collected in 2004.

⁷ The quotes in question are (Angola Maconde 2000:13-14):

Cho, hasti tendé huajaya in eje cotencia, nuasti olvida di remira, cumu ta un poco chaypu, no vaya a chojtá, no tengo ni poco pa volia [por favor extiendes un poco de coca en el mantel, no te descuides de observar el tiempo, como está un poco nublado, si le moja la lluvia se pondrá negro, no tengo ni poco para mascar o acuytar]

Hasta que día nojotro va ta in fiesta, eje día qui yo mia dició, yo no fue jai. Quilaya pue tía ta, andi pue ote va anda, ote va vini o no. Ote wuawuay quién pues, di tía pituca ¿lu juamía Flore?
[Hasta que día nosotros vamos a estar de fiesta, el día que usted me dijo, yo no fui. Como te

encuentras tía, donde te vas a caminar, podrás venir o no, hijo de quien eres, de la tía Petronila ¿de la familia Flores?]

⁸ By extension, the form *ele* < *él* in Afro-Yungas speech is in all likelihood the result of a phonetic process of paragoge, rather than a remnant of the Portuguese subject pronoun *êle*, as Schwegler (1994, 1996:282) has suggested for the Chota Valley of Ecuador. My own fieldwork in this region (Lipski 1986a, 1987) did not detect this form, evidently not commonly used

⁹ Schwegler (1996:282, 392; 1999:240) cites examples of invariant plural forms in the Afro-Ecuadoran dialect of the highland Chota Valley, a region whose demographics and surrounding Andean Spanish dialects bear some similarities to the Afro-Bolivian speech communities. My own work on this dialect (Lipski 1986, 1987) did not turn up such examples, evidently confined to only some informants.

¹⁰ This usage is documented elsewhere in Bolivian literature; for example in the novel *Zambo Salvito* (Paredes Candia 1988:21) an indigenous woman, while addressing the two black protagonists, says ‘Ustedes **jay** son dos bocas, si quieres quedate por la comida.’ From Barrera (2000:98): ‘Nara sempre mama, nara, sultera **jay** suy.’ From Díaz Villamil’s *La niña de sus ojos* (1946) come: ‘El también, **jay**, se ha desviado trabajando para la chica’ (30)