

# AFRO-CHOTEÑO SPEECH: TOWARDS THE (RE)CREATION OF A “BLACK SPANISH”

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## Introduction

Throughout Latin America, many historically black communities, subject to discrimination and marginalization, are acquiring a new social and cultural strength as *afrodescendientes*, aided by successful political movements in several countries as well as by the intense networking of activists from the African diaspora throughout the Americas. In the reaffirmation of ethnic identity and the creation of wholly positive (self-) images, Afro-Hispanic communities frequently draw on cultural elements once ignored or felt to be demeaning, fueling racist stereotypes and constituting bitter reminders of past suffering. The best-known instances of iconic reversal of Afro-Hispanic cultural elements involve traditional musical and dance expression, and to a lesser extent folk medicine and syncretic religious practices. Only recently has language usage emerged as a key element in the reinforcement of Afro-diasporic identity in Latin America, openly confronting the plethora of literary and musical parodies that incorrectly ascribe to speakers of African descent grotesquely deformed and “incorrect” Spanish. In most regions of contemporary Latin America, there is no ethnically identifiable “black Spanish” (e.g. a variety that permits racial identification over the telephone), although a number of writers and performers have attributed a marked form of language exclusively to (usually poor and marginalized) black speakers. In most instances the tone is overtly racist, although some Afro-Hispanic writers have deliberately adopted an “eye dialect” style in order to give voice to dispossessed citizens of African origin. In all instances, the speech traits in question—nearly all phonetic in nature—are common in the vernacular speech of the region, irrespective of race (Lipski 1999). The obvious mismatch between the parodies and linguistic reality only serves to deflect attention from authentic forms of black expression, and to dull the acuity of researchers and activists who would incorporate Afro-Hispanic speech into positive affirmations of cultural resistance.

The present article presents data on a little-studied Afro-Hispanic group, and on the gradual emergence of linguistic awareness as an emblem of ethnic identity. The group in question is found in highland

Ecuador, in a number of small communities scattered across the northern Andean region of that nation. Previously studied by linguists only as a repository for remnants of semi-creolized Spanish left over from colonial periods in which African-born *bozales* acquired Spanish as a second language, the Afro-Choteño<sup>1</sup> communities today are evolving a cultural self-awareness in which language patterns are playing a role.<sup>2</sup>

### **The Afro-Ecuadoran communities of Chota/Mira/Salinas**

Ecuador has a moderately large population of African origin (officially around 5% according to the self-identification data collected in the 2001 census, but probably at least twice that figure), the majority of which is concentrated along the northwest coast, in the province of Esmeraldas (Secretaría Técnica del Frente Social 2004). A much smaller, but highly concentrated, Afro-Ecuadoran group is found in the northern Andean highlands, where the predominant racial type is indigenous or Euro-mestizo. The Chota River valley (part of the river is known as the Mira River) and the neighboring Salinas valley, in the north-central provinces of Imbabura and Carchi, in an area formerly known as Coangue, is a tropical lowland surrounded by Andean uplands, and is home to some 38 black communities (Chalá Cruz 2006, Pabón 2007). From an economic point of view, the Chota/Salinas zone is stressed, with much arable land still held by large landowners, an arid climate that makes irrigation imperative, and a local lifestyle based on subsistence-level agriculture. On the other hand, the ready availability of exit routes out of the Chota valley (which is bisected by the Pan-American highway), and the Salinas valley (through which passes the highway leading to San Lorenzo and Esmeraldas on the coast) has resulted in a high rate of emigration, as Choteños work and study in Ibarra and Quito, both of which have substantial neighborhoods made

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<sup>1</sup> The highland Afro-Ecuadoran communities are found in the Chota/Mira river valley (the same river, which changes its name at the provincial boundary) and in the neighboring Salinas valley. I have used the term Afro-Choteño following popular usage, in which the terms *Chota* and *Choteño* often refer broadly to the entire gamut of black communities in Imbabura and Carchi provinces.

<sup>2</sup> Fieldwork for the present study was conducted in 2007 and 2008 in the following communities: Tapiapamba, La Victoria, Santiaguillo, Cabuyal, Las Lomas, Chamanal, Hato de Chamanal, Estación Carchi, Santa Lucía, El Chota, Mascarilla, Carpuela, El Juncal, Chalguayaco, Salinas, La Concepción, Santa Ana, Gualupe/El Limonal, Cuajara, Cuambo, Tumbatú, Caldera, Piquiucho, and Apaquí. I am deeply grateful to José Chalá Cruz for his orientation, to Renán Tadeo and Ivan Pabón for logistical support, to Barbarita Lara and Olga Maldonado for assistance in the La Concepción area, and to the dozens of Afro-Choteños who graciously shared their homes, their memories, and their language with me.

up almost exclusively of Chota/Salinas Afro-Ecuadorans.<sup>3</sup>

The origin of this black population in highland Ecuador is surrounded by uncertainty; some investigators have suggested that Choteños are descended from freed or escaped slaves from the coastal province of Esmeraldas, but it appears that most are descendents of slaves held by the Jesuits on their highland plantations. Up until the middle of the 18th century, the wealth of the Jesuit order was considerable in Ecuador, and in Carchi and Imbabura province the order owned a number of sugar plantations. Many of these estates still exist, as do the settlements that arose around them, and when the Jesuits were expelled from Ecuador in 1767, most of these slaves simply changed masters, as the lands were taken over by Ecuadorian owners. In the Chota region, oral traditions only make reference to the fact that the first black residents arrived from other unspecified lands, while in Esmeraldas there is no collective awareness of any immigration from the highlands to the coast.

The Jesuits held at least eight estates in the Chota valley beginning in the 17th century (Medina Vallejo 1996:35). The Jesuit sugar mini-empire lasted from approximately 1680-1760, and was the prime motivation for the arrival of black slaves (Coronel 1988; 1991:85-89.). First employing indigenous labor, they soon turned to the importation of African slaves. By 1779 more than 1300 African slaves worked on these former Jesuit *haciendas*, primarily devoted to the production of sugar. Little is known about the African origins of the highland Afro-Ecuadorans, but African regional surnames Congo, Carabalí, Loango, Anangonó, Mina, Minda, and Chalá persist to this day; other surnames suggestive of the Bantu language speaking area were once prevalent (Medina Vallejo 1996:38).

Slavery was officially abolished in Ecuador in 1854, but in the Chota valley black farmers continued to work the estates as virtual slaves, much as occurred in Bolivia. This continued until well into the 20th century, as witnessed by the recollections of one farmer in La Concepción, born in 1922 (Medina Vallejo 1996:55):

Toda la gente de Santa Ana trabajaba en la hacienda... si no se obedecía a los patrones se expulsaba a los peones; a veces hasta se quemaban las

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<sup>3</sup> In Quito and Ibarra, as in most other Ecuadorian cities (with the possible exception of Esmeraldas), visibly black citizens are the subject of constant discrimination and low-level harassment. Fierro Ruiz (1979), Lucena Salmoral (1994), and De la Torre (2002) document many such cases; I have personally witnessed others. De la Torre (2002: 44) lists at least 27 Afro-Ecuadorian groups in Quito alone, many of which are very small. In the capital city of a nation that considers itself to be exclusively indigenous and mestizo, this is a telling figure nonetheless.

chozas. Tres “sirvientes” respaldaban al patrón... la gente se huía para adentro, para la montaña, a Guallupe, o para Ibarra. En la hacienda se trabajaba de lunes a sábado y si los peones estaban enfermos no importaba, había que trabajar. Sólo si se estaba grave le mandaban a uno a la casa y la gente se curaba con hierbas; no había curandero. En el huasipungo se trabajaba después de desocuparse del trabajo en las propiedades de los patronos.

This forced servitude continued until the first agrarian reform law of 1964, amended in 1970 and 1973. Since that time the farmers own small parcels of land and usually work in agricultural collectives to produce garden vegetables, the region’s main cash crop (Whitten and Quiroga 1995). There is still one operating sugar mill, near Mascarilla, and some residents continue to grow and harvest sugar cane. Very recently, some upscale tourist hostals have been constructed on the Pan-American highway to the north of El Chota, with hopes of stimulating eco-friendly tourism as a supplement to the capricious agricultural economy.

Although still facing significant economic and cultural hardships, the situation contemporary Afro-Choteños has advanced considerably in the last few years, in terms of official recognition and community activism (Medina Vallejo and Castro Torres (2006). Most noteworthy is the degree of social and political organization, cultural recognition regionally and nationally, and legislation aimed at guaranteeing the civil rights of black Ecuadorans. In the highlands Afro-Ecuadorans are represented by FECONIC (Federación de Comunidades Negras de Imbabura y Carchi), which has a spacious headquarters building in the village of Chota, also used by the CIFANE (Centro de Investigaciones Familia Negra). Nationally, the government has established the CODAE, (Corporación de Desarrollo Afroecuatoriano) with headquarters in Quito. At the national level, Afro-Ecuadorans fall under the protection of the Ley de Derechos Colectivos de los Pueblos Negros of Afroecuatorianos (Ley 46, Registro Oficial 275), dated May 22, 2006. Although ultimately the product of professional politicians, the law represents the input of Afro-Ecuadoran activists from the Chota region and the coastal provinces, many of whom are acknowledged in the published version of the law.

At the present time, aspects of Afro-Ecuadoran culture are gradually entering into the educational curriculum, principally in the black communities, but with the ultimate goal of being included in all national curricula. In the Chota area, an excellent school manual (FECONIC 2005) has been produced, with professional presentation and with information on Africa and the African diaspora in the Americas; the book is now in

use in Carpuela, where the editor, Iván Pabón, is a teacher in the vocational high school. It is also used in the village of Chota and occasionally in other communities, and plans are underway for an expanded and revised edition. Several steps have also been taken to promote artistic production in the Chota villages. In Mascarilla, 2 km away from El Chota, The Grupo Artesanal Esperanza Negra (GAEN) was founded in 2002 by volunteer artists, who taught the art of ceramic production to local youth. Today the GAEN has a small craft store in Mascarilla, and also a rudimentary lodging for occasional tourists or volunteers. A professionally printed pamphlet describes the activities of this group. In Carpuela there is another small artisans' studio in which ceramic masks and figurines are produced; although located only 100 yards from the Pan-American highway, this shop is rarely visited by passersby, due to lack of promotion (a few tiny weather-beaten signs are the only indication of its existence).

### **Previous scholarship on Afro-Choteño speech**

Prior to the 1980's, the Chota region had never been the subject of linguistic investigation, and the handful of passing references to speech in this region incorrectly identified the dialect of the black highlanders with that of Esmeraldas, on the Pacific coast. A few questionable travelers' accounts also suggest that as late as the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century a distinctly Africanized Spanish may have been spoken in the Chota Valley.<sup>4</sup> Thus Boyd-Bowman (1953: 233) claims that the Chota dialect "pertenece lingüísticamente a la provincia negra de Esmeraldas," an opinion echoed by Weil et. al. (1973: 83), who also offers the objectively unsustainable claim that on the Ecuadoran coast, a "black" subdialect exists alongside other varieties. The black highland community and its speech patterns remained unknown outside of the immediate area until initial linguistic fieldwork in the region, conducted in 1984 as part of the search for vestiges of semi-creolized Spanish once spoken by African-born *bozales* and their immediate descendents in Spanish America. This research (Lipski 1986, 1987, 1989) concentrated on detecting fragments of morphosyntax (e.g. subject-verb and noun-adjective agreement) that

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<sup>4</sup> In one of the few travelers' accounts to mention the Chota region, Hassaurek (1868:194) who visited Ecuador in 1861, commented on a Choteño ceremony: "I was unable to make out any of the verses, but my companions told me the songs were composed by the Negroes themselves, and in their own dialect. Like the Negroes of the United States, the Negroes of Spanish America have a dialect and pronunciation of their own. The same guttural voices and almost unintelligible pronunciation, the same queer gesticulation and shaking of the body, the same shrewd simplicity and good humor." Hassaurek obviously shared the linguistic and racial prejudice of his 19<sup>th</sup> century compatriots, and it is not clear from this meaningless statement that he witnessed anything other than normal language overlaid by singing.

might be left over from a time when Afro-Ecuadorans were in effect speaking a second-language variety of Spanish. Also studied was the behavior of word-final /s/, whose pronunciation in the Choteño dialects shares similarities both with highland Ecuadoran Spanish and the coastal dialects, as will be shown in the following section. A few years later Schwegler (1994, 1996) extended the search for Afro-Hispanic common denominators, attempting to link Chota data and the creole language Palenquero spoken in San Basilio de Palenque, Colombia. In other words, published scholarship to date has focused on links with the Afro-Hispanic past, leaving open the question of emerging new forms of Afro-Choteño speech.

### **Linguistic features of contemporary Afro-Choteño speech**

Most younger Chota residents have access to primary and secondary education, including the vocational high school in Carpuela, and speech patterns are increasingly merging with those of the rest of highland northern Ecuador, particularly as regards pronunciation and morphosyntax. More traditional elements continue to appear in highly colloquial speech, among children, workers, and those with little formal education. Older illiterate community members continue to manifest linguistic traits that depart significantly from other Ecuadoran varieties, and which are aligned with other Afro-Hispanic varieties throughout the Americas. At the same time the growing awareness of their Afro-Choteño cultural identity is leading many younger residents to acknowledge local speech patterns and to resist linguistic assimilation to regional and national norms. Most of the traits associated with rural uneducated speech throughout Latin America (e.g. archaic items such as *vide* for *vi* and *busté* for *usted*) are no longer current among younger speakers, but some robust Afro-Choteño features remain to characterize this speech community. The following paragraphs describe the more salient traits found throughout the region, and which in their totality define a unique dialect cluster that differs subtly but consistently from the speech of neighboring groups of Euro-mestizo origin.

(1) The verb 'to be called, named' is non-reflexive *llamar* instead of the usual Spanish *llamarse*. Similar non-reflexive usage is found among Afro-Colombians in Chocó (Ruíz García 2000:83) and occasionally in traditional Afro-Bolivian Spanish.<sup>5</sup> Some Chota examples are:

mi finado papá [se] *llamaba* Ángel

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<sup>5</sup> Traditional Afro-Bolivian Spanish is described and analyzed in Lipski (2005a, 2005b, 2006a, 2006b, 2006c, 2007a, 2007b, 2007c, 2008a).

mi finado hermano, [se] *llamaba* Rafael  
una que vivía conmigo, [se] *llamaba* Juanita  
sólo yo [me] *llamo* Tránsito  
no [se] *llama* nieto sino hijo legítimo  
Jorge [se] *llamaba* ese huambra  
había un huahua que [se] *llamaba* Segundo  
un señor que [se] *llamaba* Celedonio

(2) The word for 'mother' in the traditional Afro-Chota dialect is *mama*, with accent on the first syllable, instead of the more common *mamá*. The latter form has taken over in the speech of younger residents, but the legend of the "Mama del Monte," an elderly female apparition who steals handsome children, is known to all. Some residents comment that *mama* is felt to be more rustic, and that some people correct themselves when using this word. The use of *mama* instead of *mamá* is also found in Afro-Bolivian speech.

(3) Afro-Choteños use *no hay* 'there is/are not' when referring an individual not found in the expected place, e. g. at home. To the question *¿Está don Carlos?* 'is Mr. Carlos at home?' one answers *no hay*. *No hay* is also used with reference to deceased individuals, meaning 'he/she is no longer alive': *ahora no hay de esas personas* 'those people are no longer with us.' *No hay* can also refer to previously existing inanimate objects: *[esa iglesia] ahora no hay* '[that church] no longer exists.' There are also a few cases of *haber* used instead of *tener* to indicate personal possession: *los mayor no había esa costumbre* 'the older people did not have that custom.' This usage is frequent in the traditional Afro-Bolivian dialect, but sporadic in Afro-Choteño speech.

(4) Frequently heard in the Chota Valley communities is the particle *ca*, felt to give emphasis without possessing any intrinsic semantic content. Residents feel this usage to be highly typical of the region, and it is scarcely heard outside of the Afro-Choteño communities. Some examples include:<sup>6</sup>

yo *ca* como nunca me ha salido 'since I have never seen [those apparitions]'  
yo *ca* no voy a ir  
ele yo *ca* no  
magulli yo *ca* no voy a í  
él *ca* queriendo pegar a mí  
yo *ca* me voy pa mi huerta  
Yo *ca* mi fui a Ibarra

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<sup>6</sup> Meriçli (2006) observed the sentence *¿Este ca cómo ha venido?* 'How did he get here?'

yo *ca* me voy más luego a Ibarra  
yo *ca* ya vine de allá  
ele ése *ca* qué bestia  
ele hijo yo *ca* no voy  
yo *ca* no soy  
ahora *ca* hay gente  
yo *ca* no sé  
yo *ca* no recuerdo  
yo *ca* si sé  
ella *ca* no sabe  
yo *ca* dije que

In all instances, *ca* immediately follows the grammatical subject, which is almost always a pronoun. The pronoun *yo* occurs most frequently, but other personal pronouns can also be used, and when queried, Afro-Choteños readily accept the idea of using *ca* with subject pronouns other than *yo*. *Ca* rarely if ever occurs with non-pronominal subjects in spontaneous speech, nor in embedded clauses. These apparent restrictions on the distribution of *ca* suggest a contact-induced phenomenon, although Afro-Choteños themselves are unaware of the source of *ca*. In all likelihood this use of *ca* is a direct transference of the Ecuadoran Quichua particle *ca*, which according to Lema Guanolema (2007:55) behaves rather like a definite article. This particle is attached to the end of both nouns and pronouns, and behaves identically to *ca* in Afro-Choteño Spanish (Lema Guanolema 2007:55):

*ñuca-ca cushilla cani* `I am happy´  
*pai-ca cushilla can* `he is happy´  
*huasi-ca jatunmi* `the house is large´

More generally, *-ca* is an affirmative particle, which can also attach to verbs (Yáñez Cossío 2001:107):

*pai-ca* `he, the one who is´  
*yuyani-ca* `I think what I think´

That a makeover of the Quechua particle *ca* is at the root of the form *ca* in Afro-Choteño Spanish is rendered more probable by the existence of similar constructions in other highland Ecuadoran varieties; these combinations are not exclusive to the Chota Valley as many residents believe, but they are fading from use in other modern Ecuadoran dialects. Guevara (1968:34-36) gives examples from Ecuadoran regionalist literature, as well expressions like:



*yo ca no puedo hacer  
Juan ca qué se hizo?  
mío ca no es*

(5) A traditional Afro-Choteño word is *magulli* meaning approximately ‘no, definitely not’ and said in response to a suggestion to do something that the speaker does not wish to do. In the original form, the expression is *magulli pescuezo*, accompanied by the forefinger sweeping across the throat in the universal throat-cutting gesture. In some villages the word is remembered only by the oldest residents, if at all, while in others it is still current even among children. Additional examples include:

*vamo a cortá leña: magulli;  
magulli que yo cojo;  
magulli yo ca no voy a í  
yo ca no, magulli*

The etymology of *magulli* is uncertain; some interviewees suggested that it came from *magullar* ‘to bruise or mash up’ due to the similarity in phonetic shape, but this remains to be conclusively determined. One older resident in Mascarilla relates the oral tradition that *magulli* represents the speech of free or maroon blacks who refused to return to the plantations and haciendas, saying in effect that even if their throats were cut, they would not return as slaves or peons. This would explain the addition of *pescuezo* and the cutthroat mimicry. In Chalguayaco an elderly woman recalled that *Magulli* was the name of a legendary rebellious black man, which would also fit the overall tenor of *magulli* as an expression of Afro-diaspora resistance.

(6) In highland Ecuador, syllable- and word-final /s/ is strongly pronounced, in contrast to the consonant-weak coastal dialects. In this respect, the Chota/Salinas Afro-Ecuadoran dialects follow the highland patterns, but with noteworthy differences that are now emerging into the conscious awareness of the speakers themselves. In the Afro-Chota dialect, /s/ is almost never aspirated, as occurs in coastal dialects, but it disappears in word-final position with a frequency considerably higher than in the neighboring highland Ecuadoran Spanish. This is particularly evident in the behavior of plural noun phrases, as will be shown below. The behavior of final /s/ in the Chota Valley contrasts with the pronunciation of final consonants in coastal Ecuadoran dialects, where aspiration and deletion of syllable- and word-final /s/ follows the usual Spanish phonetically-motivated patterns that stretch from southern Spain and the Canary Islands through the Caribbean and the

northwestern coast of South America. The loss of word-final /s/ in many plural noun phrases and in other frequent words creates the popular impression of a much higher rate of deletion than is objectively observed.

(7) The behavior of final /r/ in the Chota dialect is another distinguishing feature of Afro-Ecuadoran speech. The final /r/ of infinitives is routinely lost in traditional speech (*come[r]* `to eat', *baila[r]* `to dance'), although this trait is rapidly fading; it occurs only occasionally in the speech of younger residents, although all acknowledge it as characteristic of the region. Aside from infinitives, the word *mujer* `woman' is realized as *mujé* in the traditional dialect. With respect to the behavior of word-final /r/, the Afro-Chota dialect behaves identically to the traditional Afro-Bolivian Spanish dialect. An additional similarity between the two Afro-Hispanic dialects lies in the occasional appearance of word-final paragogic vowels, in *ayere* < *ayer* and *sere* < *ser*. The pronunciation *ayere* is generalized in the basilectal Afro-Bolivian dialect, and occurs occasionally in the Afro-Choteño dialect.

The loss of word-final consonants is commented on with increasing frequency by Afro-Choteños themselves, as part of their growing awareness of language as part of their cultural identity. When pressed for more specific observations on Afro-Choteño speech, residents claim that "los negros se comen las letras" [black people swallow up letters], and give as examples loss of word-final /s/, especially in words like *entonce[s]* *pue[s]*/*po[h]*l, and *vamo[s]*; also mentioned is the loss of final /r/ in infinitives. This phenomenon is occasionally mentioned by writers, for example Obando (1985:35) says of the Afro-Choteño "habla un castellano típico, comiéndose las últimas letras; pero el tono es más cercano al de los campesinos serranos que al de los negros costeños." This is a direct confirmation of the observation that some loss of word-final consonants is juxtaposed with an overall phonetic pattern typical of highland Ecuador.

(8) In contemporary Afro-Chota Spanish, subject-verb agreement is complete (with the exception of vary occasional lapses), and noun-adjective gender concord is also complete. An exception to the latter statement involves the adjective *mismo*, which when occurring postnominally in the Afro-Chota vernacular does not inflect for gender, but remains in the unmarked (grammatically masculine) form:

sobre la materia *mismo* [misma] de cada pueblo  
la gente *mismo* [misma]... se dañó, no quiere trabajar  
yo *mismo* [misma] tenía chanchos  
remedios que ellas *mismos* [mismas] han ido a criá

en esa quebrada *mismo* [misma] sabía salir [el duende]  
por qué ella es intelectual, porque ella *mismo* [misma] lo buscó  
las casas eran de paja de la caña *mismo* [misma]  
la educación *mismo* [misma] ya les dio el cambio  
ella sí *mismo* [misma] se adelantó  
fue la voluntad de ellas *mismo* [mismas]  
la tierra de sí *mismo* [misma] viene

The use of invariant *mismo* may well be the last vestige of a grammatical system without overt marking of grammatical gender in adjectives, such as is still found in traditional Afro-Bolivian Spanish and in Afro-Iberian creole languages. In fieldwork conducted in 1984, other lapses of noun-adjective agreement were found among some of the oldest residents, born at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century:

se trabajaban en las haciendas *vecino* [vecinas]  
era *barato* [barata] la ropa, *barato* [barata] era  
hay gente *colombiano* [colombiana]

A generation later, in 2007-2008, few remnants of invariant adjectives are found, except for the quite consistent use of invariant *mismo*. Among the remaining cases of invariant adjectives (derived from the Spanish masculine singular) still found among some older Choteños are the following:

les pongo *todo* [todas] estas cosas  
bien *cortado* [cortadas] las uñas  
con *el poco* [la poca] leche que tenían  
la paga era muy *poco* [poca]  
en *el* [la] casa del difunto  
esta zona es *sana* [sano]  
como todo era[n] *puro* [puras] las cosas  
trabajé dos horas, *hichadísimo* [hinchadísima] la cara  
*sembradito* [sambradita] tengo la manzanilla  
la vida era más *cómodo* [cómoda]  
cuanto era[n] *ocurto* [ocultas] las cosas  
me parece que *los más antigua* [antiguos] es que han puesto este nombre  
como eran *compartido* [compartidas] las hacienda  
tenía *unos* [unas] oreja grandota  
eran bien *barato* [baratas] las cosa

These examples are not typical of the contemporary speech of the Chota and Salinas valleys, but hark back to earlier generations when noun-adjective concordance was somewhat unstable.

(9) One of the most consistent features of Afro-Choteño speech, found in speakers of all ages in all of the primarily Afro-Ecuadoran communities, is the use of “stripped” plural noun phrases, in which the plural marker /s/ is found only on the first element of the noun phrase, typically a determiner such as an article. The same phenomenon is very frequent in vernacular Brazilian Portuguese, in which the African imprint is indisputable, is very frequent in vernacular Angolan Portuguese (Lipski 2008b) and is occasionally found in other Afro-Hispanic speech varieties, e.g. in Bolivia and Colombia. Stripped plural noun phrases were described in literary imitations of Africans’ approximations to Spanish and Portuguese, beginning with the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century poems of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, we find some of the first consistent cases of bare plurals: *las leina* [*las reinas*], *las melcede* [*las mercedes*], *lus nenglu* [*los negros*], *lo billaco* [*los bellacos*], *las paja* [*las pajas*], etc. (Lipski 2005a). Stripped plural constructions have been previously documented for the Chota region (e.g. Lipski 1986, 1987, 1989; Schwegler 1994, 1996), but until recently no explicit attention has been drawn to this phenomenon by Afro-Choteños themselves. Some earlier transcriptions of popular speech from this region contain examples of stripped plurals:

Porque ahí en Carpuela... matan pollo duro, caramba que duelen *las muela* (Coba 1980:201)

El río del Chota se llevó *las casa* (Coba 1980:216)

Entonces *los pocu* que alcanzábamos, alcanzábamos me acuerdo al precio de dieciocho mil [...] los demás nos quedamos *vacío* (Rodríguez 1994:41)

Por eso es que la lucha que horita estamos en *estos día* de acuerdo... se van aquí asentando y nosotru solamente con *unas casita* y *los huasipunguito* (Rodríguez 1994:47)

Yo prefiero sembrar con *los ajeno* que con los propios (Rodríguez 1994:56)  
él se va pa la loma a traé *los chivo* (Chalá Cruz 2006:176)

In highland Ecuador, given the strong sibilant pronunciation of word-final /s/, stripped plurals are prominent and easily identifiable. They appear in many commercial recordings of the typical *bomba* music as well as in spontaneous speech. Some recent recorded examples are:

*las casita* eran de paja, entonce...  
si me desafía a *los puñete*  
cogíamos *nuestras pala*...  
*unas tirita* que nos daban izqui di huasipungo;  
tanto golpe que tienen que sufrir de *las pierna*  
los mayores a *los guagua*...;  
hacían *unas mecha* di trapo  
compraron *sus piso* e hicieron *sus casa*

Also found in Afro-Choteño speech, but confined to some of the least educated community members, are invariant plural nouns or adjectives, i.e. ending in a consonant and lacking the normal *-es* plural ending. Some recorded examples are:

como a *los dos mes...*  
la gente mismo... se daño, no quiere trabajar, teniendo *sus propiedá...*  
hahta los *los mimo patrón* eran malos  
*los pobre peón* trabajaban como burros  
poníamos a *los pulmón...*  
hacían abrigarles *los pulmón*  
*los mayor* no había esa costumbre  
*los mayor*, ellos dicen "culata"  
ellos mantenían, a *los peón*  
nosotros vamos a *las dirección*  
nos remangamo *lus pantalón*  
no había como ahora la ciencia de *lus dotor*  
yo alcancé sembar, sin *esas curación*  
yo tenía pánico a *los hospital*  
Son cosas muy *fácil*

Afro-Choteños freely acknowledge the use of stripped plurals and a few even offer unsolicited observations of this phenomenon, but they regard invariant plurals of the sort *los peón* as non-standard even within their own speech varieties, and confined only to the oldest least educated residents. These assertions notwithstanding, invariant plurals continue to crop up rather frequently in the unguarded speech of younger speakers, suggesting a tenacity that will not be easily overcome.

(10) Frequent in Afro-Choteño speech, and commented on by community members, is the interjection *ele*. The word *ele* (or *elé*), alternating with *elaquí*, was once frequent in other vernacular highland Ecuadoran dialects but is now in decline elsewhere. Córdova Álvarez (1995:194) says of the interjection *ele*:

la primera y más simple significación es de alarma, respecto de una situación que ha ocurrido recientemente o hace algún tiempo y ahora resulta insoslayable. Es, por lo tanto, una expresión que brota para lamentar lo ocurrido y que ya no tiene solución.

Jaramillo de Lubensky (1992:74) defines the variants *ele* and *elé* as a word that "enfatisa algo antes mencionado. Expresa sorpresa." On the other hand *hele* and *helaquí* are defined simply as "forma demostrativa equivalente a 'he aquí'" (Jaramillo de Lubensky 1992:101). That *ele* can clearly be used as an expression of alarm is best illustrated by an

anecdote. At one point I was traveling through the Chota Valley in a small regional bus, which made frequent improvised stops to receive and discharge passengers along the roadside. At one point a woman descended from the bus with her small daughter; when the bus driver started to pull away before the girl had completely stepped off the bus her mother (and some other passengers) called out *¡ele!* In another instance, in the village of Caldera, a family asked me to take their pictures. Upon seeing the pictures appear on the screen of my small digital camera, the mother repeatedly exclaimed *¡ele!* with each picture. *Ele* is also well attested in Ecuadoran regionalist literature, as in the following examples:

*Elé*, patrón, acaso tiene a naides. Solitica vive (Icaza 1950:22)  
*Ele...* con los arrieros se van no más los chicos a la Costa (Cuesta y Cuesta 1962:102)  
*Ele*, ya está con oshota, pero eso sí lluchuchanga (Andrade Chiriboga 1947:74)  
Espérate, imbécil [...] *Ele*, señor comisario (Saltos 1956:227)  
*éle*, qué es pues eso, si usted puede vivir tranquilamente (Dávila Vázquez and Cárdenas Espinosa 1979:50)  
*Elé*, nuay que decir que esta agua no ha de beber (Jácome 1984:270)

Some recently recorded Afro-Choteño examples are:<sup>7</sup>

*ele* caray/*ele* carajo `well, damn it´  
*ele* qué es lo que hice yo? `what did I just do?´  
*ele*, ¿qué pasó?  
*ele* y por qué será?  
*ele* yo ca no  
*ele* ta molestando la paciencia  
*ele* ése ca qué bestia `what a brute he is´  
*ele* hijo yo ca no voy  
*ele* me olvidé  
*ele* ehti `how about this´  
*ele* la María/*el* Juan, etc. `hey it's Maria, Juan, etc.´  
*ele*, a los tiempo te veo `I haven't seen you for ages´  
*ele* esto ha pasado `this just happened´

Schwegler (1994, 1996:282) affirms the existence of a second form of *ele*, apparently used as gender-invariant third person pronoun, both

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<sup>7</sup> In the Salinas valley the alternative forms *oyele* and *ayele* can be heard, in the same circumstances.

singular and plural.<sup>8</sup> This would correspond to the similar gender-invariant third person singular pronoun *ele* in traditional Afro-Bolivian Spanish and in Palenquero (Schwegler 1996, Friedemann and Patiño Rosselli 1983). The original fieldwork conducted in 1984 did not focus on this item. In follow-up fieldwork a generation later, in 2007, numerous residents of various Chota communities were asked about the use of *ele*; examples were elicited and many spontaneous occurrences were also noted. All Choteños interviewed concur that *ele* can never act as a pronoun, but only as an interjection of surprise, alarm, or other strong emotion. Despite the unanimity of these assertions, a couple of examples arose in recorded interviews in which *ele* appears to function as a pronoun, and certainly not as an interjection:

*ele* ya puso una escuela aquí [speaking about a village council member] (Mascarilla)  
cuando *eli* ya venía nusotro sabíamo estar sentado *eli* ya iba llegando teníamo que pararno, sacarse el sombrero (Caldera)  
si yo ya me apegaba *eli* ya me hacía (Caldera)

Given that Choteños do not acknowledge the existence of a pronoun *ele*, these examples may reflect the occasional use of paragogic vowels, as in the sporadic *ayere* < *ayer*. At the same time, the tantalizing similarities with the true pronoun *ele* in other Afro-Hispanic varieties suggest that Afro-Choteño speech is subtly layered and still harbors unrevealed Afro-diaspora imprints.

(11) Another unique feature of Afro-Choteño speech is the use of the particle *vuelta* with the approximate meaning of ‘on the other hand’ and on occasion also with the connotation of ‘in times past.’ Some examples are:

Mientras él trabajaba cumplidamente todos los días en la hacienda porque había trabajos que no se podían abandonar, yo *vuelta* me iba a la huerta (Rodríguez 1994: 30)  
...cuando nos tocaba, así tiempo de cosecha, *vuelta* era arrancar el poroto Rodríguez 1994: 30)  
Como ya se acabó la hacienda,... de ahí *vuelta* me seguí en un negocio de andar así hasta Quito (Rodríguez 1994: 59)  
...de ahí después *vuelta* el aguacate le vendía aquí, después *vuelta* nos tocó, ya iba *vuelta* a Ipiales...  
la semana siguiente *vuelta* era trabajo de campo  
ya no dejaban *vuelta* alzar nuevamente  
eyus *vuelta* les parecía mal

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<sup>8</sup> Powe (1998:137), who visited this region at about the same time, registers *ele*, but he describes it only as an exclamation of surprise, as with previous attestations.

regresábamos *vuelta* a las docí y salíamos a las cuatro  
para cocinar *vuelta* era con la leña; y el carbón *vuelta* era para vender  
hay mujeres *vuelta* que trabajan en negocios; hay otras *vuelta* qui van a  
Quito  
más antes *vuelta* no había esu di fumigar  
*vuelta* cuando vivíamoh en el río, abajo, no teníamos agua potable  
nosotros *vuelta*, buscamos la manera de vivir  
ahora *vuelta* ya no vemos eso; ahora *vuelta* ya no  
anterior *vuelta* no había esto de los sitios lejos, ahora *vuelta* ya no  
pueden  
dentro de lo vivido así *vuelta* eso  
eso cuando le caía [el ombligo] *vuelta*, le curaban con cebo  
hay lo que dice [espanto] seco, *vuelta* es de agua le hincha, y el seco  
*vuelta* es que le va secando el cuerpo, entonces así mismo así *vuelta* le  
curan con unto  
queremos construir *vuelta* nuestra iglesia  
la gente mismo... ahora *vuelta* se dañó  
en Carpuela *vuelta* hay un sistema, en Carpuela *vuelta* dicen “ele ven”  
ya no me molestaba *vuelta*  
aquí *vuelta* lo que trabajaban les pagaban

This apparent grammaticalization of *vuelta* as a particle is not documented for other Afro-Hispanic varieties, and is a distinctive Afro-Ecuadoran trait that shows no signs of disappearing.

(12) There are still a few lapses of subject-verb agreement in traditional Afro-Choteño speech, although as with lapses in noun-adjective agreement, this is a rare phenomenon. Some recently recorded examples are:

*murió* [murieron] los chanchos *murió* [murieron] las gallina no tengo es  
nada (Carpuela)  
así *eh* [son] las cosa (Carpuela)  
los mayor no *había* [habían/tenían] esa costumbre (Caldera/Juncal)  
usted no *entienden* [entiende] (Caldera)  
transportes no *falta* [faltan] (Estación Carchi)

(13) In addition to the grammatical, phonetic, and lexical traits surveyed in the preceding sections, the traditional Afro-Choteño dialects have other lexical items and cultural references that are peculiar to this region, and are widely acknowledged as authentic, if somewhat dated. Maldonado Chalá (2006) is a seminal study of several such items, particularly those found in the village of La Concepción. Among some of the other most frequently mentioned items are the following:



*amatrurado* `together, ´ said of a group of people  
*calzón* `men's pants´  
*El Carbunco* `a malevolent ghost, sometimes taking the form of a dog or pig´  
*carilla* `of improved health´ as in *amaneció carilla* `he/she is better today´  
*centro* `woman's skirt´  
*chacana* `rustic cot´  
*chape* `an interjection used in the area of La Concepción´  
*chinchoso* `elegantly dressed´  
*conservadores* `men's long underpants with suspenders´  
*culata* `back yard, land immediately behind a dwelling´  
*culero* `rear pocket of men's pants´  
*cotón* `one-piece long shirt for young boys´  
*El Duende* `a troll figure who waylays nocturnal travelers´  
*estí* `a generic verb, used in La Concepción instead of verbs such as *comprar* `to buy´ and *cocinar* `to cook´  
*juelle, a juelle* `rapidly´ said when making an urgent request  
*juta perro, mandar a* `to [tell someone to] go to hell´  
*La Luteriana* `a mysterious ghostly woman of local legends´  
*Mama del monte* `a malevolent woman in local legends´  
*muñido* `well-dressed, usually said of children´  
*Padre sin cabeza* `headless priest, ghostly figure in local legends´  
*piganilla* `said of pants cut high above the ankle´  
*querendón* `love charm´  
*raya* `four days´ labor per week during the hacienda period´  
*saco* `woman's blouse´  
*tentaciones* `malevolent spirits or apparitions´  
*zango* `a dish of boiled corn´

Most Afro-Choteños recognize these items even if they do not actively use them, and some of the more dated references draw nostalgic chuckles from older residents. Upon being presented with an array of these unmistakably local words and expressions, many Afro-Choteños expressed surprise and pleasure at the number and wealth of a dialect that many had been led to believe was impoverished. Some of the youngest residents, their curiosity aroused by dimly remembered or casually overheard expressions, have begun to reintroduce them into their own speech.

### **Emerging linguistic self-awareness in Afro-Choteño communities**

The preceding section has demonstrated the existence of an Afro-Choteño variety of Spanish, a subtle blend of phonetic, morphological,

and lexical nuances – both traditional and innovative – that could indeed permit the identification of an Afro-Choteño by speech alone. During the original fieldwork in 1984 virtually no community members had any awareness of the existence of an Afro-Choteño dialect, while Ecuadorans in Quito and even nearby Ibarra mistakenly assumed that black Choteños spoke like Afro-Ecuadorans from coastal Esmeraldas. A generation later there is considerable awareness of the traits mentioned in the present study, although when asked explicitly about the Choteño dialect, most residents still focus principally on the pronunciation of final consonants and one or two key words. Given the improved system of motorized transportation, there is also more awareness of dialectal differences among the various Afro-Choteño villages, as well as on the speech patterns of previous generations. The question arises as to whether Afro-Choteño speech is “black Spanish,” an exception to the general absence of ethnically-marked Afro-Hispanic varieties in contemporary Latin America. On the one hand, none of the distinctive elements in Afro-Choteño speech can be attributed to contact with specific African languages, and only a few features (invariant *mismo*, stripped and bare plurals, use of *no hay*) coincide with other Afro-Hispanic speech communities and may stem from Spanish acquired as a second language during the difficult conditions of colonial slavery. At the same time, the precise combination of speech patterns found among Afro-Choteños is unique and exclusive to this black community (and to the very small number of Euro-mestizo residents who live in the same communities), not necessarily because of their African origin but definitely as a consequence of historical marginalization and the creation of social enclaves in the Ecuadoran highlands. In a very real sense, then, Afro-Choteño speech is authentically “black Spanish” – but not a purely Afro-derived Spanish. As such, contemporary highland Afro-Ecuadoran language is of diminishing value in the reconstruction of earlier partially creolized Afro-Hispanic language, but of great value in demonstrating the coalescence of innovative ethnolinguistic varieties and the potential for incorporating these varieties into the increasingly powerful identity as *afrodescendientes*.

The emerging linguistic self-awareness of younger Afro-Choteños is illustrative of the new role being played by Afro-Hispanic speech, and at the same time the creation of new forms of black expression in Spanish. Until very recently, Afro-Hispanic language, as spoken residually in small enclaves, was regarded only in terms of its genealogical links to contacts between Spanish and African languages during the colonial period, and was considered authentic only to the extent that remnants of earlier *bozal* Spanish could be identified. Such an approach effectively

cuts off younger generations in whose speech these contact-induced leftovers are no longer current, and implicitly ignores linguistic innovations in contemporary Afro-Hispanic communities for which the Afro-colonial litmus test is not the most appropriate criterion. Younger Afro-descendants in Ecuador and elsewhere in Latin America do not confine their affirmations of ethnic identity to cultural manifestations of African or Afro-American ancestry, although such historical roots remain as vital links to a broader cultural heritage. The Afro-Choteño data constitute a call to arms to researchers, to broaden the scope of investigation into Afro-Hispanic speech so as to encompass the full range of linguistic creativity and innovation that has been so well documented for other facets of Afro-American culture. The issue of “Black Spanish” takes on a new relevance when the perspective is shifted from retrospective to prospective.

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