

Chinese-Cuban Pidgin Spanish

Implications for the Afro-Creole Debate

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1. Contact with Afro-European creoles in 19th century Cuba

By the first few decades of the 19th century, anti-slavery movements in Europe were strong, and slaving ships en route to the Americas were routinely intercepted and confiscated. The African slave trade could not provide sufficient workers to satisfy Cuban demands, and laborers from all over the Caribbean were sought. The transshipment of slaves and free laborers from one island to another rose in importance, creating a Caribbean-wide shell game which was difficult to interdict in its entirety. This increased the proportion of plantation workers who had already acquired other Caribbean creoles. The linguistic consequences of these late-arriving workers is of great importance for reconstructing Afro-Caribbean Spanish. Workers were brought in large numbers from individual speech communities, unlike in earlier times, where slaves speaking mutually unintelligible languages found intercommunication difficult. Since these laborers worked side-by-side with African-born slaves, as well as with workers born in Cuba and Puerto Rico, there existed ample opportunities for both of the latter groups to acquire fragments of the imported languages, all of which were Afro-European creoles. These creole languages share many commonalities, particularly in syntax, as well as recurring cognate elements. The creole languages which aided in the formation of Afro-Caribbean Spanish varied according to the time and place. Cuba, the largest sugar plantation colony, naturally received the widest variety of creole languages beginning in the late 18th century; these include Haitian Creole, Jamaican Creole, Papiamentu, West African Pidgin English, and Negerhollands (Lipski 1993, 1994, forthcoming c).

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2. The Chinese labor force in 19th century Cuba

2.1

In addition to the variety of Afro-American linguistic and cultural groups which added to the demographic mix in 19th century Cuba, and which interacted with bozal Spanish as spoken non-natively by African-born slaves and in some circumstances their immediate descendents, another group of imported laborers exercised a significant linguistic influence on late colonial Cuban Spanish. In the second half of the 19th century, Cuba received at least 150,000 Chinese laborers, who worked in the sugar plantations and mills as virtual slaves, side by side with Africans and workers from other Caribbean islands. The linguistic conditions surrounding the lives of Chinese laborers in Cuba closely parallels that of African *bozales*, and according to available evidence, Chinese workers' acquisition of Spanish followed similar paths. Moreover, the linguistic model for Chinese workers was frequently the speech of *bozales* who had already learned some Spanish, as well as the Spanish spoken as a second language by workers from (Afro-American creole speaking) Caribbean territories. Finally, since most of the Chinese were recruited through the Portuguese colony of Macao, where a Portuguese-based pidgin and creole was spoken among the native Chinese population, there exists the possibility that some of the Chinese workers added their knowledge of a Portuguese creole to the already rich mix of creole and creoloid elements present in 19th century Cuba.

2.2

Spanish authorities tried a number of sources to obtain workers, including the virtual commandeering of Yucatan natives (Menéndez 1928, 1932). This project did not yield the desired results, and before long the Spanish government turned to a labor source already known in Spanish America through commerce in the Spanish colony of the Philippines: the nearly inexhaustible labor force of China. In the following decades, several hundred thousand laborers would be taken to plantations in Cuba and coastal Peru, where most of them would remain indefinitely. In Cuba, the importation of Chinese laborers began in 1844, spurred by a black slave revolt in Matanzas. The Chinese were recruited through a process known ignominiously as *el enganche* 'the snatch,' whereby Portuguese entrepreneurs in Macao would obtain laborers from neighboring Chinese areas between Macao and Canton, using methods which ranged from flattery and false promises to kidnapping.¹

2.3

By 1853, Chinese immigration to Cuba was substantial, and the abuse of Chinese subjects increased to scandalous proportions, attracting much international attention, including human rights commissions in the United States (e.g. Cuba Commission 1876). The Chinese government, still embryonic and decentralized, tried to intervene to improve the lot of the *braceros* or laborers, but were only barely effective. Both Portuguese traders in Macao and British traders in Hong Kong participated in the Chinese labor trade to Spanish America, although most of the workers contracted by the British went to the British West Indies.

Once in the New World, the Chinese were not always submissive, especially since unlike African slaves, many Chinese had actually been recruited with promises of high wages and favorable working conditions. Having left their homeland voluntarily, these Chinese were enraged to find themselves working as slaves, deprived of wages and subject to forced confinement and physical abuse. The Chinese quickly developed the reputation for being rebellious and sullen, at the same time as more compliant Chinese were prized for their industriousness and superior intelligence. Revolts of Chinese workers were not uncommon, and many planters began to have second thoughts about continuing the Chinese labor trade. The first revolt occurred in 1847, just a few years after Chinese began arriving in Cuba.

2.4

From the beginning, relations between Chinese and Africans in Cuba were not cordial. Each group regarded the other with hostility and considered itself superior. Africans saw that some Chinese could purchase out their indentured contracts or otherwise 'buy their freedom,' and were technically subject to the same abject slavery as were Africans. Chinese and Africans traded mutual accusations of ignorance and superstition, of unhealthy food practices and living habits, and of savage behavior. Some plantation owners segregated Chinese and African workers in separate *barracones* or slave barracks to prevent conflict and violence, but even in these instances the two groups worked together in the fields, and in many cases also shared living quarters. Most Chinese brought to Cuba were men, and some married African women, thereby initiating the inevitable rapprochement of the two races. Common misery did the rest, and by the time of the Cuban independence wars of the late 1800s, it was a common sight for blacks and Chinese to fight together with Cubans of European origin as *mambises* or rebel fighters. At the same time, after importation of Chinese

laborers ceased in 1873, there was a gradual movement away from the sugar plantations. In the first American census taken in Cuba, in 1899, out of a total population of 1,572,797 inhabitants, 14,863 were listed as Chinese, of which there were 49 women and 14,814 men. These figures only refer to Chinese-born subjects, and do not reflect the by then considerable Cuban-born population of Chinese origin. The American military government prohibited further immigration from China, and although subsequent Cuban governments partially lifted the prohibition, relatively few Chinese moved to Cuba in the 20th century.

2.5

Chinese laborers were also taken to many other Caribbean areas during the 19th and early 20th centuries, especially to the English colonies (Guyana, Jamaica, Trinidad, etc.). However, their situation vis-à-vis the African slave labor force was different from what occurred in Cuba (and Peru), and even when demographic proportions between Africans and Chinese were similar to those representing Cuba (Chang 1956), the chances for linguistic interaction were considerably less. Whereas in Cuba and Peru, Chinese laborers were recruited to do the same tasks as African plantation laborers, worked as virtual slaves, and shared all aspects of the oppressive plantation system, in the Anglophone Caribbean Chinese were often brought in as strike-breakers, and were viewed by the white owners as a foil to growing African resistance. Chinese were both physically and psychologically separated from Africans, and there existed neither motive nor opportunity for Chinese workers to absorb detailed aspects of the Africans' approximations to English. As a consequence, Chinese pidgin English in the Anglophone Caribbean appears to bear fewer similarities with the Afro-American creoles, and to more closely approximate the speech of the white colonial population, than in the case of the Chinese in Cuba (cf. Clementi 1915; Crawford 1989; Horton 1941; Jenkins 1981; Kirkpatrick 1939; Look Lai 1993; Sanjek 1990).

3. Linguistic features of Chinese pidgin Spanish

3.1

In comparison with Africans in Cuba, the number of Chinese was small indeed, although once the Chinese moved to urban environments, their pidginized Spanish became nearly as familiar to middle-class Cubans as the speech of African bozales. So familiar was the *habla de chino* 'Chinese talk' to the average

Cuban, that a literary stereotype quickly developed, almost always portraying the Chinese in a somewhat comical but never totally unfavorable light. Matters can be improved somewhat by also considering the small corpus of Peruvian examples of Chinese pidgin Spanish.²

3.2

The most common single instance of 'Chinese' Spanish is the massive conversion of /r/ to [l] in all positions. This same change was frequently attributed to Africans during several centuries of Afro-Hispanic linguistic contacts in Spain and Latin America (Lipski forthcoming a, forthcoming b). Throughout Latin America, the stereotype of the *habla del chino* is the change of /r/ > [l], and the occasional change of /d/ > [l] (Pichardo (1953: liv). Virtually all texts in the Cuban-Chinese and Peruvian-Chinese corpus make use of this shift; in some cases, this is the only discrepancy with respect to standard Spanish. Although many writers and actors exaggerate the shift /r/ > [l], it is a real part of the interlanguage Spanish produced by speakers of Chinese languages. Nearly all of the Chinese taken to Cuba were speakers of Cantonese, a language which contains only /l/ to represent liquid consonants (Kao 1971). The shift /d/ > [l], as in *miedo* > *mielo* 'fear,' *jodido* > *jolí* 'screwed up,' *emperador* > *empelaló* 'emperor,' *nadie* > *nalie* 'nobody,' etc. appears to have passed through an intermediate stage /d/ > [r], resulting from a short occlusive/flap articulation of intervocalic /d/, which is frequent in many interlanguage varieties of Spanish, and is well known in the United States as a typical mispronunciation frequent among Anglophone learners of Spanish.³

3.3

Cantonese phonotactics are more complex than some other Chinese languages, particularly as regards the appearance of coda consonants; since Cantonese words are basically monosyllabic, this is equivalent to word-final consonants. However, the consonants which appear in the coda do not fully coincide with Spanish patterns. Cantonese permits /p/, /t/ and /k/ in the coda, often realized as unreleased stops, together with the nasals /m/, /n/ and /ŋ/. Neither /s/ nor /l/ is found in the coda, which leads to the prediction that Cantonese speakers would further weaken the already precarious syllable-final /s/ of Cuban Spanish, and would also weaken syllable-final /l/, and/or add a paragodic vowel. In Cuban Spanish, word-final /l/ usually resists efacement, while preconsonantal /l/ may succumb to loss combined with compensatory lengthening of the following

consonant (*algo* > *aggo* 'something'), particularly in western Cuban dialects. The Cuban-Chinese corpus does contain some examples of loss of syllable-final consonants, which combine pan-Cuban traits (e.g. loss of /s/) with pronunciations not commonly found in Cuba (loss of word-final /r/).

3.4

In grammatical terms, there are almost no similarities between Cantonese and any first- or second-language variety of Spanish. Searching for direct grammatical interference from Cantonese is therefore a risky enterprise. There are, however, general tendencies of Cantonese which correspond with most African languages found in Cuba and Peru, and which result in similar configurations in the resulting Spanish pidgin (Norman 1988; Ramsey 1987). For example, Cantonese has no verbal inflexion, using only invariable monomorphemic verbs. There is no noun-adjective agreement, nor are there case-marked pronominal forms. Several Cuban-Chinese examples of undifferentiated pronouns reflect this tendency (also found among several African language families).

3.5

Like Spanish, Cantonese permits null subjects. The manner in which null subjects are licensed is quite different however, given that Chinese languages have no subject-verb agreement, and arguably have no Infl node whatsoever. Subject identification is effected through discourse-level constraints, intimately linked to the possibility for null and non-gap topics, and syntactic binding of null subjects by discourse antecedents (cf. Gilligan 1987; Hermon and Yoon 1989; Huang 1984; Jaeggli and Safir 1989). The high degree of null subjects in Cantonese (which are often preferred over overt pronominal subjects in normal discourse contexts) is often carried over to Chinese pidgin Spanish, a feature which runs against the normal stable/expanded pidgin and creole tendency to employ overt subject pronouns to compensate for loss of verbal inflection.⁴ Some examples of null subjects in Cuban pidgin Spanish are:

¡Qué late, late, late; si pue, coje y si no, leja! 'What a hassle! If you can catch [them], catch [them], if not, let [them] go' (Feijóo 1981: 145);
 Vete, vete, no puele molí aquí 'Go away, [you] can't die here' (Feijóo 1981: 153).
 Tú, Malena, jabla mucho; no tlabaja, no jase na; to lo día sentá la sillón 'You, Magdalena, talk too much; [you] don't do anything; [you] don't work, [you] sit all day in an easy chair' (Francisco de Paula Gelabert; in Bueno 1984: 459-463);
 yo pue cojé la cocina, tú come y halla sabloso, ¿poqué lize esa cosa ahola?

'I can take care of the kitchen. You eat and find [the food] tasty; why do [you] say those things now?' (Francisco de Paula Gelabert; in Bueno 1984: 459-463)
 No quelé tlabajá ... No sabel, capitán ... Yo no sabel ... Chino buenas costumbres. Sel inolante, todo inolante, jué. No sabel nala ... '[I] don't know captain, I don't know. Chinese man [has] good manners. [I] am innocent, judge. [I] don't know anything.' (Bueno 1959: 54-73)

Subject pronouns were used in Chinese pidgin Spanish when contrastive focus or emphasis was needed:

Quando tu quele pasiau yo compla manta vapó, yo compla uno palasó ... Yo tiene plata en lo Banco, tú pa mi casa mejó. ... 'When you want [to take] a trip I will buy a steamer blanket, I'll buy a parasol ... I have money in the bank ... you'd be better off to marry me' (Santa Cruz 1982: 294)
 Tú tlabaja mucho. Tú tumba mucha caña y ganá mucho dinelo ... 'You work hard, you cut a lot of sugar cane and you earn a lot of money' (Feijóo 1981: 153-4)
 Aló ta balato ahola; yo ba complá una aloba ... 'Rice is cheap now; I'm going to buy an *arroba* [unit of measure]' (Francisco de Paula Gelabert; in Bueno 1984: 459-463)
 Yo no so pícalo, yo so chino honlá ... 'I'm not a scoundrel; I'm an honest Chinese man.' (Francisco de Paula Gelabert; in Bueno 1984: 459-463)

4. Possible influence of Macao creole Portuguese

4.1

In addition to the influence of Cantonese structures on the pidgin Spanish of Chinese workers in Cuba, there is another factor which makes the Chinese-African contacts in Cuba and the convergence of bozal and Chinese pidgin Spanish of special interest to creole studies. During the Chinese labor trade to Cuba, the major port of exportation from the China coast was the Portuguese colony of Macao. It is not known precisely how many Chinese workers were actually from the Portuguese-held territory, but given the fact that recruitment efforts were normally most successful in rural parts of Canton province, it is probable that few natives of Macao were included among the *culties* sent to Cuba. At the same time, recruited workers often had to spend several months in Macao, awaiting the ships which would take them to Spanish America.

4.2

In Macao, the native Chinese population speaks Cantonese, so that Chinese workers recruited from nearby Canton would have no difficulty in communicating

with their compatriots living in the Portuguese colony. The labor trade itself was predominantly in the hands of Portuguese entrepreneurs, as were Macao businesses and the maritime traffic to the Americas. To accommodate the vast linguistic differences between Portuguese and Cantonese, a Portuguese-based pidgin (sometimes learned as a creole in Macao) facilitated communication across ethnic boundaries. The small expatriate Portuguese community in Macao spoke European Portuguese with one another, but those born in Macao or who had lived there for an extended period spoke the local pidgin, which was used when speaking to Macao Chinese. The latter in turn were usually proficient in the Portuguese pidgin, which according to contemporary sources, was sometimes used among Macao Chinese in addition to Cantonese; some examples of Macao creole Portuguese are given in the Appendix.

4.3

By all appearances, Macao Portuguese pidgin did not develop in Macao, but is substantially the result of an already existent Portuguese pidgin imported from the Portuguese colony at Malacca (this pidgin turned creole, known locally as *Papia Kristang*, is still spoken in rural Malacca; cf. Batalha 1958–9, 1960, 1974; Baxter 1988; Ferreira 1967, 1978, 1990; Gomes 1957; Montalto de Jesus 1926; Rego 1943). Macao creole Portuguese shares many of the patterns common to Afro-European creoles implicated in the formation of Afro-Lusitanian varieties in Cuba and elsewhere in the Caribbean, including Cape Verdean, Papiamentu, Palenquero, and more distantly São Tomense and Annobonese. There are also noteworthy parallels with Haitian Creole, Jamaican Creole, Negerhollands and other creoles known or suspected to have been spoken in 19th century Cuba. The implications for the study of *bozal* Spanish are immediate and far-reaching, for if it can be demonstrated that Chinese workers in Cuba brought with them, at least some fragments of Macao creole Portuguese, and added it to the linguistic mix in which *bozal* Spanish was formed in the Caribbean, this provides yet another route of entry of certain creoloid constructions in attestations of Afro-Cuban Spanish. Such a demonstration — whose full realization is as yet beyond the grasp of currently available documentation — would not invalidate claims that *bozal* Spanish derives from an Afro-Lusitanian pidgin originally formed in West Africa and used throughout the Atlantic slave trade. It would, however, reduce the necessity of such a hypothesis.

4.4

In earlier times, pluralization of nouns was effected by simple reduplication: *chino-chino* 'Chinese (pl.),' *coisa-coisa* 'things,' etc. This was eventually replaced by an NP in which plural /s/ was marked only on the first determiner: *as casa* 'the houses,' *três pataca* 'three patacas' [monetary units], *dois mão* 'two hands,' etc. (Batalha 1958: 10). This same pattern is found in Angolan *musseque* Portuguese (Endruschat 1990; Lipski *d*), in vernacular Brazilian Portuguese (Guy 1981), and in some vestigial Afro-Hispanic enclaves. In the past, literary representations of *bozal* Spanish and Portuguese beginning in the late 17th century depicted this form of pluralization (Lipski forthcoming *a, d*; Sarró López 1988).

4.5

Macao creole Portuguese uses no definite articles, reflecting the absence of articles in Cantonese. The use of pronominal clitics is quite limited, and several processes combine to reduce the Portuguese pronominal paradigm to a set of invariant forms. For example, direct objects are normally expressed via use of periphrastic constructions using *a*: *ele disse a mim* 'he/she told me,' instead of the (European) Portuguese *êle disse-me*. Direct object pronouns are normally replaced by the corresponding subject pronouns: *nã bate ele* 'don't hit him/her,' instead of *não lhe batas*. This usage is similar to vernacular Brazilian Portuguese, but unlike the latter language, Macao creole Portuguese allows replacement of the first person singular object clitics by *eu*: *ele chamá eu vai alí* 'he/she calls me to go there' (Batalha 1958–9: 15). The Chinese pidgin corpus provides several examples of disjunctive object pronouns being used instead of clitics, as well as of elimination of definite articles.

tú no da *nosotlo* life, tú no da *pa nosotlo* cásula ... 'You don't give us rifle(s); you don't give us cartridge(s)' (Jiménez Pastrana 1983: 92; Quesada 1892: 130–1)

No señó Capitán, *pa mi* no sentí gente pasá ... 'No sir, Captain, I didn't hear anybody go by' (Jiménez Pastrana 1983: 114)

Si tiene dinelo paga *pala mí* ... 'If [you] have money, pay me' (Chuffat Latour 1927: 63; Jiménez Pastrana 1983: 97)

Comandante Lupelto, *pa mi* no mila ... 'Major Ruperto, I didn't see [anything]' (Feijóo 1981: 145)

come caña hata sábaló y ven dipué, que yo lipachá comía *pa ti* ... 'Eat sugar cane until Saturday and then come, and I'll sell you food' (Feijóo 1981: 153–4)

Mila, Ginilá, coje tlilla *pa ti*, dásele otlo gente, que yo no quiele dejá máuse que tu no lo lá *pa mi* ... 'Look, General, take these stars for yourself, give them to somebody else; I don't to give up the mauser that you won't let me have' (Consuegra y Guzmán 1930: 163-4)

4.6

In Macao creole Portuguese, verbs are sometimes omitted, especially when Portuguese would call for a copula. This reflects the syntactic strategies of Cantonese: *ele filho tudo crescido já* 'all his/her children are grown up,' *sempre roupa muito limpo* 'the clothes are always clean,' *eu prigiça subi escada* 'I am afraid to climb the stairs,' *ela pena* 'she is ashamed,' *ovos caro* 'the eggs are expensive,' *esta criada bom* 'this maid is good,' *eu fómi* 'I am hungry,' etc. The Chinese pidgin Spanish corpus contains a few instances of similar constructions.

Ciudadano cubano tó ... Yo digo, junto tó nosotlo ... 'Cuban citizens, all [of us] ... I say, all of us [are] together' (Jiménez Pastrana 1983: 92; Quesada 1892: 130-1)
 Celo ta bueno ... mucho caballelo con dinelo; mucho casa glande; tlabajo bueno pa chino ... 'Heaven is good ... [there are] lots of men with money, lots of big houses, good jobs for Chinese' (Francisco de Paula Gelabert; in Bueno 1984: 459-463)
 Chino olvilalo ... Chino buenas costumbres ... 'Chinese man forgot ... Chinese man [has] good manners' (Bueno 1959: 54-73)
 Yo mimito con lifle... 'I [shot the enemy] myself, with a rifle' (Consuegra y Guzmán 1930: 163-4)

5. Macao's African connection

5.1

It is known that Malay/Malaccan natives formed the largest foreign-born population during the formative period of Macao creole Portuguese (Batalha 1974: 27-30), and it appears likely that Malay settlers brought to Macao at least the rudiments of the Portuguese-based creole formed in Malacca. Batalha (1974: 21) believes that Macao creole Portuguese was 'uma linguagem já para aquí trazida em pleno desenvolvimento' [a language taken there fully developed]. Macao was also home to settlers from Portuguese colonies in south Asia, where Portuguese-based creoles also arose (Batalha 1974: 27). Finally, and most significantly, there were also black Africans in Macao, brought there by Portuguese traders (Amaro 1980; Batalha 1974; Teixeira 1976).

5.2

Among the linguistic features linking Macao creole Portuguese to Afro-Lusitanian creoles as opposed to other Asian Portuguese creoles is the invariant copula *sã*. This item first made its appearance in the 16th century Afro-Portuguese works of writers such as Gil Vicente, and passed into *bozal* Spanish (usually in denasalized form) shortly thereafter. This copula became a permanent feature of the Portuguese-based creoles of the Gulf of Guinea (São Tomé and Annobón), but is not found in any other other Portuguese creole, in Asia, Africa, or the Americas, with the exception of Macao creole Portuguese.

5.3

Perhaps the most significant single feature of Macao creole Portuguese which draws it into the theoretical discussions on the formations of Afro-Hispanic creoles and the nature of Cuban *bozal* Spanish is the use of preverbal particles to signal tense, mood and aspect: *ta* (continuative), *lôgo* (future/irrealis), and *ja* (anterior/perfective). The first particle, *ta*, has been implicated in nearly all monogenetic theories of Afro-Iberian pidgins and creoles; this particle is found in Cape Verdean creole, in Papiamentu, and in Colombian Palenquero. The same particle is also found in most Asian Portuguese-based creoles, including those of India and Sri Lanka, Malacca, and Macao. It is also found in Philippine Creole Spanish (Chabacano), being one of the structural features which draws that language into the monogenetic debate, and which calls into questions the relative contributions of Spanish and (pidgin) Portuguese in its genesis (Lipski 1987, 1992). Significantly, preverbal *ta* is also found in several key Afro-Cuban *bozal* texts, and in one *bozal* text from Puerto Rico. In the Chinese-Cuban corpus, there are several indications of *ta* used as a preverbal particle in a fashion similar to that found both in Macao creole Portuguese and in Caribbean *bozal* Spanish; there are also many instances of *estar* reduced to *ta* as an invariant copula:

Ya poble chino ta jolí ... 'Now the poor Chinese man is screwed' (Piedra Martel 1968: 91)
 tó la gente ta qui jabla bonito na má 'All the people here just talk fancy, that's all' (Jiménez Pastrana 1983: 92; Quesada 1892: 130-1)
 pa mi no sabe, ta trabajá, quema carbón 'I don't know, [I] was working, burning charcoal' (Jiménez Pastrana 1983: 110)
 Glacia, señola. Aquí ta suciando 'Thank you, ma'am. It's dirty here' (Feijóo 1981: 149)
 Celo ta bueno ... mucho caballelo con dinelo; mucho casa glande 'Heaven is

nice ... many men with money, lots of big houses ...' (Francisco de Paula Gelabert; en Bueno 1984: 459–463)

Aló ta balato ahola; yo ba complá una aloba ... 'Rice is cheap now; I'm going to buy an *arroba*' (Francisco de Paula Gelabert; en Bueno 1984: 459–463)

Luce Pelanza ta muy macliá 'It seems that Esperanza is very bad-mannered' (Francisco de Paula Gelabert; en Bueno 1984: 459–463)

¿Londi ta Ginilá Maceo 'Where is General Maceo?' (Consuegra y Guzmán 1930: 163–4)

Campo ta mijó '[In] the country it's better' (Loveira 1974: 165)

Nosotlo tá Oliente, nosotlo peleá Oliente ... 'We were in Oriente [eastern Cuba], we were fighting [in] Oriente' (Jiménez Pastrana 1983: 92; Quesada 1892: 130–1)

Yo tá peliá ¡tú tá la casa ...! 'I was fighting; you were at home!' (Jiménez Pastrana 1983: 128; Souza y Rodríguez 1939: 95)

Aguanta poquito, guajilo, que chinito tá quivocá 'Wait a minute, country fellow; the Chinese man has made a mistake' (Feijóo 1981: 148–9)

Mujé tá buena todavía [That] woman is still in good shape' (Feijóo 1981: 152)

5.4

In the case of *ta* used as copular verb, reduced from *esta(r)*, there is no reason to assume that Chinese in Cuba learned this construction from any other than native Spanish speakers, or from *bozal* and Cuban-born Africans who had at least correctly acquired this facet of the Spanish verbal system. Examples like *yo tá peliá* and *ta trabajá* cannot be readily explained through imperfect learning of native speaker models, and in fact these constructions are identical both to Macao creole Portuguese and to Afro-Iberian creoles, including some attestations of Cuban *bozal* Spanish. Assuming — as seems overwhelmingly probable — that these similarities are not due to chance, the question remains of how Chinese laborers in Cuba came to acquire the combination of *ta* + V_{INF} as an invariant form of present or progressive verbs. There are at least three logically possible hypotheses: (1) Chinese workers had acquired Macao Portuguese creole prior to arriving in Cuba, and drew upon their knowledge of this language when attempting to speak Spanish; (2) Chinese laborers learned *ta* + V_{INF} constructions directly from their Afro-Cuban workmates; (3) both Afro-Cuban and Chinese workers learned *ta* + V_{INF} constructions from a common external source, such as the groups of Papiamento speakers found in Cuba at the time of the massive Chinese arrivals.

5.5

Although most Chinese workers carried to Cuba were not natives of Macao, and therefore had little lengthy exposure either to Portuguese or to Macao creole, the average period between recruitment in Canton province and arrival in Cuba was usually close to one year. Much of the time was spent in Macao or on shipboard, surrounded by Portuguese traders and sailors who routinely used Macao creole when speaking to Chinese. The conditions were therefore propitious for more experienced Chinese to teach some pidgin Portuguese to their newly arrived compatriots. Whatever Portuguese or creoloid elements the Chinese might have learned, these forms would have been reinforced by contact with Spanish, replete with easily recognizable cognate elements. The frequent reduction of *estar* to *ta* in vernacular Cuban Spanish, and the elimination of final /r/ in verbal infinitives by Afro-Cubans provided ready links to the Macao creole Portuguese verbal system. Moreover, *ta* + V_{INF} verbal constructions were already well known in Cuba, being common among Afro-Cubans and recognized by white Cubans as pertaining to *bozal* language. Thus, unlike some other constructions from Macao creole Portuguese, verbal constructions based on *ta* would be readily interpreted and accepted by white and black Cubans alike.

5.6

There is also some indication that Chinese workers isolated in the more remote *barracones* of the Cuban sugar plantations and condemned to work as virtual slaves surrounded by African slaves and paid laborers picked up much of their Spanish from Afro-Cuban role models. The limited corpus of Chinese-Cuban materials is not extensive enough to scan for other traces of Afro-Cuban language, but a few curious instances of convergence point in the direction of a more profound *bozal* legacy in Chinese pidgin Spanish. One involves the use of *son* as invariable copula, found in a couple of Chinese Cuban texts:

No, Malía *son* mi mujé, y yo la llamo pa que vea un choque de tlene de su male paliba ... 'No, María is my wife, and I [would] call her so that she could see one hell of a train wreck' (Feijóo 1981: 150–1)

chino *so* pesona lesente ... Mentila, chino *son* pelsona lecente. 'Chinese man is decent ... [it's a] lie, Chinese man is a decent person' (Feijóo 1981: 152)

¿Londi ta Ginilá Maceo, que yo va pleguntá si *son* velá esi cosa? 'Where is General Maceo; I'm going to ask him if that is true' (Consuegra y Guzmán 1930: 163–4)

Svetlana, tú no sabe lo que *son* una ecuación ... 'Svetlana, you don't know what an equation is' (Sánchez-Boudy 1970: 24–5)

Use of invariable *son* was a staple characteristic of Afro-Cuban speech, not only of African-born *bozales* but apparently also of at least the first generation of Cuban-born blacks.

6. Summary and conclusions

The Chinese pidgin Spanish data in themselves represent only a tiny fraction of the non-native Spanish language usage found among slaves and indentured laborers in 19th century Cuba. In addition to the curiosity value afforded by the disclosure of yet another marginalized linguistic community in the forced labor environment of the 19th century Caribbean, the Chinese data have potentially greater significance for the reconstruction of Afro-Caribbean Spanish. First, the Chinese workers brought to Cuba spoke a language whose structural features shared many commonalities with the Afro-European pidgins and creoles already present in the Cuban sugar plantations and slave quarters. These similarities would both facilitate the Chinese workers' learning semi-creolized varieties of Spanish, and reinforce creoloid patterns used among other plantation workers for whom Spanish was not a native language. Some of the Chinese laborers may also have known Macao creole Portuguese, a language which is not only genetically related to Afro-Lusitanian creoles and hence — according to monogenetic theories at least — to some varieties of Afro-Hispanic speech, but which also received a direct African component that bypassed the developmental patterns of Portuguese creoles in other parts of southeast Asia. The presence of Macao Chinese laborers, African-born *bozales*, and creole-speaking blacks from other Caribbean islands in mid-19th century Cuba brings the Euro-creole scenario full circle, creating intriguing possibilities for cross-fertilization and innovation.

The preceding remarks are not intended to diminish the major role played by Afro-Hispanic *bozal* language in 19th century Cuba, nor to undermine other theories as to the relative contributions of African languages, Portuguese pidgins and creoles, Caribbean creoles, and second language acquisition strategies, to Afro-Cuban speech (cf. Lipski forthcoming e, for a summary of the debate). One important lesson to be drawn from the Chinese story in Cuba is that the reconstruction of earlier Caribbean Spanish is a complex endeavor, not all of whose components have yet been uncovered, much less analyzed. These brief comments on Chinese Cuban pidgin Spanish are meant to stimulate interest in the individual and collective contributions of involuntary or unwilling immigrants — whose

voices have only been heard, if at all — when their marginality has evolved into comic relief — to the development of Latin American Spanish

Notes

1. For a composite of the history of Chinese in Cuba, cf. Chang (1956), Chuffat Latour (1927), Corbitt (1971), Deschamps and Pérez de la Riva (1974), Helly (1979), Jiménez Pastrana (1983), Martín 1939), Montalto de Jesus (1926: 399–412), Gomes (1957), Ordas Avecilla (1893), Pérez de la Riva (1966, 1978; Varela (1980). A comparable history of Chinese laborers in Peru is provided by Arona (1891), Bazán (1967), Díaz Canseco (1973), Fernández Montagne (1977), Rodríguez Pastor (1977, 1979, 1989), Sánchez (1952), Stewart (1976), Trazegnies Granda (1994). In Cuba, ethnic Chinese were often referred to as *chino Manila*, since for many Spanish subjects China was identified with the Philippine trade and the Manila Galleon, known as the *Nao de la China*, which brought Chinese merchandise to the port of Acapulco. However, most Chinese laborers taken to Cuba were from the Macao-Canton area, and spoke Cantonese.
2. Despite the fact that few pidgin-speaking Chinese are still to be found in Cuban communities, the stereotype remains, and is widely cultivated in popular culture. For example, the daily Radio Martí broadcasts aimed at Cuba by the U. S. Information Agency/Voice of America include a number of serial comedies produced in the Miami Cuban exile community. In one of these shows, '¿Qué pasa en casa?' [what's happening at home?], Pancho, a Cuban-Chinese neighbor of the protagonist family frequently participates in conversations with a stereotypical 'Chinese' pidgin Spanish. Despite the type-casting, this character is portrayed as both generous and hard-working, and is highly regarded by his acquaintances.
3. In past decades, Cubans enjoyed a radio serial known as 'La serpiente roja' [the red serpent] (Varela 1980: 18), whose main character was a Chinese detective Chan Li Po. His signature phrase was 'Tenga mucha pachencha. Chan Li Po no tiene mielo' [be patient, Chan Li Po is not afraid].
4. The occasional appearance of *mí* as subject pronoun in the Chinese Cuban corpus may represent contact with other creole languages already present in Cuba, e.g. Papiamentu, Jamaican Creole, or Negerhollands, all of which use *mi* as first person singular subject. It is also possible that the Chinese laborers used the Chinese Pidgin English pronoun *mi* (which, however, was usually pronounced [ma], given the widespread use of Chinese pidgin English at the time.

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