

## Developing self-awareness of a minority dialect/language

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### **Introduction**

The main theme of this presentation, that speakers of traditionally marginalized minority speech communities may be unaware of the true nature of their language, first struck me head-on not in one of the remote redoubts of Latin America or Africa where my fieldwork has taken me, but in a culturally advanced corner of the European Union: Spain. Since my interest in Ibero-Romance goes beyond Spanish, I had studied Portuguese- and Galician-speaking communities, had spent time among Catalan speakers, and had eventually managed to observe Asturian *bable* spoken in its native habitat. One Ibero-Romance language still escaped me, namely Aragonese, which figures prominently in treatises on Spanish dialectology and Romance philology, but which according to much scholarship that came my way, was a rapidly receding language now confined to rural areas of the Upper Pyrenees, in the province of Huesca. Having been invited to lecture at the University of Zaragoza, I made contact with scholars of Aragonese, was taken to Huesca, and finally met up with a number of elderly native speakers of Aragonese, some nearly monolingual. My long-standing desire was quickly and amply satisfied, since these individuals generously plied me with many hours of spontaneously spoken Aragonese, including several regional variants. This speech was grammatically as far removed from canonical Spanish as Catalan or Portuguese, in terms of verb conjugations, subject and object pronouns, prepositions, word order, and core vocabulary. Like all Ibero-Romance languages spoken in Spain, Aragonese can be understood by a speaker of Spanish (especially one trained in Romance philology) after a little practice. After listening them speak to me at length in a quintessential Aragonese dialect

(not the almost Catalan still spoken with considerable vitality in extreme eastern Aragon), I asked them what they themselves had called their unique language when they were growing up. I was astounded by their answer—delivered in Spanish—which was that this was simply *hablar mal* ‘speaking poorly.’ In other words, these speakers had been led to believe—and some still believed—that the Aragonese language was simply “bad Spanish.”

This response was a poignant reminder that linguists’ appreciation for and fascination with minority languages and dialects are often not shared with members of the speech communities in question. Not only are minority languages frequently disparaged with terms such as *jargon*, *patois*, and misnomers suggestive of illegitimate parentage (to wit *Tex-Mex*, *pocho*, *Spanglish*, *franglais*, *Taglish*, *Quechuañol*, *joual*), but in many instances their very existence as languages is denied, in nomenclature as well as official practice. In Spain during the long dictatorship of General Francisco Franco, all regional languages (Catalan, Asturian, even Franco’s native Galician) were officially declared to be “dialects” of Castilian, i.e. Spanish. Pushing this absurdity to its extreme, some adherents of the regime even insisted that Basque—a non-Indo European language completely unintelligible to speakers of any Romance language—fell into the same category. At the other end of the scale sentiments of mini- and maxi-nationalism may provoke affirmations that regional or social dialects are in fact distinct languages, claims that are difficult to refute empirically given the lack of clear algorithms for establishing the distinction between dialects of a single language and separate sibling languages. Thus some Andalusian activists in southern Spain claim *el andaluz* as a language, although objectively it is identical to other regional dialects of Spanish except for some very predictable pronunciation. In eastern Spain Valencians claim that their language—*valenciano*—is a different language than Catalan and not simply a regional dialect of the latter; at least a few small

grammatical differences can be adduced to bolster this claim, which appears to have proportionally more emotional content than linguistic foundation. Closer to home, the debate over Ebonics is far from over in the United States, given the enormous legal, educational, and political stakes involved.

Even among scholars studying the languages in question there is often a lack of agreement on the status of particular varieties as dialects or separate languages. Thus some treatises on the languages of Spain (e.g. Entwistle 1936) treat Asturian and Aragonese as dialects (presumably of Castilian), while Galician and Catalan, many of whose varieties overlap significantly with Asturian and Aragonese, respectively, are considered separate languages. Such classifications are frequently based on independent literary traditions, tied to national or regional identities, as well as to the existence of similar varieties in neighboring countries where they are unquestionably regarded as dialects: Portuguese in Portugal vs. Galician in Spain; Provençal in France vs. Catalan in Spain. Such reasoning can produce total circularity, since when written texts (usually poems or stories) are produced in minority varieties they are inevitably consigned to the category of “folk” literature, and face a struggle to be taken seriously. When political events catapult ambivalently regarded regional languages/dialects into official status, as occurred in Spain with the declaration of autonomous regions, the speech communities are taken by surprise, and in the rush to create “serious” and “modern” discourse, are forced to rely on neologisms as well as borrowings from the majority language, all of which contributes to the notion of linguistic illegitimacy. I have heard a Spanish academic professional (raised in a community where a rustic variety of Asturian was spoken) deliver lectures on microbiology in “official” Asturian that is not native to any region or social class, while some Aragonese activists have given pronouncements on education and economy, all in a neo-Aragonese koiné that no one

recognizes as their own language. The creation of regional autonomies has even spurred movements to upgrade to “language” status archaic rustic varieties that had never been considered anything more than regional dialects. In Murcia some intellectuals are promoting a modernized variety of the traditional rural *panocho* dialect as authentic *murciano o lengua maere*, together with an orthography based on popular speech that gives the visual impression of a much greater distance from Castilian than might objectively be recognized. Similarly the traditional *castúo* dialects of Extremadura, in reality part of the Leonese dialect cluster, are making an intellectual comeback among activists in Cáceres, although probably not among rank and file citizens of these regions.

In the extreme case, a “language” may achieve recognition through linguistic scholarship alone, even when its own speakers do not acknowledge a sense of linguistic or ethnic community. This is patently the case of “Rhaeto-Romance,” universally acknowledged among Romance linguists as one of the Romance languages, at least since the pioneering scholarship of Ascoli (1875). In reality this is a group of widely divergent dialects, spoken in several discontinuous communities in Switzerland and northern Italy, and strongly influenced by majority languages and regional dialects, including German, standard Italian, Florentine, and northern Italian dialects. Switzerland has officially recognized Romansch (a related cluster of dialects) as one of its official national languages and has created an official koiné. Activists in the Dolomites (northern Italy) and in Friul have also worked toward the recognition of their respective languages and the creation of official versions. However except for the scholarly virtual speech community of linguists, speakers of the various Rhaeto-Romance dialects do not find common cause. The Italian linguist Carlo Battisti (1931:164, apud Haiman and Benincà 1992:6) commented on “the supposed linguistic unity which corresponds neither to a

consciousness of national unity, nor to a common written language, nor to any ethnic nor historical unity.” And he was referring only to the Ladin dialect group, not to Swiss Romansch or the Friulian dialects. This mismatch between linguists’ descriptions and prevailing beliefs in the communities being studied suggests that linguists are sometimes guilty of violating the “prime directive,” although it is difficult to imagine any harmful consequences to the speakers involved.

### **Afro-Hispanic language in Latin America**

This rather lengthy preamble documents the fact that activism and linguistic scholarship can converge on minority language varieties, with potential consequences affecting the social and economic possibilities of the speakers themselves. I will discuss the implications of the non-recognition of minority dialects with respect to the largest non-indigenous minority group in Latin America, people of African descent. The purpose is twofold: first, to demonstrate the enormous gaps between linguistic reality and popular perception that can result from marginalization and racism; and second, to suggest some ways in which linguistics can be brought to bear on social issues involving ethnic minorities.

During the Atlantic slave trading period between 8 and 10 million sub-Saharan Africans were taken to Spanish America, first to highland mining regions in Central Mexico and the Andes, then to urban areas in the largest cities, and finally to the burgeoning sugar plantations of 19<sup>th</sup> century Cuba and the cotton plantations of coastal Peru. Although in most contemporary Latin American countries the black populations have been substantially integrated into national cultural and economic patterns, there continue to exist relatively isolated and culturally self-aware Afro-Hispanic communities in several nations, i.e. regions or communities which are not only characterized by phenotypically Afro-American residents, but whose inhabitants consider

themselves culturally and ethnically black. An exceptional case is Uruguay, which has a substantial black population, but no longer has black neighborhoods or villages. The Central American nations, with the exception of El Salvador, have black populations of West Indian origin along the Caribbean coasts, but these groups are not properly considered Afro-Hispanic. Blackness does not always correlate with Afro-diasporic awareness, since in the more marginalized communities knowledge of an African past is all but nonexistent.

Among the various Afro-Hispanic communities, discernible Afro-Hispanic language exists in only a few spots, most known as such only to linguists and anthropologists. This fact runs contrary to popular notions, since depictions of “black” Spanish in popular culture and literature (invariably spoken by native Spanish speakers of African descent) inaccurately suggest objective linguistic differences between monolingual Spanish dialects and sociolects based on race or ethnicity. The linguistic features thus ascribed to “black” Spanish are usually common to all popular strata in the countries in question, especially among the socially most marginalized sectors of society, in which individuals of African origin are overrepresented. 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. Indeed, with few exceptions all of these traits are common to vernacular Spanish worldwide, and represent linguistically universal patterns of consonant and vowel reduction. Paradoxically, some distinguished Afro-Hispanic writers have used the same mechanisms to create a virtual “black Spanish,” linking vernacular speech traits to speakers of African origin, assigning only unmarked Spanish to their other personages (Lipski 1999). These authors include Nicolás Guillén of Cuba, Nicomedes Santa Cruz of Peru, Manuel Zapata Olivella of Colombia, and Nelson Estupiñán Bass and Adalberto Ortiz of Ecuador. This counterpoint of racist stereotypes and the appropriation of these same stereotypes by Afro-

Hispanic cultural activists has produced a environment of ambiguity from which unusual results can emerge. For example the Colombian constitution guarantees land and monetary rights to the nation's linguistic minorities, all of indigenous (Amerindian) origin. Afro-Colombian groups have claimed minority language status for "Afro-Colombian Spanish," in the absence of any empirical proof that such an ethnically distinct variety exists. A more frequent result is the educational marginalization of black children in schools, under the preconceived assumption that they suffer from linguistic (and therefore in the popular conception cognitive) deficits. The problem is further exacerbated in nations which "officially" contain few or no citizens of African descent, and in which black populations are small and isolated. The present remarks will describe the relationships between language variation and ethnicity in four nations not normally associated with Afro-Hispanic populations: Bolivia, Paraguay, Mexico, and Chile.

Among Afro-Hispanic communities where an objectively distinct ethnolinguistic features exist, the most widely known is the town of Palenque de San Basilio, Colombia, to the south of Cartagena, where a true creole language is spoken. This language, evidently formed in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and with a heavy Portuguese component, is known as Palenquero to linguists and as *lengua* by community members, and after centuries of discrimination is finally emerging as an acknowledged language in educational and political domains. Despite the existence of accurate transcriptions of Palenquero as early as Escalante (1954), the field workers of the linguistic atlas of Colombia visited Palenque and found only regional varieties of popular Spanish (Montes Giraldo 1962). This is apparently due to the fact that Palenqueros preferred to not reveal their local language to outsiders, several of whom were experienced dialectologists and would have immediately recognized a creole language if they had heard it. A few years later the creolist Derek Bickerton got together with the anthropologist Escalante and the two published the first

definite article acknowledging the existence of the Palenquero Creole (Bickerton and Escalante 1970). Thereafter numerous Colombian and foreign linguists visited Palenque de San Basilio, which resulted in many monographs and articles. More importantly, it resulted in Palenqueros' taking a fresh look at a traditional language that many younger residents felt was an embarrassing throwback, and an endangered language shunned by many Palenqueros has been revitalized and has now been adopted as a proud symbol of ethnicity.

### **From out of the shadows: Afro-Bolivian Spanish**

The Palenquero case is an extreme example of a truly bilingual community, whose local language was always recognized as such within the community, but either unknown or rejected by outsiders. A more complex case, and one brimming with possibilities for linguistic intervention, comes from the only other region of Spanish-speaking Latin America in which a complete Afro-Hispanic language is known to exist: in Bolivia. Despite a scattering of anecdotal commentaries heard in passing over the years, no one had studied Afro-Bolivian speech until I began my own fieldwork some three years ago. I therefore have the dubious distinction of being currently the only source of sociolinguistic data on this unique speech community.<sup>1</sup> This means in effect that I can't blame anyone else for any errors or misinterpretations.

Highland Bolivia, known in colonial times as Alto Perú, then the Audiencia de Charcas, was the site of the earliest massive importation of African slaves in Spanish America. Slaves were carried to the silver mines of Potosí, Bolivia, where most worked in the royal mint (Casa de la Moneda) and as domestic servants. 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 17<sup>th</sup> 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).

Most contemporary Afro-Bolivians live in scattered communities in the provinces of Nor Yungas and Sud Yungas, in the department of La Paz. Bolivia is divided into *departamentos* `departments,' and each department is divided into *provincias* `provinces.' The Yungas de la Paz are located in the department of La Paz, to the northeast of the capital city. 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 adequate roads and other infrastructure, and frequent mud and rock slides, has effectively cut off the Yungas communities from much of Bolivian society. Most communities are less than 100 miles from La Paz, but to reach even the closest settlements one must travel upwards of four hours in crowded and decrepit vehicles along a one-lane muddy mountain road with steep dropoffs and no guard rails (considered to be the world's most dangerous "highway" by travel agents and known as *la carretera de la muerte* `death road' by Bolivians). The region is principally inhabited by an Aymara-speaking indigenous population together with a considerable mestizo component; black Yungueños live both in villages with Aymara majorities and in *comunidades* (an officially recognized term in Bolivia)—scattered mountainside houses on lands once belonging to

haciendas. The small towns have electricity and rudimentary telephone service, as well as some running water. In the *comunidades* electricity has arrived only recently and many houses still have no electric service or use but a single light bulb. Running water and indoor plumbing are all but nonexistent in the smaller *comunidades*. . Most residents do not travel to La Paz or other highland areas, due 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. 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. Most residents have devoted all arable land to growing coca, the principal product of the old haciendas but now representing a virtual monopoly in the Yungas. The *cocales* are made by cutting terraces into the steep slopes; a less labor-intensive but short-lived technique is the *zanjío*, consisting of furrows cut into the mountainside. The coca is purchased at low prices by brokers, ostensibly for the legal Bolivian tradition of chewing coca leaves and brewing *mate de coca* herb tea, and for use in the many “cola” drinks produced around the world. Local production exceeds the needs of these markets, and an undetermined amount of the coca finds its way to the clandestine cocaine laboratories of eastern Bolivia.

The most important Nor Yungas black communities are Tocaña, Mururata, Chijchipa, and Dorado Chico, together with some smaller settlements such as Khala Khala and Coscoma. 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 settlements. The geographical extension of the traditional Afro-Yungueño dialect in its most basilectal form has yet to be determined exactly, given the existence of widely scattered

homesteads and communities and the lack of reliable testimony from neighbors and family members. All fieldwork conducted to date, however, has documented the presence of this dialect only in the following Nor Yungas communities: Dorado Chico, Coscoma, Mururata, Tocaña, Chijchipa, and the immediate environs of these communities. Outside of this region Afro-Bolivians explicitly indicate that they are neither familiar with nor speak the deepest form of the dialect, although a few of its traits, such as invariant plurals and some lapses in noun-adjective agreement, are found as far away as Chicaloma (Sud Yungas).

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. As for the current Afro-Bolivian population, 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. 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. Angola Maconde (forthcoming) offers the following breakdown, estimates based on personal experience as well as considerable field work: some 3,500 Afro-Bolivians in Nor Yungas, 3000 in Sud Yungas, 1000 in Inquisivi, and the remainder scattered throughout the country, for a total of some 15,800 (0.18% of the total national population).

Tracing the arrival of black Bolivians in the Yungas is hampered by the almost total lack of historical documentation. According to Leons (1984), although historical accounts date the presence of blacks in the Yungas at least since 1600, the first official records (deaths, marriages, and other accounts) date from just after 1700 (also Angola Maconde 2003). By the end of the

18<sup>th</sup> century the historical record is more substantial as regards black slaves on the *haciendas* of the Yungas and other central Bolivian regions. By the end of the colonial period (early 19<sup>th</sup> century), Afro-Bolivians were already well established as *peones* on large *haciendas* owned by usually absentee landholders. At least until the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> 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 20<sup>th</sup> 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 and lashes 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 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 required to speak to the overseers only in Aymara. 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. 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. Educational reform and the ready availability of more and better schools remains one of the most pressing necessities of Afro-Bolivians (and most other residents of the Yungas).

### **National awareness of Afro-Bolivians**

The relative remoteness of the Yungas (currently visited only by mostly foreign “eco-tourists,” 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. Although most Bolivians are passively aware of the nation’s *afrodescendientes* few have accurate information, and negative stereotypes often lurk just below

the surface of apparently cordial relations. To this day residents of La Paz recall the greeting *¡suerte, negrito!* ‘a black; good luck’ 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. This may be a remnant of the *estornudo* or feigned sneeze practiced by white residents of Spain during the 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> centuries whenever a black person passed by.

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 (Ceaser 2000). The many government-sponsored and private tourist bureaus throughout the country contain abundant information on indigenous and mestizo cultures but no written documentation on Afro-Bolivians. When queried on the topic at best sketchy and often inaccurate verbal information is offered. The Casa de la Cultura in La Paz makes no mention of Afro-Bolivians, nor does the otherwise well-presented Museo Nacional de Etnografía y Folklore, despite having produced a short video on Afro-Bolivian dance culture. When Afro-Bolivian culture is mentioned in public discourse it is usually in reference to the *saya*, an Afro-American dance and drum expression that is frequently presented at cultural events and to tourist groups in various Bolivian cities. However as the Afro-Bolivian writer Fernando Cajías warns (Anon. 2002): “No hay que musicalizar la cuestión afro” [one should not reduce the Afro issue to music]. As an example of the tendency to reduce the serious plight of Afro-Bolivians to a colorful musical pageant, a newspaper clipping about an elderly former *saya* practitioner from Mururata shows him dressed in an elegant (borrowed) outfit. The article fails to mention that this individual, who was

interviewed as part of the present investigation, is nearly destitute and normally wears ragged clothing ill suited to the capricious climate of Mururata's hilltop location.

When Afro-Bolivians are mentioned in the press in contexts other than music and dance, reference is usually made to folklore such as traditional medicine, and seldom to their desperate economic plight. An illustration of an elderly *curandera* from Tocaña, also interviewed as part of the present project, appeared on the front page of the Sunday supplement in a chain of syndicated newspapers nationwide. The title of the section is “AFROS: la alegría silenciosa” [Afros, silent joy], but this woman, born in 1920 and 85 years old at the time of the interviews, confessed to us that she is utterly worn out from years of hard work but must continue to receive “patients” all day long in order to support herself in a society that provides no social security or retirement benefits to rural *yungueños*. The newspaper article also incorrectly reported her name and her age and blithely described her working “como si fuera una joven” [as though she were a young woman]. The woman received no acknowledgement for her participation and was not even aware that her photo had appeared across the country until my friend and co-researcher Juan Angola Maconde and I, took her a copy of the newspaper. None of the other individuals interviewed and photographed for this article—including the aforementioned man dressed in the *saya* costume—had received the newspaper, and were equally surprised and gratified to receive copies from us. This unfortunately not atypical incident underscores the fact that Afro-Bolivians still struggle to be taken seriously in a nation that prides itself on its multi-cultural population.

### **What is Afro-Bolivian Spanish like?**

In order to discuss the widespread ignorance of the true nature of the traditional Afro-Bolivian dialect, it is necessary to demonstrate its many systematic differences with respect to any other natively spoken variety of Spanish in the world, past or present. These significant

grammatical features, together with a radically altered phonetic/phonological system, demonstrate that traditional Afro-Bolivian speech is not really a “dialect” of Spanish but rather a restructured semi-creole language, at least as different from Spanish as, e.g. some Asturian and Aragonese dialects, and in many respects more radically altered in the direction of Afro-Hispanic creole languages such as Palenquero, Papiamentu, and Cape Verdian Creole Portuguese.

**Table 1: Systematic grammatical differences between Afro-Bolivian Spanish and other Spanish varieties worldwide (including the local non-Afro Bolivian dialects):**

- Suspension of grammatical gender in nouns and adjectives. Only remnants of the Spanish masculine gender are used: *lu mujé* ‘the women’; *tudu lu gente* ‘everyone’; *lu taza di cajué* ‘the cup of coffee’
- Invariant plurals; nouns do not take the normal Spanish plural form: *lu persona mayó* ‘the older people’; *lu mujé* ‘the women’; *lu patrón* ‘the landowners’
- “stripped plurals,” marking plural /s/ (if at all) only on the first element of the noun phrase: *esoh fiesta* ‘those parties’; *algunoh cosa* ‘some things’
- Elimination of definite articles in subject position (required in other Spanish dialects): *perro ta flojo* [*los perros están flojos*] ‘dogs are worthless’; *patrón huasquiaba mujé* ‘the landowners beat the women’; *nube ta bien rojo* [*las nubes están bien rojas*] ‘the clouds are very red’
- Restructured subject pronoun system, including no formal-familiar 2<sup>nd</sup> person distinction and no masculine-feminine distinction in the 3<sup>rd</sup> person: *yo, oté, ele* (masculine and feminine), *nojotro, otene, eyuh* (masculine and feminine)
- Single series of 3<sup>rd</sup> person clitics for both direct and indirect object: *lu, lu(h)*
- placement of object clitics between auxiliary verbs and infinitives: *yo va ti decí* ‘I’m going to tell you’; *¿por qué no viene mi mirá* ‘why don’t you come see me?’; *¿quién va ti bañá?* ‘who is going to bathe you?’
- Non-inverted questions: *¿cuánto hijo pue oté tiene?* ‘How many children do you have?’; *¿ande pue oté viví?* ‘where do you live?’; *¿Andi pue oté ta trabajá?* ‘where are you working?’
- Several bimorphemic interrogative words, including *qui laya* ‘how,’ *qui lao* ‘where’ (for location; *andi* is used to express movement); *qui rato* ‘when, how often.’
- Use of the Spanish 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular as invariant verb form for all persons and numbers in each tense: *nojotro tiene* [*tenemos*] *jrutita* ‘we have fruit’; *yo no conoció* [*conocí*] *hacienda* ‘I never knew the haciendas’; *yo miró* [*miré*] *jay* ‘I saw it’
- Constructions based on invariant *ta(ba)* + INFINITIVE instead of conjugated verbs: *¿quién ta comprá?* ‘who is buying [coca]?’; *¿andi pue tía ta i?* ‘where are you going, ma’am?’; *eje taba mirá* ‘she was looking’; *eje perro ta ladrá* ‘that dog is barking’
- Elimination of the prepositions *a* ‘to,’ *en* ‘in,’ and sometimes *de* ‘from’: *yo nació* [*en*] *Mururata* ‘I was born in Mururata’; *nojotro va* [*al*] *trabajo* ‘we’re going to the work site’; *nojotro viene jay* [*de*] *Coroico* ‘we are coming from Coroico’



By criteria typical of comparative Romance linguistics, this traditional dialect could easily qualify as a separate language; it also bears many of the hallmark grammatical structures of Afro-Iberian creole languages. The auditory impression conveyed by this dialect is even more striking, since both segmental and suprasegmental phonetic features depart drastically from anything else heard in Bolivia: final /s/ and /r/ disappear, the usual palatal lateral phoneme /ʎ/ is replaced by a weak glide [y], stressed vowels are hugely elongated, and intonational patterns swoop and dive in patterns unlike other monolingual and bilingual Bolivian Spanish dialects. Afro-Bolivians fluent in the traditional dialect switch effortlessly, between this variety and some approximation to contemporary highland Bolivian Spanish, providing a dramatic contrast of the same magnitude as Afro-Colombians from Palenque de San Basilio switching between Spanish and Palenquero.

### **Afro-Bolivians' awareness of the true nature of their dialect**

Given the striking contrasts between the traditional Afro-Bolivian dialect and all contemporary forms of Spanish, what do Afro-Bolivians themselves know about their language? The answer is similar to that I obtained for spoken Aragonese, except that even Bolivian dialectologists are unaware of the existence of this language. It is an ironic testimony to the marginalization and historical denial of Afro-Bolivians' culture that almost no awareness of the true nature of the unique Afro-Hispanic dialect exists within this community. This is evident in the lack of any name for this dialect, either within the Afro-Bolivian communities or by outsiders. 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* (from an Aymara word used to call attention, roughly 'hey') or *jay* (another Aymara word, used to punctuate informal discourse), or with circumlocutions like "the way we used to talk." These

imitations almost never extend to grammar, which is objectively by far the most unusual aspect of this dialect. In my writings I have used the term “Afro-Yungueño dialect” for descriptive purposes, but no such word is used among Bolivians. A range of comments and observations made during interviews and informal conversations provide some insight into the complex and problematic linguistic self-awareness of Afro-Bolivians.

Although no word exists in the Afro-Bolivian communities for the traditional dialect, there is no doubt that individuals who have grown up hearing or using this dialect immediately recognize it upon being prodded with representative samples. Reactions range from smiles and chuckles to frowns and clear signs of disapproval, but almost no one denies ever having heard this form of speaking in communities for which there is independent evidence that the dialect has been spoken. In the only substantially Afro-Bolivian community outside of the cluster of Nor Yungas villages, namely in Chicaloma, Sud Yungas, even the most elderly black residents whose own speech contains several creole-like traits are not familiar with the traditional Nor Yungas dialect, and evince obvious surprise when presented with samples. Among those individuals who are familiar with the Afro-Bolivian dialect, this speech mode is referred to either through circumlocutions or by imitation of stereotyped expressions, some of which have already been mentioned. In Mururata, the epicenter of the traditional dialect and a community in which the traditional dialect continues to be used on a daily basis by numerous residents, elderly residents still remember the “African” king of Mururata, a hereditary title bestowed since the 1600’s on an individual who was honored and afforded special treatment by other black Bolivians in the area. The last “official” king reigned until the 1960’s, after which time there was no succession. He was buried in the old Mururata cemetery, near the original settlement but now far removed from the current village center, and no longer used for burials. The grave, which once was marked

and well-tended, is now a jumble of weeds, rocks, and rusty sheet metal that once covered a small crypt; in addition to the effects of weather on this exposed hilltop site, the grave bears signs of deliberate vandalism. In the 1990's a local landowner decided to revive the traditional king, the grandson of the last official king was named king in a highly publicized ceremony. To this day the grandson continues to be mentioned in newspaper articles and documentaries, but in Mururata the notion of a traditional king has again fallen into disuse except when mentioned by outsiders. The grandson runs a small general store on a corner of Mururata's main plaza, and can hear the traditional dialect spoken in the store and in the village square. Nonetheless, when he generously agreed to be interviewed, and when asked about the dialect, he asserted that only "long ago" did people speak in this fashion, and could muster only the frequently cited expression *andi ehtah yendo?* 'where are you going?' Numerous urgings to induce him to speak in the dialect of his youth brought forth little more than this expression; his own spoken Spanish is impeccable, including a strongly pronounced final *-s* which would do justice to any resident of La Paz, but which stands out in the generally relaxed speech of the rural Yungas. His reluctance to use a dialect with which he is undoubtedly quite familiar underscores the ambivalence surrounding Afro-Bolivian culture, equating speech felt to be improper with the humiliations of the forced labor on the haciendas and—by extrapolation among those aware of colonial history—of African slavery in previous centuries.

In another conversation, an elderly Afro-Bolivian woman from Santa Bárbara, now living in Coroico, was prompted to speak in the traditional dialect "la manera en que hemos hablao siempre en nuestro comunidá, normá" [the way we have always spoken in our community, normally]. She smiled and answered in modern Spanish, at which point she was again asked to speak "el modo así bien simple como nosotros hablamos ... hemos hablao siempre bien simple"

[the simple way we have always spoken, really simple], to which she replied “como antes ¿no?” [like before, right?]. She then proceeded to rattle off the words *ele disí* ‘he/she says,’ *oté* ‘you,’ *¿qui ta yindo?* ‘where are you going?’, *yo va í* ‘I’m going.’ Following this demonstration of her knowledge, and despite her assurance that “ya no pode” [I can’t do it any more] she slipped in and out of the dialect—which she had not spoken for many years—always reminded to speak “normal nomah” [just normally]. At several points she corrected herself, for example “mi hermana también si ha muertu y queda pues con mi mamá ... con mi mama... yo quedó con mi mama” [my sister died too and I stayed with my mother], replacing the modern Spanish *mamá* with the traditional *mama* (accent on the first syllable) and reinforcing the non-agreeing verb. This same woman remarked that her daughter, who currently lives near Coroico in a community with virtually no Afro-Bolivians, knows nothing about Afro-Bolivian language and culture.

In Mururata one of our most prolific and willing participants spontaneously referred to the traditional dialect as *nativo* ‘native.’ When speaking of the language of another Afro-Bolivian, she remarked “en tu lugá Juanito poniendo a pensá yo noto que no es muy nativo” [where you come from, Juanito, it occurs to me that it is not very native]. When comparing the speech of Arapata and Tocaña, she said of Mururata “hay diferencia ... el más nativo es aquí” [there is a difference, the most native is here], to which her husband added “más nativo es Chijchipa” [the most native is Chijchipa]. His wife disagreed with this assessment, underscoring the traditional friendly rivalry between the village of Mururata and the tiny settlement only a 15-minute walk away: “no hay nativo, ¿quien va hablá nativo? Awicha Maria ta Brasil, el único era muy nativo” [there are no natives, who can speak natively? Old Maria is in Brazil, she was the only one who was very native].

An elderly resident of Tocaña, who once worked on the haciendas during the peon period and who was surrounded by speakers of the traditional dialect, could only affirm that people now were “civilized,” presumably referring to literacy and schooling, and while cordial and welcoming, he did not respond to indirect promptings to speak in the dialect. He did comment on the frequent aspiration of word-final /s/ in Afro-Bolivian Spanish, a feature still found in the speech of many Afro-Bolivians who do not use the traditional dialect, but which is conspicuously absent in the speech of this individual: *la idioma antiga, decían pueh, pueh lo metían como los cambia* ‘the old language, they said “pueh pueh” like the *cambas* [residents of Santa Cruz de la Sierra, in eastern lowland Bolivia].’ Two elderly sisters in Chicaloma, the only substantially black community in Sud Yungas (although the current black population is less than 50% of the total) and in which only a few features of the traditional dialect are found, proudly asserted that they and their family spoke “correctly.” One stated that in Chicaloma *aquí es correcto* ‘it’s correct here,’ while the other stated that *mi mamá y mi papá hablaban correctamente* ‘my mother and father spoke correctly.’

It is interesting to note that all Afro-Bolivians who were explicitly questioned about school teachers’ attitudes towards the traditional dialect responded that there was no explicit criticism of the dialect in the first schools to enter the black communities. This is an unexpected result, given the significant differences between the traditional Afro-Yungueño dialect and modern Spanish, and the fact that highly non-standard minority dialects are usually repressed and criticized in official educational discourse. Moreover virtually all teachers have come from indigenous or mestizo backgrounds; there have been no Afro-Bolivian teachers, and in many instances the teachers come from outside the Afro-Bolivian communities, and may have had no awareness of the traditional dialect. Some of the community schools served a primarily

indigenous population, and some of the teachers were themselves Aymara speakers whose command of Spanish was less than perfect; Juan Angola Maconde, in the autobiographical sketch found on his web site ([www.geocities.com/amacondejuan](http://www.geocities.com/amacondejuan)), describes his first teacher in the newly founded school in Dorado Chico: “El profesor era de origen aymara, seguro egresado de la normal rural de Huarizata, no hablaba bien el español” [the teacher was of Aymara origin, probably a graduate of the rural normal school at Huarizata, and did not speak Spanish well].

The nature of the “learning” environment may also have played a role in the lack of attention paid to the children’s use of an ethnolinguistic dialect; Juan Angola Maconde describes the school: “era un solo ambiente y en ella funcionaba tres niveles, la preparatoria, primero y segundo y atendido por un solo profesor” [it had a single room, in which three grades were found, preparatory, first grade, and second grade, all taught by a single teacher]. He notes that the teachers typically did not finish out the school year, and pupils had to repeat a single grade up to three times. Angola was eventually sent to the school in the neighboring community of Dorado Grande, where he learned some Aymara in this predominantly Aymara settlement. In this type of environment a young and relatively untrained rural teacher (who typically graduated from normal school at the age of 18 or 19) who was struggling to speak Spanish would likely not dwell on the linguistic peculiarities of the pupils. Objectively, the interlanguage spoken by Aymara-dominant speakers (cf. Laimé Ajacopa 2005) is quite different from the traditional Afro-Bolivian dialect, spoken natively, but this may not have been apparent to second-language speakers of Spanish. More to the point, Afro-Bolivians have always had a sense that their dialect belonged only to the black communities, and given that there was already some awareness of modern Spanish in the Yungas communities, black children in school would probably gravitate away from the most striking usage of the traditional Afro-Bolivian dialect. All of these

circumstances have combined to produce the notion, now deeply embedded in these communities, that the traditional dialect is to be equated with “uncivilized” people. In other areas of Latin America dialect traits once stigmatized and avoided have been taken up proactively by young people and social activists, often associated with an assertion of regional or national pride; this has occurred with the pronunciation of syllable-final /r/ and /l/ as [i] in the northern Dominican Republic, with the velar pronunciation of the trill /rr/ in Puerto Rico, with the use of the *voseo* verb forms and the pronoun *vos* itself in urban Chile. That young Afro-Bolivians have not similarly adopted what is by far the most unique and ethnolinguistically identifiable speech mode in all of Latin America is due to the fact that most continue to live in marginalized rural areas, where possibilities for activism are scarce and where awareness of continent-wide social issues is equally limited. The small nucleus of young Afro-Bolivian intellectuals living in urban areas, chiefly La Paz, have adopted the *saya* dance as the quintessential emblem of Afro-Bolivian ethnicity, but have not included elements of language in their affirmation of identity as *afrodescendientes*.

The few written observations on Afro-Bolivian speech tend to focus on individual words or pronunciation, rather than on the significantly restructured grammar. The anthropologist 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.” 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” [the language of many black families is currently Aymara and Spanish with certain variants] (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. Montañó 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” [as for the typical speech of black people, they pronounce Spanish in a fashion reminiscent of the Rio de la Plata and also in other parts of Latin America]. No examples accompany this statement, which probably refers to the combination of aspirated /s/ and *yeísmo* (lack of phoneme /ʔ/, although Afro-Yungueños do not pronounce /y/ as [ž] or [š] as in the Río de la Plata region). He also refers to Afro-Yungueño speech as (Montañó Aragón 1992:272): “un castellano deformado en la pronunciación y a veces en lo semántico” [Spanish phonetically and sometimes semantically deformed]. Many of Montañó Aragón’s examples appear to be erroneous, and are not attested in the Afro-Bolivian communities. The American writer 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 aki*”.” In fact both expressions



contain only patrimonial Spanish words, although with considerable phonological and morphosyntactic restructuring:

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

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

Recently, Afro-Bolivians (whose community leaders now prefer the term *afrodescendientes*) have received coverage in the Bolivian press. In one article (Anon. 2004) their culture is described in traditional terms of dance and clothing, funeral rites, and handicrafts. One interesting allusion to speech is: “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” [even the way of talking is different. Their language is Spanish, but with expressions that only black people understand. Young people have researched this and believe that their accent is the heritage of the first men who arrived from another continent as slaves]. 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.) [we have been changing the customs of our grandparents, we are even ashamed to speak with our style, which is so pretty. For example *jay* was a word that enriched our speech. Today’s youth no longer wants to continue our cultural practices, which are very rich].

In the first monograph on Afro-Bolivian culture, by the Afro-Bolivian scholar Angola Maconde (2000:13-14) the traditional dialect is exemplified with two quotes and translations:

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 jay. 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?]

Angola Maconde (p. 13) speaks of “el rico modismo en el habla, para diferenciarse del resto y que es peculiar en cada sector” [the rich style of speaking, to differentiate themselves from the rest, and which is different in each sector]. He also declares (p. 13) that “este modismo es propio del negro coripateño” [this style belongs to the blacks from Coripata]. The second example comes from the “modo dialectal del negro coroiqueño” [the dialectal form of blacks from Coroico].

### **The possibilities for linguistic intervention**

These quotes illustrate population notions within the Afro-Bolivian community regarding the traditional form of speaking. Essentially there is no recognition of the significant structural differences between the Afro-Bolivian dialect and other forms of Spanish. There is a recurring sense that what is at stake are *modismos*, a vague word often referring to idiomatic expressions but in a more general sense alluding to vocabulary and style. On those rare occasions when Afro-Bolivians have suggested to educational officials that their language deserves consideration, this has been dismissed by saying that there are only some *modismos* that typify

Afro-Bolivian speech, which is therefore unremarkable. This was essentially the state of affairs when I began my research on Afro-Bolivian Spanish more than three years ago. Accompanied by Juan Angola Maconde, himself a fluent speaker of the traditional dialect and also of highly educated Bolivian Spanish, I began to interview elderly community members to obtain samples of the dialect. Most of our collaborators were not sure what was being asked of them, since there has been almost no metalinguistic commentary on the dialect within their communities. Juan would prompt them by asking to speak “like they used to” and by speaking the dialect himself, but since he currently spends most of his time among professionals in La Paz and even in childhood he was sent to boarding schools outside of his community, he would frequently slip into standard Spanish, thus providing unspoken cues as to expected language behavior. On the other hand, almost none of our interviewees was reluctant to speak to or in front of an outsider from another country and of another race, given the high esteem in which Juan Angola is held throughout the region. The results were not unexpected: an amorphous mixture of modern Spanish as spoken by rural poorly educated Bolivians, interspersed with flashes of the traditional dialect. As I learned the dialect, I would take a more active role in the interviews, asking speakers to talk in the fashion I was attempting to imitate. Eventually we hit upon a few communities in which the traditional dialect is still used spontaneously, and enlisted the assistance of a remarkable self-taught community activist in Mururata, who is proud of her black heritage and insists on speaking the traditional dialect to all and sundry. She has organized a voluntary adult literacy class for community women, and upon visiting the class I explained to the women that now it was their turn to be teachers, since I would be their pupil in learning their special way of speaking. This proved to be an effective gambit, and with much good humor and

teasing these women have become my tutors, correcting my efforts during my visits and occasionally by long-distance phone call (our friend has a cell phone).

During my field work in Bolivia I have now talked with several hundred Afro-Bolivians of all ages in the various communities, in addition to the couple dozen prime sources of data on the traditional dialect. This has resulted in numerous informal conversations, while working in the coca fields, walking down the road, or on the doorstep of dwellings. Invariably the topic of black culture and language in other countries comes up, since Afro-Bolivians, while they share no community-wide knowledge of an African past, are increasingly aware of the existence of black communities in other countries, such as neighboring Brazil and Peru, and are filled with natural curiosity about a wider world which most will never experience. From these conversations has come a growing awareness of the fact that Afro-Bolivians are privileged among Latin America's black communities in having retained a traditional language in purer and much more complete form than in any other country. In Mururata we were able to convince members of the literacy class to attempt to write in the traditional dialect, and a few brief notes have appeared. I have also provided a major spokesperson for Afro-Bolivians in numerous appearances before government commissions with position papers that delineate in lay terms the differences between Afro-Bolivian Spanish and contemporary Spanish, as well as comparisons with acknowledged Ibero-Romance languages such as Portuguese, Catalan, and Galician. Our most ambitious goal, obviously a bit utopian given the political climate in Bolivia, is to have the traditional Afro-Bolivian dialect declared a minority language, which would provide tangible economic benefits under the provisions of the Bolivian constitution. A more realistic medium-term goal is the inclusion of some facts about Afro-Bolivian culture language in official school curricula, which currently condemns Afro-Bolivians to total invisibility. This is a two-pronged

approach, the other half consisting of raising consciousness within the Afro-Bolivian communities as to the importance of including language and other cultural patterns as part of their self-definition as *afrodescendientes*. This task is not as simple as it might appear, for several reasons. Foremost among them is the fact that most Afro-Bolivians have little time and energy left for intellectual reflection, after working seven days a week in subsistence agriculture and other back-breaking tasks. There is also the formidable job of providing a broader awareness of things African and Afro-American, beyond the sketchy historical accounts of slavery now percolating through the communities. Finally, language variation itself needs to be contextualized, since most rural Bolivians have no inkling of Spanish dialect variation beyond their own limited contact with at most one neighboring regional variety. The potential dividends are considerable, not only in terms of possible educational and political benefits, but also as regards community self-esteem, which has historically been quite low. To this end we are preparing a phrase book, aimed at community members and tourists alike, and setting forth the traditional dialect in the same format as other “foreign” languages. It is our hope that once community members see their unique language written and presented seriously, they will develop a greater appreciation for this aspect of their cultural heritage. This may not result in a language revival, given the precarious state of the Afro-Bolivian dialect in all but a few spots, but it may help to stem the tide of rejecting all traditional culture.

### **An overview of other little-known Afro-Hispanic isolates**

The linguistic situation of Afro-Bolivians is relatively unique, in that these communities have preserved an ethnolinguistically marked language in tandem with modern Spanish. They are not, however, the only small enclave of isolated and marginalized *afrodescendientes* in Latin American countries in which Afro-Americans do not fit into the national self-image. Some of

the other communities have been known within small circles of anthropologists and ethnographers for some time, but only within the past few years have the communities' own members developed an awareness of the African diaspora and of the presence of similar Afro-Hispanic groups throughout the Americas. These same residual Afro-Hispanic communities contain the potential for ethnolinguistically marked features, to the extent that geographical and social isolation have provided appropriate conditions for retention of earlier contact-induced elements. I will briefly survey three other little-known Afro-Hispanic groups, which differ greatly in size, degree of social integration, standard of living, and ethnically identifiable linguistic features. I will present them in descending order of poverty, which is substantially correlated with discernible Afro-Hispanic linguistic features and therefore with the potential for intervention on language issues. The groups in question are found in Paraguay, Mexico, and Chile, respectively.

#### **Among the “newest” *afrodescendientes*: Camba-Cua Paraguay**

Paraguay is famous (among linguists, at least) as being the only Latin American nation where an indigenous language is spoken preferentially by all residents, irrespective of their ethnic origins, and often more fluently than Spanish. It is also one of the least likely places in Latin America to search for remnants of Afro-Hispanic language and culture, and many researchers have taken at face value the many quasi-official pronouncements to the effect that there are no black people in Paraguay, and have looked no further. Among those few scholars of Afro-Latin American culture that have looked into the Paraguayan situation, mention of a few Afro-Paraguayan communities is usually based on second-hand sources, often with misleading or even erroneous references. The reasons for this lacuna are not hard to fathom. Landlocked Paraguay has never gone out of its way to welcome foreign visitors, beginning with the hermetic

Francia dictatorship in the first decades following independence (1812), passing through the devastating Triple Alianza and Chaco wars that destroyed more than half of the male population and left the country devastated, and culminating in the decades of the Stroessner dictatorship (1954-1989), in which tourism was discouraged.

Despite the scarce mention of African presence in Paraguay, either during the colonial period or at the present time, the black presence has at times been significant, while the linguistic and cultural imprint of Africans and their descendents in Paraguay is a virtually untouched area of inquiry. Colonial Paraguay imported few African slaves, due to the unique conditions of this colony, and those black slaves who did arrive more frequently came from Buenos Aires or Brazil than directly from Africa. In 1800 the free and slave black population was some 11,000 or nearly 11% of the total national population. When one considers that another 31% of the population was indigenous—including many not participating in the Spanish colonial culture—the proportion of blacks to whites rises to nearly 18% (Andrews 2004:41). In the 1860's it was estimated that at least 10% of Paraguay's population was black or mulatto (Pla 1972:37; Rout 1976:206). As late as 1951 an informal estimate of 3.5% of the national population was presumed to have some African blood (Rout 1976:208).

Beginning at the turn of the 17<sup>th</sup> century several black villages were established by colonial officials, including Emboscada, which even today is known as having many *morenos* (Blujaki 1980), and Areguá, Tobapy, Arequi, and Guarambaré, in which few citizens of African descent can be found at the present time. However, the most significant black presence in Paraguay derives not from slaves formerly held in the Spanish colony, but rather from a group of free black soldiers who arrived in 1820. In that year the Uruguayan general José Gervasio Artigas, following numerous defeats in his homeland, went into exile in Paraguay, where he

received political asylum from the country's first president, Dr. Gaspar Rodríguez de Francia. Artigas was accompanied by some 250 black lancers, not surprising in view of the key role played by black soldiers in Uruguay and Argentina in the many civil wars that erupted in the decades following independence. Francia—who had already proclaimed himself supreme dictator for life—evidently had second thoughts about a powerful and popular political leader establishing himself in the nation's capital, and he sent Artigas into internal exile in distant Curuguatí, where the Uruguayan leader spent most of the rest of his life. The black soldiers were resettled in at least areas some 15 km. to the east of Asunción, Laurety and what became known as Campamento Loma(s), then Lomas Campamento, and ultimately Camba Cua. Each black family was given land, a team of oxen, and seeds to plant, and for more than a century and a half these tiny settlements retained a distinctly Afro-Hispanic character. Lomas Campamento (still the "official" name of this community) became known by the Guaraní term Camba Cua, combining an originally derisive term for black people, *camba*, and the word *cua*, meaning cave or hideout. The original land grant to the residents of Camba Cua was some 100 hectares. In 1940 the dictatorship of General Higinio Morínigo snatched half of the land. In 1967, at the height of the Stroessner dictatorship, soldiers suddenly cordoned off most of the remaining land with barbed wire, with the intent of turning over this rich farmland, now part of greater urban Asunción and bordering on the lands of a major university, to private owners. The residents resisted as best they could, sending the men into hiding for fear of being killed and with the women, armed only with sticks and machetes, tearing down the fences and attempting to hold back the soldiers and police. The latter prevailed in short order and the community was stripped of all but seven hectares. In recent years the community has been able to recover three more hectares, but although the Paraguayan government acknowledges the resident's putative rights to



more land, the law requires that the land originally taken by force and coercion be paid for at current fair market prices, estimated to be several million US dollars and beyond the wildest dreams of the settlement's poor residents. After losing more than 90% of their original land, the former farmers were forced to seek alternative employment. Many of the women found work as maids in Asunción, while those men who could find work labored as masons and carpenters. There is considerable prejudice against visibly black people, and consequently unemployment and underemployment is high in the community of some 200 families (a rough estimate since there are no census data and community members themselves have only a vague notion of how many members have remained in Camba Cua). Currently all that remains of Camba Cua is a long narrow strip of land along a dirt road that branches off a major artery linking Asunción and towns to the east, the Avenida Mariscal López. The dirt road is bordered on one side by the Hospital Materno Infantil, for women and children, and further along by lands belonging to the agronomy school of the national university. On the other side the community is hemmed in by housing development, so that Camba Cua is effectively a narrow string of houses along a winding dirt path some 2 km. long.

Unlike their counterparts in Bolivia, nearly all of whom are visibly of unmistakable African ancestry, only a few of the oldest Camba-Cua residents display a clear African phenotype. The remainder have dark complexion but more frequently mestizo features, and in a nation whose population contains various admixtures of racial mixture with indigenous peoples the visual impression caused by these Afro-Paraguayans is not immediately *negro* or even *moreno*. That this group has been historically discriminated against and marginalized is beyond dispute, but it is likely that the current marginality of the community is due in large measure to the collective memory of a historical caste system rather than to the immediate visual

identification as Afro-Paraguayans. The phenotypical ambiguity of the Camba-Cua community does not enhance possibilities for official recognition as an ethnic minority, and even within the community, as young residents are surrounded by an increasingly light-skinned population it is difficult to maintain a sense of identity as *negros*.

Despite its tiny size, the Camba-Cua community has achieved national recognition by means of festive drumming and dancing, which reinforces popular stereotypes regarding groups of African origin. Of the rich traditions of Afro-Uruguayan communities little survived the march to Paraguay in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Afro-Paraguayans in Camba Cua and Laurety have always celebrated the feast of San Baltasar on January 6 with dancing and drumming, but with only a few dancers and drummers carrying on the tradition across generations.<sup>2</sup> In recent decades the annual San Baltasar celebration in Camba Cua has become a regional and even national tourist attraction, covered extensively in the press, the subject of short television documentaries and occasional recordings. Hundreds of visitors show up at the tiny Camba Cua chapel, in crowds that sometimes include members of the diplomatic corps and other resident and visiting dignitaries. This activity has given considerable publicity to the Camba Cua community and has resulted in generally favorable press coverage. Although there have always been traditional drummers in the community—Santiago Medina, who learned from his own father, is the oldest surviving drummer—in recent decades the Afro-Paraguayan community has received an infusion of cultural assistance from Afro-Uruguayan groups, most notably the Montevideo-based Mundo Afro. The latter group has contributed Afro-Uruguayan *tamboriles*, elongated drums similar to the Afro-Cuban *congas* or *tumbadoras*, to complement the rounder drums previously used by Afro-Paraguayans. The Ballet Folklórico Kamba-Kua has toured extensively, including in Uruguay and at international Afro-Latin American events, and there is

clearly some syncretism and borrowing in their contemporary interpretation of drum patterns claimed to be purely traditional. The success of the dance group has given impetus to the sister Organización Kamba Kua, which by means of local activism as well as contact with international Afro-diasporic and human rights organizations is fighting for the return of the lands seized by the Stroessner government as well as official recognition as an ethnic community. As has occurred in Chile, Bolivia, and even in Peru, the cultural identity as *afrodescendientes* is a recent phenomenon in a country where possessing visible African traits has always been considered a social liability. The “neo-Africanization” of Camba Cua, while unquestionably a positive development for Paraguay’s *afrodescendientes*, presents a considerable research challenge, since few community members remain who recall the truly traditional cultural components, and many younger activists claim as Afro-Paraguayan recent adaptations from Afro-Hispanic groups in neighboring countries. To date the essence of Camba Cua culture is identified with drumming and the accompanying dance. No element of language is associated with Afro-Paraguayan self-identity, with the exception of a lullaby possible in an African language which some community members assert has been part of the traditional culture, but which appears to have been taught by a visiting African artist.<sup>3</sup>

My own fieldwork among the oldest residents of Camba-Cua, conducted in 2006<sup>4</sup> (Lipski forthcoming c), suggests that a few linguistic features may be added to the ethnic profile of the Afro-Paraguayan community, despite the fact that community residents themselves are not aware of any linguistic differences that might separate them from other Paraguayans of similar socioeconomic background. All community residents are bilingual in Guaraní and Spanish and freely use both languages in daily discourse, as do other Paraguayans. Older residents have little or no formal schooling, while many of the younger residents have been able to attend at least

primary and some secondary school. Only a literal handful of Camba Cua natives have achieved university education, and those fortunate few now live outside the community. When speaking Spanish Camba Cua natives use the popular register of Paraguayan Spanish, which bears the imprint of Guaraní influence as well as the absence of normative pressures. In addition among the oldest Camba Cua residents, some features not found to the same extent among other Paraguayans have been detected:

(1) lapses of noun-adjective agreement: *la motivo é ...* `the motive is'; *é jodido la cosa que tiene ...* `this thing is all screwed up'; *loh mujere* `the women'; *todo mih cosa* `all my things'; *algún comida* `some food'; *esas oracione legítimo que han traído* `those legitimate prayers that they brought'; *aquí demasiado plata* `too much money here'; *hasta el propio justicia* `even the judicial system.' As with other Afro-Hispanic dialects the masculine gender usually predominates, but cases like *la motivo* occasionally occur.

(2) Invariant plurals: *las tropa* `the troops'; *los camión* `the trucks'; *lo militar* `the soldiers'; *esos militar que venía uniformao* `those soldiers who came in uniforms'; *había parterah particular* `there were private midwives'; *tuvimo atropello de militar* `we had military assaults.' These are the same invariant plurals found, e.g. in Afro-Bolivian Spanish and occasionally in the Chota Valley of Ecuador.

(3) Lapses of subject-verb agreement: *mandó (mandé) hacer [el tambor]* `I had the drum made'; *loh muchacho ya hablar cahtellano* `the young people now speak Spanish'; *servicio militar aprendé [aprendí] cahtellano* `I learned Spanish during military service'; *hay mucho muchacho que no trabaja ... falta[n] ehtudio* `there are many young men who don't work ... they lack education'; *ya murió [murieron] todo(s) ya* `they all died'; *alguno(s) aprendió [aprendieron] loh chico de acá* `some of the kids from here learned'; *nosotro no tenía apoyo* `we

had no support'; *cómo noh dihcriminó loh policía* 'the policemen discriminated against us'; *hay muchoh chico quiere ehtudiá y no puede* 'there are many children who want to study but cannot'; *loh padre ehtán con el corazón el la mano ehperando [que] lo chico llega del colegio* 'the parents are waiting with their heart in their mouth for the kids to come back from school'; *porque así nuehstro chico ehtá cerca de nosotros* 'because in that way our children are close to us'; *lah abuela siempre deja; ese fulano y mengano é nuehstro pariente; Ello hice otra cosa; quiere que nosotros abandone, la tierra* 'they want us to abandon the land; *ello ehtá gestionando* 'they are applying for'; *si uhtede quiere* 'if you (pl.) want'; *ahí fue que se le murió muchoh soldado* 'that's how many of his soldiers died'; *loh muchacho en seguida aprendió* 'the kids learned quickly'; *aquí todo loh día pasa doh señora que vende menudencia* every day a lady selling tripe goes by'; *loh hombre que trabaja en la chacra* 'the men who work the small farms.'

Once more in alignment with other vestigial Afro-Hispanic and *bozal* varieties of Spanish the third person singular is almost always the unmarked form chosen for the invariant verb.

(4) A preference for verbs in the present tense with clear past reference, in contexts where other varieties of Spanish would require past tense verbs: *aquel tiempo pertenece [perteneía] a San Lorenzo* 'at the time it belonged to the municipality of San Lorenzo'; *hace [hacíamos] [conciertos] alguna vez* 'we gave concerts sometimes'; *se van [fueron] lo militar y después lo policía* 'the soldiers left, and then the police'; *yo tengo (tenía) vacas, bueyes, chancho* 'I had cattle, oxen, hogs'; *yo tengo [tenía] [en la época de] la guerra del Chaco doce año* 'I was twelve years old at the time of the Chaco war'; *había ciertah personah que hacen [hacían] [el carbón]* 'there were some people who made charcoal.' This usage is consistent with the grammatical simplification found in other Afro-Hispanic pidgins from the *bozal* period, as well as with some cases of the traditional Afro-Bolivian Yungas dialect.

An analysis of the significance of the Afro-Paraguayan data is not straightforward, given the complicating factor of bilingualism with Guaraní. The grammatical features just described are found only in the speech of the community's oldest residents, who strictly speaking are not monolingual Spanish speakers, but usually acquired Spanish after Guaraní. The same acquisition pattern holds for younger Paraguayans, but a greater shift towards the use of Spanish in the greater Asunción urban setting (which has now completely surrounded the once rural Camba Cua community) as well as greater access to formal schooling has instilled a greater confidence in Spanish language usage among younger residents. In principle it could be the case that the deviations from monolingual/native Spanish usage found among the oldest Afro-Paraguayans are simple reflections of their imperfect acquisition of Spanish, rather than vestiges of earlier Afro-Hispanic language. This eventuality is rendered less probable by comparing the speech of these elderly Camba Cua residents with that of other non-Afro Paraguayans for whom Spanish is clearly a second language. Guaraní speakers who are not fully fluent in Spanish may produce errors of subject-verb and adjective-noun agreement but not with the consistent choice of the 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular as invariant verb and masculine gender as invariant adjective form, as among Afro-Paraguayans.<sup>5</sup> Subject-verb errors are also scattered across the spectrum.<sup>6</sup> The use of invariant plurals, frequent among Afro-Paraguayans, is not typical of other Guaraní-Spanish bilinguals in Paraguay, although occasionally occurring outside of Camba Cua.<sup>7</sup> Nor is the preference for present tense verbs to describe past tense events typical of non-fluent Guaraní speakers elsewhere in Paraguay. These qualitative differences combine to bolster the affirmation that the speech of the oldest Camba Cua residents is more than simply the Spanish of illiterate Guaraní-dominant Paraguayans, although aspects of the latter are certainly present in their speech.

The question arises as to whether these differences are due to a residue of post-*bozal* Spanish carried by some of the Afro-Uruguayan lancers who accompanied Artigas to Paraguay in 1820. Although it will probably never be possible to definitively test such a hypothesis, circumstantial evidence suggests an affirmative answer, based largely on Afro-Uruguayan demographics of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. When the Banda Oriental colony at Montevideo was settled from Buenos Aires, beginning in 1726, few Africans were found on either side of the Río Plata, but the black population of Montevideo rose sharply in the course of the 18th century, peaking at figures estimated at between 30% and 40% for the turn of the 19th century. In Montevideo, as in other Latin American cities, African-born *bozales* and their immediate descendents formed mutual aid societies known as *cabildos*, which had the collateral effect of providing a venue in which retention of African languages—as well as Africanized or *bozal* Spanish—was facilitated. The Montevideo government conducted censuses or *padrones* on a street-by-street basis, in which Africans gave their nationality, and an extract from 1812-1813 (Montaño 1997:62-64) reveals high concentrations of Africans in several neighborhoods, with natives of Angola, the (Portuguese) Congo, and Nigeria being the largest single ethnic concentrations. Well into the 19<sup>th</sup> century interpreters were needed in Montevideo and Buenos Aires in order to deal with the *bozales* ((Fontanella de Weinberg 1987:85), and African languages survived in Montevideo well past the middle of the 19th century, as did *bozal* or pidginized Afro-Spanish. Immediately following independence a number of civil wars and minor skirmishes broke out in both Argentina and Uruguay, and soldiers were drawn from the humblest ranks of society. With slavery still in effect one powerful recruitment tool was the (usually implicit) promise of freedom in exchange for military service. This brought an undetermined but high number of *bozales* as well as American-born blacks into the rival armies. As a result of

these considerations it is reasonable to suppose that a not inconsiderable number of the black soldiers who accompanied Artigas into Paraguay were *bozales* and spoke a pidginized Spanish which may have influenced the speech of successive generations, living in the (at the time) geographically and socially isolated black enclaves of Laurety/Campamento Lomas.<sup>8</sup>

Given that the highest priority of the Kamba-Kua organization is further land recuperation, issues of linguistic identity are not currently prominent. However as Afro-Paraguayans continue their struggle for recognition as an ethnic minority it is likely that they will require more drums and songs; language awareness may well figure in future efforts.

### **The “other” Mexico: Afro-Mexicans of the Costa Chica**

Mexico, in its colonial incarnation as the Viceroyalty of New Spain, was one of the major importers of African slaves; even at the dawn of independence in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century most major Mexican cities contained at least as many black residents as white citizens, and coastal areas such as Veracruz and Acapulco were predominantly black (Aguirre Beltrán 1972). Veracruz was one of the three ports authorized to receive African slaves during much of the Spanish colonial era, and once trans-Pacific trade with the Philippines was established, Africans also entered Mexico through the port of Acapulco. Africans worked in mines and agriculture, and then in cities and towns throughout Mexico, from the Gulf of Mexico to areas which are now part of the United States. Contemporary Mexico shares with Bolivia an image as a mestizo nation with a strong indigenous presence, and little mention is made of Africans and their descendents in history books or school curricula. Despite the fact that most Mexicans are unaware of a black population past or present, there is a significant Afro-Mexican community scattered along the Pacific coast, which has maintained some cultural traditions and even some linguistic traits. Some tiny Afro-Mexican enclaves are also found in Veracruz state, particularly



near the former maroon village of Yanga, now a mid-sized provincial town, but whereas there are many individuals—and even small communities—of nearly pure African descent, there are no communities in which an Afro-mestizo cultural or historical identity has survived until the present. In other words Afro-Mexicans in this region have always considered themselves to be *morenos*, but given the wide range of phenotypes found throughout Mexico, and especially in the proximity of indigenous communities, there was never a reason to consider a prototypically Negroid phenotype as being any less “Mexican” than any of the many other phenotypes to be found in the same communities. Despite the relatively recent existence of slavery on nearby sugar plantations—the ruins of which still exist in many areas—the awareness of African origin had effectively been lost throughout the region. Black or mulatto residents in no way lived or considered themselves apart from their neighbors, sharing in general poverty and neglect, and prevailing comments about the undesirability of dark complexions as just as frequently applied to indigenous or mestizo Mexicans. As a consequence there is no reason to anticipate that the speech characteristics of these Afro-Mexicans will differ in any way from that of their neighbors of differing racial and ethnic composition. Awareness of African descent and the revival of drumming and dancing routines—in particularly the popular annual carnival in Yanga—is a recent phenomenon in Veracruz state, with almost all instructors brought in from Caribbean countries or even Africa. Fieldwork must be undertaken with caution, since some younger community members who have learned about their African past may “remember” earlier cultural practices such as African-style drumming or dancing not from actual memories or oral traditions but rather from having heard that such phenomena occur in other Afro-Hispanic communities and from the implicit conclusion that they must therefore have existed in such places as Yanga, Mata Clara, El Mirador, and other isolated Afro-Mexican communities. There is of course no

deliberate deception on the part of community residents, all of whom welcome visitors warmly and freely share their thoughts and memories; nonetheless the introduction of previously unsuspected Afro-historical facts into the communities has produced the inevitable mnemonic syncretism, found in many similar populations throughout the Americas. Although sharing a somewhat precarious economic situation—but not desperate poverty—with their neighbors, these visibly black Mexicans are not discriminated against based on ethnicity or physical appearance, and little would be gained in the short run by claiming an African identity.

Matters are considerably different on Mexico's Pacific Costa Chica Pacific coast, home to the nation's largest, most ethnically homogeneous, and at the same time most marginalized black communities (Vinson and Vaughn 2004). Along the Pacific coast of the states of Guerrero and Oaxaca lies the Costa Chica, stretching roughly from Puerto Escondido in the east almost to Acapulco in the west. In this region are found some 200 communities of predominantly African origin. Despite the preponderance of African phenotypes in these towns and villages, until the last few decades, with the arrival of anthropologists, historians, and other researchers, black inhabitants of the Costa Chica had no knowledge of their African origins. Oral history contained no mention of slavery or rebellion, knowledge of the world outside the Costa Chica region was all but nonexistent, and residents simply regarded themselves as *morenos*. Many residents lived in round thatched-roof huts known as *redondos* and of demonstrably African origin, but no words of indisputable African provenance were used, no African surnames remained and most customs represented a syncretic mix of European and Native American patterns. Nowadays all communities have electricity, most have running water, some even have Internet connections, and with the exception of a few isolated communities reachable only by motor launch all are accessible by some sort of road and are served by public transportation. Most of these

improvements have come only recently; electricity has arrived within the last decade in many communities, and many dwellings still have no indoor plumbing. In recent years the region has attracted a number of researchers, writers, and activists, and several Afro-Mexican organizations and religious groups are actively promoting *afromestizo* culture throughout the Costa Chica. Despite this attention and increasing self-awareness, the villages of the Costa Chica continue to be plagued by poverty, inadequate infrastructure, limited educational opportunities, and general indifference from the remainder of Mexico.

Cuajinicuilapa, now referred to as Cuaji and once as Cuisla, is now a thriving town of more than 10,000 inhabitants, but when the pioneering Mexican anthropologist Aguirre Beltrán (1958) described the sleepy village of the 1950's it had just over a thousand inhabitants, all living a meager rural existence. The construction of the coastal highway, which passes through Cuajinicuilapa, was a big boon and has also resulted in immigration of indigenous (Mixtec and Amusgo) Mexicans and those of neighboring states. As a result the prevailing phenotype in Cuaji is not that of the black African, although a number of unmistakably African faces can still be seen. Despite the significant demographic shifts, Cuajinicuilapa continues to be the self-proclaimed focal points of Afro-Mexican culture. The city sports the small but well-appointed Museo de las Culturas Afromestizas Vicente Guerrero Saldaña, located in the town's main square, and surrounded by replicas of the traditional *redondo* dwellings. Of the culturally Afro-mestizo communities, the best known and culturally most developed are El Ciruelo in Oaxaca state and San Nicolás in Guerrero State. El Ciruelo is a small farming community near Pinotepa Nacional, now well connected by roads and public transportation in small pickup trucks, but once more isolated. Unremarkable in its history, El Ciruelo has become a magnet for Afro-Mexican culture due to the activism of the local priest, Father Glyn Jemott, a native of Trinidad

and Tobago, who has spent several decades in El Ciruelo. Through the México Negro organization, summer workshops for Afro-Mexican children from throughout the region, and the constant promotion of Afro-Mexican culture, this village is now a repository for numerous cultural artifacts and artistic productions, by children and adults.

San Nicolás de Tolentino, in Guerrero state, lies near Cuajinicuilapa, and is served by an irregular collective taxi service from downtown Cuaji. Significantly larger than El Ciruelo, San Nicolás takes pride in being the home town of the *artesa* dance. The *artesa* is a hollow wooden box some two feet high, three feet wide, and eight feet long. The current *artesa* in San Nicolás was built by a local carpenter, and has a horse's head at one end and a tail at the other. In traditional ceremonies, including parties and weddings, one or two couples dance barefoot on top of the *artesa*, to the accompaniment of *cajón* (small wooden box) drumming and guitars and /or violins. According to oral traditions the *artesa* derives from barnyard food troughs turned upside down during the slaveowning period; dancing on top of the overturned box symbolized the slaves' affirmation of freedom and scorn for the landowners. The *artesa* was once found in numerous Afro-Mexican communities along the Costa Chica, but survived until the present time only in San Nicolás. In recent years some residents of San Nicolás demonstrated the *artesa* to artisans in El Ciruelo, who constructed their own *artesa* and incorporated the dancing and drumming into local festivals. The *artesa* is becoming increasingly popular thanks to some documentary videos and recordings, the most extensive of which is Ruíz Rodríguez (2005), combining a 2-CD set and a descriptive pamphlet, including the verses to all songs and improvised *coplas* (Ruíz Rodríguez 2005). San Nicolás is also home to several well-known improvisers of verses, particularly Melquiades Domínguez and Catalina Bruno de Noyola, both of whom were interviewed for the present project, and who also appear on the CD recordings.

The folkloric verses and stories of the Costa Chica, when transcribed and printed or when presented orally, at first give the impression of being radically different from other forms of Mexican speech. Closer inspection reveals that the speech is a combination of rustic lexical and grammatical items found in rural Spanish of many countries and the phonetic patterns of the Costa Chica, which include heavy reduction of final /s/ and /r/, as well as frequent modification and loss of other consonants. Strictly speaking this is not “Afro-Mexican” speech since the same patterns are shared throughout the region by speakers who neither phenotypically nor culturally are identified as Afro-mestizos. It is quite likely that some of these regional traits do in fact derive from the high concentration of Africans during the formative period of the Costa Chica dialect.

As in many other Afro-Hispanic communities throughout the Americas, Afro-Mexicans of the Costa Chica had no knowledge of Africa or their own African past until the last few decades, when researchers from outside the region brought the beginnings of a new self-concept. Although tourism is still almost nonexistent in this region and awareness of Afro-mestizo music and the *artesa* is limited to small intellectual circles within Mexico, enough research has been concentrated in a small relatively unpopulated area as to complicate the reconstruction of any true Afro-Hispanic survivals. To date the expanding Afro-Mexican self-awareness has not included linguistic features, although verbal behavior such as the improvised verses and storytelling have been identified with Afro-Mexican culture. Afro-Mexicans are in a position similar to Afro-Paraguayans and Afro-Chileans, although the number and concentration of phenotypical Afro-Mexicans is much higher than in the latter two countries, and they are distributed over a much wider geographic area, known locally and regionally for its black population.

Although in general sharing the same popular speech traits as other residents of similarly depressed socioeconomic background, many older Afro-Mexicans along the Costa Chica exhibit speech traits that coincide with Afro-Hispanic speech from other regions, and which either are not used by other Mexicans of non-African background or are much attenuated in the latter group. Since the otherwise quite comprehensive linguistic atlas of Mexico (Lope Blanch 1990) did not visit any of the more than 200 Afro-Mexican communities during data collection, there is almost no knowledge of their speech patterns among Mexican dialectologists. These traits are mostly phonetic, and include:

(1) Among the Afro-Mexican communities of the Costa Chica, paragogic vowels are occasionally found, in the speech of the oldest residents. Althoff (1994) heard *motoro* < *motor* and *caloro* < *calor* in the speech of an elderly resident of San Nicolás. My own recordings in San Nicolás in August 2006 (Lipski forthcoming d) produced examples such as the following, in the speech of some of the oldest residents: *vamo a correre; qué me va a hacere; le dio de comere; yo lo voy a llamara; le dio de comere; me va a quemara; para que yo me pudiera desencantara; me voy a casar contigo y me voy a quedara; aunque no tenemos veces para comere en la casa*. These examples are particularly interesting because they appear to demonstrate not only the addition of a vowel to achieve open syllables, but also vowel harmony, a process found in many West African languages (Lipski 2002, 2005a).

(2) The change /f/ > [h<sup>w</sup>] before unrounded vowels is common in Afro-Mexican speech: *juamilia* < *familia* 'family'; *juaro* < *faro* 'lighthouse'; *cajué* < *café* 'coffee.' The opposite, hypercorrect, change sometimes occurs as well: *Fan* < *Juan*. This change before unrounded vowels only occurs in language-contact situations in Latin America (Lipski 1995), and is particularly prominent in Afro-Hispanic speech, in Bolivia, Ecuador, and Peru.

(3) Nearly categorical loss of word-final /r/, especially in verbal infinitives. This pronunciation, while common in southern Spain and in some Caribbean nations, is very infrequent in Mexico, except in the band of Afro-Mexican communities. The same feature is found in Afro-Bolivian speech (in strong contrast to all other Bolivian dialects), as well as in historical imitations of Afro-Hispanic speech.

(4) Syllable- and word-final /s/ is categorically aspirated or deleted. Although a weakened /s/ is characteristic of much of Mexico's Pacific coast, from the Yucatan to Baja California, modern central Mexican dialects have driven back the consonant-weak coastal dialects, except in the more marginalized Afro-Mexican communities (Moreno de Alba 1994).

Although most Afro-Mexican activists are not aware of specific linguistic features of their speech, several collections<sup>9</sup> of folktales from this region compiled by investigators from other regions give reasonably accurate phonetic transcriptions, without delineating which traits might be Afro-Hispanic in nature. As cultural awareness continues to grow, attention to the form of language as well as content (folktales and improvised verses) will in all probability be factored into the Afro-Mexican profile.

### **A simple twist of fate: Afro-Chileans today**

Chile regards itself and is widely regarded as a nation of primarily white descendents of Europeans. Indigenous groups continue to exist in the extreme north and south, but Chileans of African descent are generally non-existent, given the relatively sparse reliance on African slavery during the colonial period.<sup>10</sup> Most Chileans assert—not entirely without justification—that there were never any blacks in Chile, a situation compounded by the official invisibility of Africans and their descendents in school curricula and nearly all historical treatises.<sup>11</sup>

An exception to the aforementioned absence of African elements in Chile is found in the extreme north, in the Azapa Valley just outside of Arica, less than an hour's drive from the Peruvian border. In this totally arid region (in some parts of which no rainfall has ever been recorded since earliest colonial times), irrigation has made possible the establishment of large olive groves, and many have prospered by producing olives and olive oil. Olive growing is attested for the Azapa and Lluta valleys since colonial times, and is already mentioned as a major industry in late 16<sup>th</sup> century documents (Wormald Cruz 1972:19-21). In this valley there is a significant visible minority of African descent, who acknowledge themselves as *negros* or *morenos*, or more recently as *afrodescendientes* (Cantos Larios 2003). These Afro-Chileans have recently formed the non-governmental organization Oro Negro de Chile with headquarters in Arica; they receive some support from the regional government and from the nearby Universidad de Tarapacá, and members of Oro Negro have participated in international forums dealing with human rights among the African diaspora in the Americas.<sup>12</sup> Phenotypically, only a few of the communities' older residents have physical features that unmistakably identify them as descendants of Africans; many others have a complexion, hair texture, and facial features that suggest admixture with the neighboring Aymara community, and up until recently those Afro-Chileans who could "pass" for white or mestizo invariably chose to do so. With the advent of a successful activism on the part of Oro Negro and other groups and individuals, many Afro-Chileans who had ignored or rejected their African heritage now proudly embrace their condition as *afrodescendientes*. Young children whose upbringing and outward appearance can be construed as "Afro" only with considerable imagination are learning how to dance and drum "traditional" Afro-Chilean music, most of which has been recovered from archives rather than by transmission from living sources.



Although nowadays all Afro-Chileans consider themselves to be completely Chilean, this region was actually part of Peru until a plebiscite in 1926, and most of the history of these northern Afro-Chileans is in reality part of Afro-Peruvian history. Arica was part of southern Peru until the War of the Pacific of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, as the result of which Bolivia lost its seaport (Antofagasta) and Peru lost its southern departments of Arica and Iquique. Following the end of the War of the Pacific Arica and its environs remained in a sort of limbo for several decades. Nominally still part of Peru, although subject to eventual transfer to Chile as part of the war settlements, Arica was in fact torn asunder by attempts to “Chilenize” the region as a settler-state and equally vigorous resistance by Peruvians. With the eventual Chilenization of Arica de facto and de jure, the overwhelming white population began a systematic purge of the region’s black and mulatto residents. Homes belonging to *afrodescendientes* were marked with a black cross painted on the door and the residents were ordered either to leave for Chile (abandoning their homes and lands without compensation to the Chilean equivalent of carpetbaggers) or face the ultimate consequences of death threats. Many black residents did indeed flee to Peru, although a good number eventually returned a decade or more after the persecution had stopped, and most Afro-Chileans in Arica have relatives in southern Peru. Other black residents hid out for varying periods of time in small caves hollowed out in the muddy riverbanks, while according to the testimony of the oldest community residents, some black or mulatto residents who refused to leave were actually massacred and dumped in unmarked graves. Recent demands to identify and excavate such putative massacre sites have not received an official response, but the matter remains of concern to human-rights activists.

Also according to local oral history, during colonial times the Azapa and Lluta valleys contained slave breeding centers, run as commercial enterprises. In highland Ecuador (the Afro-

Hispanic communities of the Chota Valley) and perhaps elsewhere in Latin America the Jesuits had deliberately bred African slaves for sale to the agricultural labor markets, but in northern Chile the most recent slave breeders were not associated with any religious order. Given the significant Jesuit participation in Chilean slavery earlier in the colonial period a Jesuit involvement in slave breeding is not inconceivable, but no available documentation supports this contingency. According to oral histories collected in Azapa, black women were held captive in cabins, to which black men were brought and forced to mate with the women.<sup>13</sup> The resulting children were sold as slaves, in violation of the *ley del vientre libre* that in theory guaranteed that children born of slave mothers would be free.

The Afro-Chilean populations of the Azapa valley are close to the port of Arica (some 30 km. away), and blacks in this region were never isolated from linguistic and cultural contact with native speakers of Spanish, as well as with Aymara-Spanish bilinguals closer to the mountains. There are consequently none of the post-*bozal* speech patterns found, e.g. in Ecuador's Chota Valley or even in some of the smaller and more remote Afro-Peruvian villages along Peru's southern coast. Although once belonging to Peru, the Arica region has been completely Chilenized linguistically; the local dialect of Spanish shares all Chilean features, together with some regional innovations. There are a few old speakers with little formal education who exhibit some phonetic traits that coincide with earlier Afro-Hispanic speech (such as occasional reduction of onset clusters as in *pobe* for *pobre* 'poor'), but there is definitely no "Afro-Chilean" way of speaking. Community activists have undertaken the recovery of some traditional songs, which may bring to light additional linguistic data. A more promising avenue of investigation lies in the Afro-Peruvian communities of southern Peru, where many Afro-Chileans maintain ancestral ties. Ethnolinguistically identifiable Afro-Peruvian speech forms have been maintained

in some isolated communities through the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, mostly phonetic variants involving the pronunciation of /d/, /r/, and consonant clusters. Afro-Peruvian artists such as Caitro Soto<sup>14</sup> and the late Nicomedes Santa Cruz have revived an Afro-Peruvian ethnic identity, and have maintained or re-introduced elements of popular language originally associated with *bozal* and post-*bozal* Spanish, and there is increasing interest among Afro-Peruvians in linguistic aspects of Afro-Hispanic culture (Feldman 2001, Ojeda 2003, Romero 1994; also Lipski 1994). Two years ago I taught a one-week seminar in Lima co-sponsored by the University of San Marcos and CEDET, the leading Afro-Peruvian NGO, and many community members attended and actively participated .

In Chile's Azapa valley and elsewhere in Chile, Afro-Chilean scholars look to the colonial history of Chile for their roots, despite the fact that nearly all contemporary Afro-Chileans descend from Afro-Peruvians. Were the search extended to Peruvian history, matters might take a different turn. In reality, however, northern Chile's *afrodescendientes* as a group are not marginalized or discriminated, which has given them the luxury to devote most of their efforts to document the history of black people in Chile, rather than the desperate struggle to obtain basic human rights that is the plight of many other Afro-Hispanic groups.

### **Summary and conclusions**

Across Latin America, communities of African descent continue to figure among the most marginalized, discriminated, and poverty-stricken segments of society. Through the dehumanizing experience of slavery, lingering racism, revisionist "official" histories and school curricula, and general neglect, hundreds of thousands of *afrodescendientes* have been robbed of their cultural heritage and have been denied participation in programs that benefit ethnic minorities. Aspects of traditional Afro-American culture have been stigmatized and criticized,

including syncretic religious practices, community customs and values, and language usage. Across the Americas the speech of black people has been stereotyped and stigmatized as a badge of ignorance and marginality, to be parodied in literature and mocked in real life. Only in recent years have Afro-Hispanic communities entered the arena of political and educational reform, claiming rights as ethnic minorities based on traditional practices in addition to historical discrimination. Developing an awareness of ethnolinguistic differences not only carries the benefits of enhanced self-esteem and a sense of membership in a greater Afro-America, but also the possibility for significant official recognition and economic aid. The task of documenting ethnolinguistic features of minority dialects falls to linguists: linguists as researchers, linguists as educators, and linguists as activists. Such professional intervention on behalf of minority languages or dialects traditionally regarded as substandard has borne fruit not only in prosperous nations where ethnic and racial discrimination is not at issue—such as Spain, Switzerland, and Italy—but also in the aforementioned Afro-Colombian community of Palenque de San Basilio, and in several English- and French-derived creole speaking communities in the Caribbean. Matters are complicated by the fact that speakers themselves do not think in terms of languages or dialects, but only in terms of “good” and “bad” speech. Linguistic research can set matters straight, although it is up to community members themselves to assimilate and disseminate linguistic self-awareness as self-esteem.

Linguistic intervention is by no means a panacea that will right all the wrongs that have been visited on minority cultures, but it can represent a powerful re-humanizing force.

Colloquial Spanish refers to one's native language as *la lengua que mamamos*, a metaphor comparing “mother tongue” and “mother's milk.” To suggest that a community's language is illegitimate, and to dismiss it as nothing but a jumble of non-standard is therefore a frontal

attack on the wellspring of human dignity. Knowledge of the true nature of one's native language, stripped of value judgments and situated in a broad sociohistorical perspective, can be used as a weapon against racism and discrimination. An unidentified audience member in a large public lecture that I once delivered in South America asked for a quick and non-technical definition of sociolinguistics; my quick, non-technical, and spur of the moment answer was: "linguistics with a social mission." The mission of developing self-awareness of minority language use is, in my view, a worthy mission indeed.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Lipski (2005b, 2006a, 2006b, forthcoming a, forthcoming b).

<sup>2</sup> Ruiz Rivas de Domínguez (1974:2521-3) describes the *galopa marimba* dance with drum accompaniment; the term *marimba* does not refer to the xylophone-like instrument but rather to an African drum, which accompanies the *galopa*.

<sup>3</sup> Mario Casartelli, personal communication, June 4, 2006.

<sup>4</sup> I am grateful to Lázaro Medina, Carlos Medina, Santiago Medina, Eulalia “Laly” Medina, and all the members of the Asociación Kamba Kua for their cooperation during my visit to their community.

<sup>5</sup> Welti (1979; 1982:656-8) finds gender concordance errors distributed between incorrect masculine and feminine forms, e.g. *mi taller propia, alguno trabajos buenas* vs. *persona bueno y aseado*. Usher de Herreros (1976:37-8) notes only a few cases of gender discord, such as *te traigo agua frío*, a combination sometimes heard as a performance error in monolingual varieties of Spanish, given the morphophonetically-motivated syntagm *el agua*.

<sup>6</sup> Welti (1979; 1982:660-665). Examples like *yo trabajos, yo piensan, mi amigo me contaron, mi padre trabajo, mi madre trabajan* are found as frequently as the 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular as invariant verb, as in the Afro-Hispanic examples (e.g. Welti found examples such as [*yo*] *trabaja, piensa*, etc. Usher de Herreros (1976:40-1) similarly found widely dispersed errors of subject-verb agreement, without a clear preference for the 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular: *mi abuela y mi tía te manda*.

<sup>7</sup> For example Welti (1979; 1982:656) found examples like *mi familiares* analyzed as an error of number agreement, although phonetically-motivated loss of /s/ in *mis* is a probable

alternative. Some cases of invariant plurals are found (1982:657), although not as frequently as in Camba Cua: *irme otros país a trabajar*. Usher de Herreros (1976:38-9) similarly notes only ambiguous plural combinations such as *soldados paraguayo/soldado paraguayos*, where phonetic erosion of /s/ could be at issue, as well as *me dio mucho(s) guaraní*; the national currency, the *guaraní*, is often given no plural even by Paraguayans entirely fluent in Spanish and who evince no other instances of Guaraní interference.

<sup>8</sup> It is also well-known that Francia gave refuge to many escaped slaves from Brazil (Pla 1972:28-9, 48-52), among whom were many *bozales* who spoke pidginized Portuguese, which may also have influenced the linguistic destiny of Camba-Cua.

<sup>9</sup> Aparicio et al. (1993), Díaz Pérez et al. (1993), Gutiérrez Ávila (1993), Guzmán Calvo (1992).

<sup>10</sup> African slaves did work in agriculture around Mendoza, once part of colonial Chile but now a province of Argentina (Masini 1962).

<sup>11</sup> Although some musicologists attribute the origins of the popular Chilean folk music the *cueca* to the Afro-Hispanic *zamacueca*, there is nothing “Afro” about the melodies or the lyrics and Chileans do not consider the *cueca* to be a product of an Afro-Hispanic syncretism.

<sup>12</sup> I am grateful to Marta Salgado, Sonia Salgado, Nelson Corvacho, and all the members of the Fundación Oro Negro de Chile, who kindly received me during my visit to Azapa in 2005.

<sup>13</sup> The historian Wormald Cruz (1968:76-79) describes these *criaderos de negros* in less harsh terms.

<sup>14</sup> The song “A sacá camote con el pie” by Caitro Soto, one of the more popular Afro-Peruvian musical numbers, has a number of subtle Afro-Hispanic elements. A fragment is:

María del Carmen taba buena,

de repente hocico ya quemó;  
Molina, molina, molinar,  
molino sólo ta andando [...]  
Andá uté negro Fraicico, que allá tá capitulero;  
luego que empuña la plata,  
y el papelito afrojá  
irá uté derecho  
a otra parroquia a votá [...]  
Que remonio de borica,  
que no quiere caminá [...]