

Marlyse Baptista, *The Syntax of Cape Verdean Creole, the Sotavento Varieties*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2002.

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This book is quite an achievement and a must for linguists working on the language of the Cape Verde Islands, both in its goals and results. First of all, the author takes in hands the ambitious task of registering an extensive description of the syntax of ‘Cape Verdean Creole’ (CVC), as she chooses to name the language. This is the first published volume to assume such a categorization in a generative grammar framework – CVC has been the object of study for some other linguists who do not necessarily consider it as an expression of Universal Grammar. Baptista defines her approach as the following: ‘The primary theoretical framework of generative grammar that I adopt in this book is the Minimalist Program’ (8).

The book offers an overview of both NP (Noun Phrase) and VP (Verb Phrase) internal patterns (chapters 3, 4, 7), and the description of word order patterns, such as double object constructions and clefting, among others (chapter 5). It also presents a description of clause structure (chapter 6), and of the syntax of pronominals (chapter 8). Pluralization, cliticization, negation, reduplication, wh-questions, verb movement and null subjects, among other main issues, are approached. In some cases Baptista presents a review of relevant theories for a particular domain of the grammar, such as some competing accounts for verb movement or some different perspectives on functional categories and the patterns of TMA (Tense, Modality, Aspect). In chapters 1 and 2 we find, respectively, an introduction and a sociohistorical sketch. In these chapters the author aligns her objectives and orthographic choices, as well as the historical and demographic circumstances that surrounded the genesis of CVC.

Cape Verde is an archipelago composed of two main clusters of islands. It was a Portuguese colony until 1975, and although CVC is the native language of all its inhabitants, Portuguese is still the only official language in the country. Baptista points out the languages that have contributed to the formation of Kriolu (as it is known by its native speakers): ‘besides Portuguese, which contributed to its lexicon, the African element is mostly represented by the Niger-Kordofanian languages: West-Atlantic languages [...] and the Mande languages [...]’ (19).

The fieldwork that supported the author’s Ph.D. dissertation, completed at Harvard University in 1997, has been carried further in three field trips to Cape Verde (1997, 2000 and 2001), in order to gather a collection of data representative of all four basilectal Sotavento (leeward) varieties, spoken in the islands of Brava, Fogo, Santiago and Maio. The Barlavento (windward) islands are: Boavista, Sal, São Nicolau, Santa Luzia (uninhabited), São Vicente and Santo Antão.

For all these reasons, Baptista’s book has been a precious source of inspiration to me, as her Ph.D. dissertation had already been. In both I found many important clues to be pursued in my own research. It certainly can not be ignored by any linguist that plans to work on CVC, especially (but not only) if a generative grammar perspective is to be followed along.

In spite of these remarkable qualities, however, the book has some drawbacks, which I will highlight, not because I believe them to be more relevant than the just mentioned qualities, but because I think they deserve some clarification. At least one of them is fairly justified in the objectives defined by the author, namely ‘to promote a better understanding of CVC, a language that offers serious descriptive challenges’ (4). Offering such a wide descriptive scope and trying to cover almost every aspect of Cape Verdean syntax turns the book really helpful to anyone who wants, or needs, to have a general overview of the language. This is obtained in its 270

pages, thematically organized in chapters and sections. But, on the other hand, this wide scope compromises a more analytical one, also defined as a goal by the author: ‘to use the tools provided by generative linguistics to uncover scientific evidence for the principles that rule the linguistic system of this particular language’(4). In my opinion, the most serious weaknesses of the book result from the imbalance between description and analysis; the book is clearly tilted to description.

This imbalance seems to have made the author rush into conclusions supported by somewhat irrelevant arguments and unconvincing data, namely the assumptions that CVC (henceforth Capeverdean, as I believe it should be named) has verb raising (verb movement to a position higher than V), and referential null subjects.

The questions around each of these parametric values have given hard work to generativists in the last decades. Each of these properties in a given grammar has, at some point, been linked to rich verbal agreement morphology. This relation has later been questioned and exhaustively discussed, and this discussion has also presupposed a necessary definition of what is meant by ‘rich’ morphology. It is assumed that, even when the language under analysis has NO overt verbal agreement morphology, as is the case of Capeverdean, it does not mean that linguists should give up looking for those properties: there are some covert operations that can license them. Both questions must thus be answered by other diagnostic tools, some of which have also been strongly discussed in recent studies.

This is what has been observed, for instance, with the role of floating quantifiers in order to determine the existence of verb raising. The traditional assumption of quantifiers as a diagnosis for this parametric value used to go as follows: whenever a quantifier appears on the right of the verb, it would mean that this quantifier has been left behind by the NP in its movement to Spec,IP (where it is assigned nominative case); the quantifier

is, then, stranded in Spec,VP (where the NP subject has been base-generated), and the verb raises past it. However, the analysis proposed by Bobaljik (1995) shows that quantifiers are not necessarily a reliable diagnosis for tracing NP-base positions, since they can be analysed as adjuncts to the left of some XP. This accounts for the contrast in English (1):

- (1) (a) Larry, Darryl and Darryl came into the café \*all.  
 (b) Larry, Darryl and Darryl came into the café all [at the same time].  
 (c) Larry, Darryl and Darryl came into the café all [very tired].

Furthermore, the main data provided by Baptista with floating quantifiers are clauses with unaccusative verbs (like txiga ‘arrive’). Since the subject of these verbs is not base-generated in Spec,VP, but as the internal argument of the predicate, the previous prediction makes no sense in here. In unaccusative (ergative) constructions, if the NP moves to Spec,IP it may very well leave the quantifier behind in its original postverbal position. And the verb can stay in V.

Some diagnoses with adverbs between verb and complement positions are also presented in the book: as adverbs are assumed to be in left adjunction to VP, there must be some verb raising for adverbs to appear on the right of the verb. However, some of the examples by Baptista are taken from literary texts, and it is well known that literary constructions may violate the most inviolable rules of a given grammar. It means, in other words, that they can not exactly be taken as valuable data proving anything like verb movement. Some other data, with morphologically light adverbs (like ben ‘right’), have been completely refused in this intermediate position by my informants from Santiago, who, besides, never use the word ben, but dretu. Perhaps there is some dialectal variation involved in here and this must be subject to further research.

The strongest argument in the book in favour of verb raising in Capeverdean is the one linked with the TMA imperfective marker *-ba*. Baptista proposes that verb movement to T allows this morpheme to affix on the right of the stem. However, in a language like English, which is widely assumed to have no verb movement, we find a TMA suffix like *-ed*. The analysis assumed by Bobaljik (1995) proposes a Distributed Morphology approach and explains this by means of lowering, an operation that occurs after syntax, in the morphological component of the grammar. This is what has been proposed by Costa & Pratas (2003) for the Capeverdean *-ba*.

The fact of Capeverdean being pro-drop is also defended by Baptista. The (obligatory) presence of expletive null subjects in this language (with weather verbs or raising constructions, for instance) is a widely attested fact. However, there is still a discussion among linguists on whether this kind of null subjects should be an argument to classify a language as pro-drop. Moreover, the author assumes that Capeverdean also has null referential subjects, and this assumption is, in my opinion, still to be supported by a more convincing analysis of the data. Being null referential (argumental) subjects completely ruled out in most Capeverdean sentences, even in embedded clauses where its semantic content could be easily recovered from the context, Baptista's assumption is supported only by sentences like (2).

- (2) (E1 / E) E nha pai  
 (PRON.3SG/ CL.3SG) Is my father

In every other context (not: 3SG + copula in present tense), and also by comparison of each of these contexts with English (assumed not to have null subjects at all), there is no possibility of having a referential pro. Hence, it is not clear why there should be one in here. I have argued earlier (Pratas in

print) that in (2) there is no *pro* but some kind of phonological phenomenon involving both *e*'s, since the 3SG clitic and the copula are homophonous forms. But there is a stronger possibility, which must be taken in consideration: the *pro* in (2) is not referential, but expletive. If a sentence like 'It's my father' is possible in English, with an overt expletive subject, this could be possible in Capeverdean, with an expletive *pro*. In either case, there is still no empirical evidence to propose 'that CVC is a radical pro-drop language', as the author risks to (266).

In both Baptista's Ph.D. dissertation and this book (although mediated by five years and three more fieldwork trips, the data that support Baptista's assumptions remain basically the same), one gets the strong feeling that the author is somewhat determined in proving that Capeverdean shows some grammatical properties usually not found in other Creoles. My opinion in this respect is slightly different. I firmly believe that there are no sound empirical and scientific reasons to assume that Creoles are a set of special languages, at least from a synchronic generative grammar perspective. That is why CVC should be renamed Capeverdean and treated as any other natural language (this should eventually apply to the whole of 'Creole' languages). Comparative studies in linguistics help to shed some light on the abstract rules that govern human language, and in some specific contexts it makes sense to compare Creoles, as to compare Romance languages, or Germanic languages, for within each of these groups there are historical and linguistic common circumstances. But considering all the dangers of some postcolonial misunderstandings, I overtly assume DeGraff (2003) position against 'Creole exceptionalism'. This position can be much better defended by dealing with Creoles as what they mean – natural products of the human capacity for language –, than by trying to show that some Creole has grammatical properties not typical of Creoles, as if it would

help fighting the still pervasive belief that Creole languages are somehow structurally inadequate.

With the evidence that I have found so far, Capeverdean has neither referential pro nor verb raising, and with this, obviously, no special quality is added to or subtracted from the language.

I also have not found any good reason to give such an emphasis to the word ‘varieties’, moreover when we are talking about only one of the clusters of the islands. The so-called Capeverdean ‘varieties’ have been in the centre of the discussion around (not) making it an official language in the country. There seems to be no satisfactory answer to the big question: which ‘variety’ to chose?

The fact that Baptista shows this kind of comparative concern, however, also does not reduce the extreme value of this book and her extensive description of Capeverdean syntax. Personally, I am really grateful for this indispensable tool and source of precious clues to future work, in generative linguistics in general and on Capeverdean in particular.

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