

Nicolas Quint, *L'Élément Africain dans la Langue Capverdienne // Africanismos na Língua Caboverdiana*, 2008, 133 pages. Paris : L'Harmattan.

Nélia Alexandre (Centro de Linguística da Universidade de Lisboa)

1. Structural overview

Nicolas Quint's book, *L'Élément Africain dans la Langue Capeverdiennne // Africanismos na Língua Caboverdiana*, explores the presence of (West-)African elements in the Cape Verdean Creole (Santiago variety—henceforth, CVC). The main goal of this book is to examine the relevance of the African stratum of CVC, deciding which African-based Capeverdean words and/or structures determine, in particular, the origins of this Creole language and of the Afro-European Creoles, in general.

In the literature on CVC, two main varieties of the language are typically considered: (i) the Sotavento variety, spoken in the leeward islands of Brava, Maio, Fogo and Santiago, represented by the island of Santiago; and the Barlavento variety, spoken in the windward islands of Boavista, Sal, Santo Antão, São Nicolau and São Vicente, identified with the island of São Vicente (cf. Veiga 2000; Baptista 2002). Quint's option for the Santiago variety is based on three (strong) reasons. First, Santiago variety is the one the author assumes to know better; second, the island of Santiago is taken to be the cradle of CVC and is the variety that is more basilectal (i.e. more africanized); third, the demographic figures show that Santiago is the most populated island, given that over 50% of the population of the country lives there.

The book begins with a long and inspired preface from Manuel Veiga (former Minister of Culture, linguist and native speaker of the Santiago variety), who acknowledges Quint's contribution for the research on CVC, enhancing the African nature of the language, and, according to Veiga, deviating from the scholars that claim that the 'European influence' on the Lexicon and the main components of the grammar of Creoles is very relevant. Veiga's desire to show the African influence on CVC leads him to add to Quint's arguments one of his own, suggesting that the monophthongization that CVC exhibits is a process of innovation probably due to African influence (e.g., Portuguese *baixo* > CVC *baxu* 'low'; *caixa* > *kaxa* 'box'; *peito* > *petu* 'chest'; *deitar* > *deta* 'lay'; *beijo* > *beju* 'kiss'; *feijão* > *fixon* 'beans'; *Europa* > *orópa* 'Europe'; *noite* > *noti* 'night'; *doido* > *dodu* 'crazy'; *louco* > *loku* 'insane'; *poupar* > *popa* 'save'; *coice* > *koxi* 'kick'; from table in pages 10-11). Note, however, that the very same diphthongs in bold in the words given as examples are monophthongs in some varieties of contemporary Portuguese.

Quint's book is organized in three main parts: Chapter 1 presents some historical facts about the origin of the black slaves that were taken to Cape Verde during the Portuguese settlement in the 15th century, stressing on the fact that in the second half of the 16th century there were thirteen thousand individuals living in Santiago island, 87% of which were black slaves (probably brought from a limited area in the West Africa coast, namely, between the peninsula of Dakar, in Senegal, and Freetown, in Sierra Leone). Assuming the hypothesis that the archipelago was inhabited when found, the African features of the contemporary Capeverdean culture (and language) must have their roots on other continental African cultures/languages.

Chapter 1 also looks to methodological issues related to the African languages that the black slaves spoke and to the collection of African etyma. Particularly, Quint remarks that one of the methodological problems for the research on the African elements in CVC is the diversity of African languages that might have been at the origin of this Creole. Those languages belong to two linguistic branches of the Niger-Congo family: the Atlantic branch (especially languages such as

Wolof, Themne and Fula), and the Mande branch (represented by Manding, Mandinka, Soninke, Susu, Loko and Mende). Although these languages seem very distinct from each other, they share similar properties, given that they belong to branches of the same phylum. Another methodological problem reported by Quint is the lack of documentation on the West-African languages referred to above. Some of them have been poorly described and the best known languages, such as Manding and Wolof, have dictionaries with little more than ten thousand words. A third methodological problem is related to the unavailability of diachronic data for the Atlantic and Mande languages at stake here and for some languages that might have existed in the 16th to 18th centuries but have disappeared (in fact, there is no documentation for the languages of these groupings prior to the 19th century), and, therefore, researchers can only speculate about their grammar and sociolinguistic influence.

Chapter 2 analyzes Quint's corpus of seventy African-based Capeverdean words (listed in appendix 1) concluding that three fifths of the corpus are Manding etyma (note that languages like Mandinka, Maninké, Soninke, Bambara and Diula belong to this language sub-branch). The relevance of Manding languages over CVC is not surprising if we consider that they are spoken in all West Africa by over twenty million people (ten of them as native speakers and the rest as lingua franca) and they were used since the beginning of the Portuguese settlement in Cape Verde. Historically, there is some evidence that a significant part of the ancestors of the Capeverdeans are black slaves captured and sold by Mandinka speakers from the kingdom of Gabu (which corresponds to contemporary South of Senegal—Casamance—and Guinea-Bissau).

In this chapter, Quint also explains that the influence of the Atlantic language grouping over CVC is not as rich as the Manding sub-grouping probably because after the 16th century the Portuguese confronted with their European rivals (such as the French, the Dutch and the British), who push them away from the area between Senegal river and the mouth of the river Gambia (where Wolof was lingua franca), being confined to the area between the rivers Casamance and Componi (the contemporary coast of Guinea-Bissau) in the 17th century.

Quint looks at the Bantu presence in CVC words as well, claiming that some of them are derived from Kimbundu and Kikongo. This Bantu evidence may be explained by the Portuguese trade, since the 16th century, within the Portuguese colonial empire (namely, in Angola) and with the kingdom of Congo.

The analysis of the corpus of African-based Capeverdean words reveals that the main West-African languages involved in their origin are Manding (60%, table 1, pp. 32-33), Wolof (16%, *ibid.*) and Themne (6%, *ibid.*). Quint also concludes that there are no African functional words in CVC, such as prepositions, conjunctions and pronouns, but only content words. However, it is possible to find some traces of African affixes in few CVC words, such as the word class marker *ma-/min-* (e.g., *mafáfa* 'yam', *mankara* 'peanuts', *minkóko* 'taro', pp. 50-53) and the verbal suffix expressing iterative events (e.g., *korkoti* 'to clean the dish with a spoon', *rukuti* 'to carve out a piece of something', *tchuputi* 'to peck, to get something with the beak', pp. 52-55). Quint observes likewise that the African-based Capeverdean words belong to the most diverse semantic domains, such as cooking, breeding, animal names, etc., but the African-based words cover a more restricted semantic field than the Portuguese-based ones. Nevertheless, Quint argues that 99 out of 100 lexical items of the nuclear vocabulary of CVC are Portuguese-based and, hence, the African-based Capeverdean words occupy a very peripheral area in the Lexicon of CVC.

The chapter ends approaching a possible rational explanation for the presence of African-based words in the Lexicon of CVC, given that they are the living testimony of the languages that the Capeverdeans ancestors spoke. Considering that the black slaves did not speak Portuguese, they had to learn the language because of their Portuguese owners and because they were native speakers of different West-African languages, none of them being a lingua franca. Consequently, the black

slaves acquired the most frequent Portuguese words (i.e. the nuclear vocabulary), as any language learner does, and the African words that survived until today in CVC must have been used systematically, supposedly because their Portuguese equivalent was very rare or inexistent (e.g., *kundidem* ‘coccyx’ or *polom* ‘African tree’). The scarce corpus of African-based Capeverdean words is then probably the product of an explicit effort of the African speakers to learn Portuguese, the vehicular language at that time and place.

Chapter 3 considers the presence of African elements on the morphology and semantics of CVC. Concerning the morphology component, Quint reports the existence of ideophones in CVC (i.e. “*de mots exclusivement associés à une ou quelques notions sémantiques, qu’ils intensifient ou modifient*”, p. 73), such as *bránku álbu* ‘completely white’ and *prétu finu* ‘completely black’, which exhibit an African process over Portuguese-based words. The gender marking in CVC is also distinct from the Portuguese strategy, in that it is intimately associated to the semantic identification of sex, and the process usually resorts to the words *mátchu* ‘male’ and *fémia* ‘female’ to express the opposition masculine/feminine, as in *fidju mátchu* ‘son’ vs. *fidju fémia* ‘daughter’ (pp. 76-77), a strategy also found in Bambara. The tense and aspect systems are also referred to as showing evidence of African influence, specifically from Manding Bambara and Wolof, since CVC has only two tenses (Past, marked by a \emptyset morpheme or by the suffix *-ba*, and Present, signaled by the free morpheme *ta*), and the aspectual value seems to be preferred over the tense value (see, for instance, the opposition between dynamic and stative verbs, such as *fasi* ‘to do’ and *sabi* ‘to know’, in *ês fasi* ‘they did’—Perfective / *ês sabi* ‘they know’—Imperfective, pp. 82-83).

With respect to the semantic component, Quint presents three cases that he argues to be rooted in a Manding language: the Capeverdean word *manxeda* (lit. ‘the food that dawned’, i.e., ‘leftovers that are eaten at breakfast’); the expression *Nhós é kántu na nhós mai?* (lit. ‘you + are + how many + in + your + mother’), a tracing from Bambara (*a’ yé jòli yé a’ ba la*, lit. ‘you + be + how many + be + your + mother + in’); and the word *burmedju* ‘red’ used to refer to the yolk, as *bliman* ‘red/yolk’, in Bambara.

Quint claims that several other morphological and semantic matches can be found between CVC and West-African languages and that the ones presented in this book are just a small portion. The book has, nevertheless, a methodological effect for the research on CVC: the non-Portuguese linguistic properties must be carefully compared with the relevant West-African languages before they are taken as Creole features (pp. 94-95). For that reason, Quint petitions for further research done by African linguists, whose knowledge of their own native languages might bring new insights on the origins of CVC, reinforcing that “*la double nature des créoles afro-européens ne sera jamais totalement comprise si l’on ne prend pas en compte le regard des Africains*” (p. 99), especially those who speak Mande or Atlantic languages. Quint concludes that CVC is an Afro-European language.

The book ends with six appendixes (pp. 100-125) that list the African-based words of CVC, which are classified according to the lexifying language (appendix 1); are exclusively attributed to one variety of Mande (appendix 2); are organized according to the semantic field (appendix 3); denominate typical African realities (appendix 5); and establish the equivalence between Wolof and Mande and CVC stative verbs (appendix 6).

2. Critical evaluation

I believe that the contribution of the African languages for the origins of Creoles is unquestionable, and I agree with Quint in that there is no systematic research on that topic, a kind of work that could determine which is the exact influence of the African elements in the structure of the Creole grammars.

In this book, Quint does not only establish relations between CVC and some West-Atlantic

languages, but one of his main contributions is the listing of the problems that he takes into account for the research, showing that he is a conscious linguist, correctly approaching the data and the sources. Quint shows here that he is aware of the dangers of certain positions that ignore those kinds of problems.

Notwithstanding the overall positive evaluation of this book, there are some aspects that I would like to comment in particular.

One criticism I would raise is that the Portuguese title, *Africanismos na Língua Caboverdiana*, leads the reader to believe that the book is about the Capeverdean Lexicon, in the same way as words like *galicismos* or *anglicismos* refer to the words whose base is French or English, respectively. However, the book goes beyond the Lexicon of CVC, since it considers morphology, morpho-syntax and semantics. It would be better to have a translation closer to the original text, *L'Élément Africain dans la Langue Capverdienne*, as in *Elementos Africanos na Língua Caboverdiana*, stressing the fact that the African elements do not only affect the Lexicon but also other components of the grammar of CVC. As the author claims (p. 96), at first sight one may assume that lexical items are the most important elements of African influence over CVC. Despite that, the author shows that the Lexicon of contemporary CVC includes few words derived from West-African languages and that the (morpho-)syntactic and semantic features of those languages seem to have more impact in the grammar of CVC.

Another aspect subject to criticism is the lack of references to specific updated literature on CVC (variety of Santiago) and West-African languages, which could strengthen the topic discussed in Quint's book (vd. Lang 1994, 2004, 2009; Baptista 2002; Torrence 2005; Fiéis & Pratas 2006; Sall 2008; a.o.). For instance, Lang (2004) suggests that the tense and aspectual systems of Wolof and CVC share several affinities (e.g., in grammatical function and word order) that set these languages apart from Portuguese, in the same way Quint does. Nevertheless, Lang adds further data, showing that both Wolof and CVC exhibit two *have*-type verbs (*am / ame*, in Wolof, and *ten / tene*, in CVC, the former expressing 'basic possession' and the latter 'occasional possession'); he also claims that both Wolof and CVC use deictic elements in a parallel way (e.g., *-i / -a*, in Wolof, and *li / la*, in CVC, signaling proximity and distance, respectively); and Lang says that the lack of [v] in CVC (which is replaced by [b]) is due to the fact that Wolof does not have the phoneme /v/, but only /b/. For that reason, Lang (2004:145) notes that "*Les affinités observées sont trop nombreuses et trop spécifiques pour être dues au hasard.*" Lang assumes, moreover, that the connections between CVC and African languages could be assigned to other West-African languages than Wolof, but that the Mande grouping is excluded because its verbal system is very different from CVC and Wolof.

Finally, I observe that the syntactic and semantic components of CVC are poorly analyzed. Note that the language exhibits several constructions derived by strategies that are not found in European (specifically, Portuguese) grammars, such as reflexivity (cf. Pratas 2004, in *Djon mata kabesa*, lit. 'John killed head' / 'John killed himself'); double object constructions (cf. Fiéis & Pratas 2006, as in *Djon da kes mininu ki ka gosta di le libru di Nhu Lobu ku Xibinhu*, lit. 'John gave the boys that don't like to read books of "Nhu Lobu"' / 'John gave books of "Nhu Lobu" to the boys that don't like to read'); relative clauses and wh-questions with spelled out pronominal elements (cf. Alexandre 2006, 2007, in *Kes mudjeris k'N papia ku-el, es bai parti*, lit. 'the women that I talked with him, they went away' / 'the women that I talked with left' and *Ki skolas ki Maria ta trabadja n'el?*, lit. 'which schools does Maria work in it?' / 'which schools does Maria work in?'); bare singular nouns with a specific plural meaning (cf. Baptista 2007, in *kasa di es aldeia e baratu*, lit. 'house of this neighborhood is cheap' / 'the houses in this neighborhood are cheap'); the distinction between dynamic and stative verbs (*fasi* 'to do' and *sabi* 'to know') referred to by Quint should be seen not only as a Perfective/Imperfective opposition, but also as events and subevents (cf. Pratas in press), and many other issues. Probably, some of these topics may be attributed to African influence, since similar strategies can be found in (West-)African languages, but some others may

be just changing tendencies that are CVC grammar specific or favored by linguistic contact; and some of them may be ascribed to external influences.

I recommend, therefore, this book highly to students and to any researcher interested in exploring the connections between the grammar of African languages (especially, those of the Niger-Congo family) and the grammar of Creoles.

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