

Grammatical Structure, Historical Development, and Religious Usage of Afro-Cuban Bozal Speech

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In the middle of the nineteenth century, in the small Cuban town of San Marcos de Artemisa, Manuel Cabrera Paz, a little known bard, wrote a lengthy poem entitled "Exclamaciones de un negro en las fiestas efectuadas con motivo de la inauguración del patrono de este pueblo de San Marcos, el día 25 de abril de 1857."¹ A fragment of the composition reads:

- (1) Yo llegá, quitá cachucho
cuchá música bonito
de ese guitarra chiquito
que lo toca con serrucho.
Yo tá mirá gente mucho;
musiquero no parese
iuté ve cosa como ese! . . .
Yo levanta sojo isiaa!
imusiquero tá bombá
brabacoba de la grese! (Fernández de la Vega and Pamies 1973:125)

I arrived, took off my cap
heard a beautiful music
coming from that small guitar
that is played with a handsaw.
I see many people;
but I can't find the musician,
imagine something like that! . . .
I lift up my eyes, siaa!
the musician is perched
in the attic of the church.²

What concerns us here is not this composition's dubious literary merits, but the fact that it is entirely written in *bozal*, a creolized language once spoken in Cuba by African slaves and their descendants.³ The poem by Cabrera Paz is far from being exceptional. In 1847, Bartolomé José Crespo y Borbón published his comic play *Un Ajiaco o la Boda de Pancha Jutía y Canuto Raspadura*, in which most of his characters spoke in bozal. Many nineteenth century Cuban writers (Gelabert, Villaverde, Suárez y Romero, Bachiller y Morales, De la Torre) either mention this language variety or employ it in their works. In the twentieth century, Lydia Cabrera found many old people who regularly used bozal. For instance, her informant Tá Mónico Biabangá spoke thus:

- (2) Tánze so mismo rey viejo Ekoi. . . Né murí jayá tiempo tiempo ante, y píritu di é bobé pecao que mué cogé, né contrá lo río la suete lo rey Ekoi, y barón quita neye, mata mué pa poné un religión. Obón Tánze e rey mueto que entrá pecao y pasá bongó. (Cabrera 1970:80)

Tanze is the same old king of the Ekoi. . . He died a long time ago, and his spirit turned into a fish that was caught by a woman, she found in the river the charm of the Ekoi king, but a man took it away from her, he killed the woman in order to institute a religion. Obon Tanze is the dead king who entered a fish and became a drum.⁴

Nowadays, bozal has all but disappeared as a regular vehicle of communication, and its usage is restricted to religious settings, as discussed elsewhere in this paper.⁵ Here, I will analyze the principal grammatical features of this language as well as the sociohistorical context in which it developed, expanded, contracted, and (almost) died. I will conclude by discussing the contemporary use of bozal in the Afro-Cuban religious domain.

The lack of live informants has forced contemporary scholars (Alzola, Granda, Otheguy, Lipski) to gather their data from written sources, primarily from the books written by Lydia Cabrera. I have done likewise in the analysis of this language's grammatical structure, since tape recorders are strictly banned from the few ritual contexts in which bozal speech is still employed. At the same time, I have tried to expand my corpus by extracting material from all of the books by Cabrera in which bozal is documented, as well as from many other Cuban sources: books by Fernando Ortiz, vernacular nineteenth century plays, descriptions of customs and traditions, novels, and plays by nineteenth and twentieth century authors. I have also employed a

series of recordings of ritual chants obtained by Cabrera in Matanzas around 1950, and my description of the ritual usage of bozal is based on fieldwork among Afro-Cuban religious practitioners, primarily in Miami.

Lydia Cabrera is still the most reliable supplier of bozal samples for several reasons. First, one of her primary objectives has been to faithfully reproduce what her informants told her, without any attempt at elaborating or "correcting" their language traits. Second, I have had the privilege of consulting her old field notebooks in which I have found long narratives (many still unpublished) written entirely in bozal. Third, in the course of my fieldwork, I have been able to ascertain that Cabrera's transcriptions of Afro-Cuban chants and prayers are strictly accurate, be they in *Lucumí*, *Congo*, *Abakuá*,⁶ or bozal. In addition, the writer very often identifies the people who speak in her works. This makes it possible to explore the speech characteristics of several of her informants and to examine their internal consistency. For instance, Francisquilla Ibáñez employed a bozal that was closer to Spanish than that of Tá Mónico Biabangá, while José de Calazán Herrera expressed himself either in standard Spanish or in bozal.⁷

As I will show later, Afro-Cuban bozal speech possesses numerous creole characteristics, although a long standing, stable creole did not take hold in the island. The data gives the picture of a code in constant process of flux and with considerable internal variation, due to an advanced process of decreolization and shift toward Spanish. In this study, I analyze this internal variability as frequently as possible, although very often the data will not be sufficient in quantity to determine which linguistic constraints promote a specific variant. Also, I have limited my study of grammatical features to those that clearly separate Afro-Cuban bozal from other more "conventional" Spanish dialects.

I. Grammatical features

A. Number

One of the most salient features of Afro-Cuban bozal is the absence of a plural marker and its indication by determiners that signal quantity or by the context.⁸ Since verbs also lack number inflections, sometimes it is difficult to determine whether a specific clause is in the singular or in the plural. I have looked at eighty noun phrases from my corpus that clearly possess a plural meaning, and in sixty-nine (86.2 percent), find no morphological marker:

- (3) Allá tiera nosotros hombre no cabe po pueta, mujé no cabe po pueta (Cabrera 1979:17).
There, in our land, men do not fit through the door, women do not fit through the door.
- (4) Bueno día tó lo Tata, bueno día tó lo Mama (Cabrera 1979:82).
Good morning to all the fathers, good morning to all the mothers.
- (5) Tó día uté habla con mí (Cabrera 1970:108).
Every day you speak with me.
- (6) Gayina negro son mucho y toito pone güebo blanco (Morúa Delgado 1901:37).
There are lots of black hens, and all of them lay white eggs.

Two observations: First, in bozal, there is an almost categorical absence of final /s/, and this fact may lead to the belief that the lack of plural marker obeys phonological rather than morphosyntactic constraints. There are, however, cases like example 3, in which the word *mujé* (woman, women) is found in a clear plural context. If this were a process of phonological reduction, one would expect to find *mujere*, instead of *mujé*. Second, in the previous examples, the copula *son* and the article *lo* give the impression of plural, but these forms are invariable with respect to number.

B. Gender

Modifiers in bozal most frequently employ forms that correspond to masculine modifiers in Spanish. Moreover, articles and other determiners show traits that may alter the specific analysis of gender agreement. For all of the above reasons, I decided to restrict my analysis to agreement between adjectives and feminine nouns. Confining the data in this way guarantees greater reliability in the results of the analysis, but considerably limits the sample. Of the thirty-seven noun phrases that fulfill the previous conditions twenty-four (65 percent) are cases of zero agreement. Besides example 6, I found, among others:

- (7) Cosa güeno (Cabrera 1979:123)
Good thing
- (8) Santa Bárbara bendito (Cabrera 1971:114)
Holy Saint Barbara

Nevertheless, an incipient gender can be detected in the corpus, as I will show immediately in my discussion of articles.

C. Articles

The article system of bozal is extremely variable. Granda (1971:485) has noticed a frequent absence of articles in sentences such as:

- (9) Yo aprendé divino (Cabrera 1979:158).
I learned from the diviners.
- (10) Mayombero ñama con mambo (Cabrera 1979:123).
Mayomberos (Congo priests) call with *mambos* (songs).

This fact is confirmed by analysis. Articles are absent in 247 of 475 environments examined (52 percent of all cases). In general, articles behave in the following manner: there are two definite articles (*la* and *lo*) to be found in specific and presupposed noun phrases:⁹

- (11) Yo tiene la pecho premio pur nelle (Fernández 1968a:143).
I have my chest all wrung out by her.
- (12) Lo ingenio cuero na má (Cabrera 1979:91).
In the sugar mill [one receives] only whippings.

There is, as well, one indefinite article with two variants (*uno*, *un*) in noun phrases that are specific, but not presupposed:

- (13) Un chino Manila puso uno pincho . . . (Cabrera 1979:58)
A Chinaman from Manila put a stick . . .

All other cases are frequently marked by absence of articles:

- (14) Negro criollo son má mijó que congo (Fernández 1968a:145).
Creole blacks are better than Congos.

The contrast between presence versus absence of articles is clearly shown in the following example taken from a Congo song (Cabrera 1979:40, emphasis mine):

- (15) Ah Mayorá son malo
tira cuero do mano
Marayo parta *lo* Mayorá. . . .

Ah! Overseers are bad
they whip [you] with both hands
May a lighting bolt fall on *the* overseer. . . .

Absence of articles is also very noticeable in those noun phrases in which some other determiner appears after the noun:

- (16) Ikú ese cane na má (Cabrera 1970:108).
That dead person is merely flesh.
- (17) Tú ve bariga mía (Crespo y Borbón 1847:55).
You see my belly.
- (18) Yo so piera ese (Cabrera 1979:108).
I am that rock.¹⁰

I have already mentioned that there exist two definite articles in bozal (*lo, la*) which are used in both singular and plural contexts. *La* occurs with nouns that would be feminine in Spanish in 68.9 percent of the sample, and with masculine nouns in 31.1 percent. *La* appears twice as frequently as *lo*, and the latter occurs with masculine nouns in 90 percent of all cases. It is possible that *la* is an older form, and *lo* arises as an incipient way of marking gender. This is also suggested by the fact that only *la* is found in the oldest samples of bozal at my disposal, some eighteenth century popular songs gathered by Lezama (1965:174-175).

- (19) Su messe, la cabayero . . .
Your honor, the gentleman . . .
- (20) Ni viene con la lía.
He comes with the problem.

The indefinite article occurs with masculine and feminine nouns in equal proportion.

- (21) Un guja (Cabrera 1979:82)
A needle
- (22) Uno güeno regalito (Crespo y Borbón 1847:64)
A good gift
- (23) Uno visita (Gelabert 1881:119)
A visit

The article *una* appeared in just four samples, and in three of those it occurs with feminine nouns. The almost exclusive demonstrative determiner is *ese*, which modifies both masculine and feminine nouns and may precede or follow the noun:

- (24) Ese Mayorá (Cabrera 1979:42)
That overseer
- (25) Pollo ese no viene (Cabrera 1976:65).
That chicken does not come.¹¹

It is my hypothesis that determiners were originally invariable with respect to gender in Afro-Cuban bozal. In a subsequent stage, an initial distinction between *lo* and *la* emerged, followed by a very incipient differentiation between *un*, *uno*, and *una*. Gender agreement between nouns and determiners appears to be more advanced than that of nouns and other noun phrase modifiers, such as adjectives.

D. Pronominal System

Personal pronouns—the only ones to be studied here—are extremely variable in Afro-Cuban bozal, as is shown in the following chart.¹²

SUBJECT		
1st person singular	Yo	(26) Niña, yo va lo Nfinda. Girl, I go into the forest.
1st person plural	Nosotros	(27) Nosotros tá mirá chino. We were looking at the Chinaman.
2nd person singular	Tú	(28) Tú sacá mujé ese. You took that woman out.
	Uté	(29) Uté ve cosa como ese. You see a thing like that.
3rd person singular	Né	(30) Né murí jaya tiempo. He died a long time ago.
Singular and plural	É	(31) É mimo dícl tú tá olé. He said that you are stealing.
	Nelle	(32) Nelle tiene un bariga. She has a belly.
	Neye	(33) Toíto neye tá cargá. All of them are loaded.
Object chart on next page		

OBJECT		
1st person singular	Yo	(34) ¿Quién llama yo? Who calls me?
	Me	(35) Si yo me muere . . . If I die . . .
	Mí	(36) Contramayorá manda mí. The slave driver sends me.
2nd person singular	Uté	(37) E da comé uté tó. He gives you all the food.
	Te	(38) Cuando cometa te salí . . . When the comet showed up to you . . .
	Tí	(39) Yo va contá a tí un cosa. I am going to tell you something.
3rd person singular	Né	(40) Yo vá curá né. I am going to cure him [her?].
	É	(41) Yo tumba é. I throw him down.
	Lo	(42) Pa acé lo que yo quiere . . . To do what I want . . .
Singular and plural	Nelle	(43) Varón quita nelle. Men take away from them.
	Neye	(44) Moso tá mirando neye. The young men are looking at them.

I have found no examples of plural object pronouns for the first and second persons. In the case of the third person, only *nelle/neye* may be singular or plural. A frequent—though far from categoric—feature of Afro-Cuban bozal is the lack of differentiation of subject and object pronouns, particularly in the first and third person singular and the third person plural, as shown in examples 26, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 40, 41, 43, and 44. This alternates with differentiated forms as in examples 38, 39, 42. I have not been able to determine which factors promote each of the third person singular variants (*nelle*, *né*, and *é*). Otheguy (1973:330) suggests that *né* occurs only as a subject pronoun and *é* as an object pronoun. However, in the corpus, I find

several instances—as in example 40—in which *né* is used as a complement.

In one of the oldest samples (allegedly from the eighteenth century), *né* is also used as a copy of the subject (Lezama 1965:176, emphasis mine):

- (45) Mira sojo d'ese nimá
candela *né* parese
¿Qué nimá son ese
que *né* parese majá?

Look at the eyes of that animal
fire *they* look like
What animal is that
which *it* looks like a snake?¹³

One of Lydia Cabrera's informants (1970:259, emphasis mine) employs *né* in identical manner:

- (46) Divino entonce *né* mata mué. . . .
The diviner, then *he* kills the woman. . . .

And a similar function is fulfilled by *lo* in *La Boda de Pancha Jutía and Canuto Raspadura* (Crespo 1847:9-10, emphasis mine):

- (47) Branco que vivi la Bana *lo* comé mu puquitica.
The whites who live in Havana, *they* ate very little.
- (48) Cumpare, poque cunvite *lo* debe sé a la campana
Compadre, because the feast *it* must be held when the bell [rings].

The insertion of a pronoun as a copy of the subject is a feature that is frequently found in creoles.¹⁴

E. Possessives and Parataxis

I have already shown that the determiner *ese* may either precede (as in example 24) or follow the noun (as in example 25) and that in the latter case no article is found in the first position of the noun phrase. The same is true of possessive determiners, although the forms that precede and follow the noun are differentiated:

- (49) Cuando sueta uté va comé *mi* casa (Cabrera 1979:58).
When they let you go, come to my house to eat.
- (17) Tú ve bariga *mío*.
You see my belly.

Also, as is the case in other creole languages, possessive noun phrases are frequently paratactic, i.e., they lack conjoining elements, such as prepositions:

- (50) Garabata, gaina guiné (Cabrera N.d.:Record No. 7, side 2).
Turn around, Guinea hen.
- (51) Ni botón camisa apareció de chino (Cabrera 1979:58).
Not even the button of his shirt was left of the Chinaman.¹⁵

Nevertheless, on occasions, possession is signaled by a prepositional phrase.

- (52) Orí *de* gente (Cabrera 1971:77)
A person's head¹⁶

I tried in vain to determine throughout the corpus the factors that promote one or the other construction. Variation was simply too inconsistent. I decided, then, to concentrate on the speech of three of Lydia Cabrera's informants, two of whom—Francisquilla Ibáñez and Tá Mónico Biabangá—are very often explicitly identified in Cabrera's works. In doing so, I discovered a marked tendency to employ prepositional phrases if one of the nouns is [+ human]:¹⁷

- (53) Barriga de Mabona (Cabrera 1979:174)
Mabona's belly
- (54) Ereniyó de mué (Cabrera 1970:68)
The woman's eyes

The preference for parataxis in Afro-Cuban bozal is not restricted to possessive noun phrases, but is commonly found in other constructions as well. For instance the preposition *a* appeared in just seventeen of seventy-seven possible contexts (22 percent):

- (55) Ekoi viene bucá pa llevá mundo la verdá (Cabrera 1970:259).
The Ekoi come to find [it] to take truth to the world.

The same is true of the preposition *en*, which is absent in 54.2 percent of all cases, as in examples 47 and 12.

F. Verbal System

Bozal has two copulative verbs: *son*—sometimes reduced to *so*—which occurs with predicate nouns as in

- (56) Ese son ereniyó de mué que matá, son Sikán y pescá (Cabrera 1970:68).
Those are the eyes of the woman who was killed, it is [both] Sikán and a fish.

It also occurs with predicate adjectives that indicate a permanent state or condition:

- (57) Allá gaína son grandísimo como vaca (Cabrera 1979:18).
Hens are big like cows there.
- (58) Nelle son burico (Crespo y Borbón 1847:64).
He/she is an ass; they are asses.

The second copula—*tá*—is used with predicate adjectives that indicate a transitory state.

- (59) Yo tá namorá (Fernández 1868a:143).
I am in love.

It also serves as a locative verb:

- (60) Aquí tá yo (Morúa Delgado 1901:37).
Here I am.

Copulative verbs are invariable with respect to person and number, although I have found a few instances of a form *e*, an obvious reduction of Standard Spanish *es*, like in example 2. I also found a variable absence of copula in 12 percent of all cases, particularly in those which signal a transitory stage:

- (61) Pritu separao (Cabrera 1970:263).
The spirit is separate.
- (62) Chino enganchao (Cabrera 1979:58)
The Chinaman is caught.

This tendency towards verbal simplification—so common in creolized codes—is one of the most salient characteristics of Afro-Cuban bozal. Bozal has two basic verbal forms: the first is a reduction of the Spanish infinitive, e.g., *murt*, *dicl*, *llegá*; while the second is similar to the Spanish third person singular present indicative: *mira*, *sabe*, *mata*, *llega*. The first form may be preceded by one of three markers: *ya*, which indicates perfective aspect and rarely appears in the corpus:

- (63) Ya yo vé la cosa mundo (Cabrera 1979:159).
I have seen the Cosa-Mundo.¹⁸

Tá indicates duration, almost always in the present, but occasionally in the past:

- (64) *¿Tú tá hablá? pue yo tá cuchá* (Cabrera 1976:65).
You are speaking? well, I am listening.
- (65) *Yo no tá mirá cuando Cuevita Mabona gonizando* (Cabrera 1979:174).
I wasn't looking when Cuevita Mabona was dying.¹⁹

Va indicates future reference, and, *bozal* distinguishes between the future and other members of the *irrealis* category:

- (66) *Nelle vá llorá* (Fernández 1868a:145).
He/she/they is/are going to cry.

When the first form is unmarked, it indicates punctuality in the past.²⁰

- (67) *Ne murí jaya tiempo* (Cabrera 1970:88).
He died a long time ago.

The second form, which is always unmarked, may refer to a habitual or iterative action.

- (68) *Tó día uté habla con mí* (Cabrera 1970:108).
You speak with me everyday.²¹

Similarly, it may signal *irrealis* modality, with the exception of the future:

- (69) *Si yo me muere . . .* (Cabrera N.d.:Record No. 14, side 2)
If I die . . .

It is used as an imperative as well:

- (70) *Trae akukó* (Cabrera 1971:77).
Bring a rooster.
- (71) *Ndiambo, mira leló* (Cabrera N.d.:Record No. 6, side 2).
Spirit, look at the watch.

It seems to us that the features analyzed here are sufficient to demonstrate that *bozal* exhibits grammatical characteristics—simplification of verbal forms, variable absence of copula, a tendency toward paratactic constructions, etc.—that clearly distinguish it from other Spanish dialects. On the other hand, these features are shared by other widely documented and studied creole languages. Let us now explore the sociohistorical processes that made its birth possible and

that eventually promoted its demise as a regular vehicle of communication.

II. Historical Development

Some scholars such as Sidney Mintz (1971) and Humberto López Morales (1981) have concluded that social conditions in Cuba and in other Spanish possessions were not favorable for the formation and development of creole languages, except in rare circumstances such as the ones surrounding San Basilio de Palenque, in Colombia.²² It is true that historical circumstances in Cuba—when seen as a whole—do not seem propitious for the development and maintenance of a stable creole throughout the country, as was the case in many other European possessions in America. Today, it is clear, however, that far from being a uniform institution, slavery was actually an extremely fluid social reality, which adapted in many different ways to its environment, bringing forth in it many dissimilar reactions. In Cuba, as shall be seen, slavery exhibited different traits at different historical periods and under diverse social conditions. Urban slavery diverged from rural slavery. The institution was not the same at the early historical stages of conquest and colonization and later, after Cuba became a fully developed colony. For this reason, what would not take place on a general level throughout the country could occur—and in fact did occur—in some separate geographical regions or in some individual sectors of society. Thus, some very specific factors of the ever-changing slavery system promoted pidginization and creolization in certain parts of the island; whereas in other regions and sectors they provoked a rapid displacement toward the superstrate language.

The history of slavery in Cuba can be divided into two distinct stages: the pre-plantational period, which comprises the sixteenth, the seventeenth, and part of the eighteenth centuries, and a second phase which emerges during the second half of the eighteenth century and lasts until the abolition of slavery in 1886. Since the sugar plantation becomes the economic core of this second period, I shall call it the plantational stage.²³

After the brief gold rush of the first colonists, Cuban economy was based primarily on the breeding of cattle. This activity demanded vast uninhabited spaces for pasture and very few laborers. For a long time, the most dynamic factor in the Cuban economic complex was the stay of the fleets in the port of Havana. These sources of income, however, were not sufficient to guarantee a high index of growth. The colonists decided to explore other venues of economic development. First, copper mining, whose age of splendor—never

extraordinary—ended around 1610. Also, the building of ships, an industry which did not consolidate until the middle of the eighteenth century. Last but not least, the cultivation of tobacco and the production of sugar cane, which during the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries was of secondary importance. For the first two and a half centuries of Cuban history, the country's pre-plantational economy was based primarily on agriculture (mostly tobacco), cattle raising, and crafts. Capitalist development was still incipient, semi-feudal remnants were numerous, and class tensions were relatively mild. Cuba was composed primarily of very small communities—the only important city was Havana—and small productive units in which masters and laborers were able to establish direct and intimate personal contacts. In other words, it was a society open to the mitigating factors of slavery and not favorable for the maintenance of African languages and the formation of pidgins and creoles. The shift toward Spanish was, at this time, the dominant sociolinguistic force.

Traditional Cuban historiography maintained that the island had remained in total socioeconomic lethargy until the British, who overtook Havana from 1762 to 1763, opened the doors to commerce and unleashed, as if by magic, the forces that would lead to the creation of a new society. Ramiro Guerra (1938:129, 175-176) was a dissenting voice with respect to these views. More recently, Leví Marrero (1978a, 1978b, 1980) has amply demonstrated that the British aggression was preceded by six decades of sustained economic growth. Those years saw the emergence of an incipient capitalist class which descended primarily from the old cattle ranch oligarchy. This class, which acquired substantial wealth between the years of 1741 and 1762, invested primarily in the tobacco and the sugar industries, and these would soon displace cattle raising from the dominant position it maintained until then in the island's economy.

In the second half of the eighteenth century, then, Cuba was ripe for the revolution that would irrevocably transform its social structure. In the 1760s the island had sufficient population and economic development for a transition toward an economy dominated by sugar production. A series of international events, such as the Haitian revolution, would also push it in the direction of a *sui generis* plantational society, similar in some respects to those of Jamaica, Haiti and other European colonies in the Caribbean, but at the same time very different from them; a plantational society that operated under the sign of a peculiar dualism, since the traditional and rather moderate forms of slavery coexisted, in precarious balance, with the new brutal ways of plantation slavery, based primarily on the intensive exploitation of human labor.

The establishment of an economy dominated by sugar production promoted the massive importation of slaves. It is estimated that, through legal or illegal means, more than 700,000 slaves arrived in Cuba in less than a century. Leví Marrero (1983:1, translation mine) explains it thus:

In 1774, the colored population amounted to 75,180 persons, 60 percent of which were slaves; in 1867, the inhabitants with African blood added up to 793,318, and 58 percent were slaves. This multiplication by 7.9 in 93 years is not a sign of a high natural rate of growth of the black and mulatto population; on the contrary, this figure masks a tragic demographic reality, since no less than 752,000 Africans were introduced in the island, legally or illegally, between 1764 and 1868.

A vast and complex ethnic, cultural, and linguistic diversity characterized the African regions from which the Cuban slaves originated. Some groups—the Yoruba, for instance—were well represented and their languages survived until today, under the protection of their religious functions. Most tongues, however, disappeared rather quickly.

Any process of massive repopulation carries with it inevitable cultural and linguistic consequences. And the earliest references to Afro-Cuban bozal speech are from the period of transition toward a plantational economy, in other words, between 1750 and 1800. Pedro Agustín Morell de Santa Cruz, the new bishop of Cuba, arrived in Havana in 1754. He soon asked the priests to try to learn the African languages spoken by slaves. If this were not possible, they, at the very least, ought to learn bozal:²⁴

They therefore have need of a special minister who accommodates to their rudeness and speaks to them with great clarity, repeating the same thing over and over again, and who can teach them in the accents and the corrupt ways in which they pronounce the Spanish language.

In other words, the Bishop proposed the use of bozal as a vehicle of communication between priests and slaves. A few years later, in 1796, Antonio Nicolás Duque de Estrada stressed the same principles in his catechism entitled *Explicación de la doctrina christiana acomodada a la capacidad de los negros bozales*, and unwittingly offered us an initial description of Afro-Cuban bozal:²⁵

So that (the slaves) may understand, it is necessary to use familiar comparisons, and, as much as possible, one must refer to those things that they use: the oxen, the mares, the shacks, the plots, the sugar mill boilers, etc., and as often as possible one should speak to them in the language that they use, without cases, without tenses, without conjunctions, without agreement, without order.

The sudden arrival of hundreds of thousands of Africans in the plantational period left a profound mark in Cuba's cultural and linguistic development. What was the fate of African slaves who arrived in the island after their long voyage? A fortunate few would remain in the cities as domestic servants, and they would be in constant contact with the Spanish speaking population. For these, the process of shifting toward Spanish started immediately. Most Africans, however, were taken to the sugar and the coffee plantations. In the plantations, slaves shared their lives with people of very diverse ethnic and linguistic origin. Their contacts with whites were few and, as a result, their exposure to the Spanish language was limited and sporadic. Let us examine, as an example, the ethnic composition of the personnel at the San Felipe and Santiago sugar mill, in Jibacoa, at the end of the eighteenth century. In 1786 there were 74 slaves, four of them Cuban-born. There were 31 *carabalies* (from the Calabar region), 14 *congós* (Bantu), and one *lucumí* (Yoruba). Marrero (1984:219) tells us that the personnel included one *mayoral* (overseer) from Guanabacoa, one *contramayoral* (driver) from Puerto Príncipe, and three free workers, one of them from the Canary Islands. In most cases, overseers were white and drivers were black. If the three free workers were white, the proportion of blacks at the mill was of 93.7 percent. These conditions, far from being exceptional, were the usual ones throughout the century dominated by a plantational slave economy, particularly in the large centers of sugar production in the provinces of Havana and Matanzas.²⁶ There are still towns in these two regions where over 90 percent of the population is black. Situations such as these are extremely favorable for a process of pidginization and creolization. As Gillian Sankoff (1979:24-25) explains:

The plantation system is so crucial because it was unique in creating a catastrophic break in linguistic tradition that is unparalleled. It is difficult to conceive of another situation where people arrived with such a variety of native languages; where they were so cut off from their native language groups; where the size of no one language group was sufficient to insure its survival; where no second language was shared by enough people to serve as a useful vehicle of intercommunication; and where the legitimate language . . . was inaccessible to almost everyone. . . . I think that to understand what happened in any particular case, we must become better historians. We must learn more about their conditions on plantations in order to understand what kinds of communication possibilities existed there, and how these affected pidginization and creolization.

In the case of Cuba, there exists documentary proof of pidginization. Several scholars make reference (Pichardo 1875; Ortiz

1916; López Morales 1971; Moreno Fraginals 1978) to "word lists" of diverse provenance that were used by masters as a rudimentary form of communicating with African slaves.²⁷ Let us examine some of these terms:

cucha-cucha: to hear, to listen
 llari-llari: to cry, to get sick
 quiquiribú: to die
 mano-machete (literally: machete hand): right
 mano-garabato (literally: *garabato* hand): left.

Unfortunately, those who have studied this topic have limited themselves to exploring the probable origin of these lexical items, without commenting on their importance as a clear documentary evidence of pidginization. López Morales (1981:326) argues, for instance, that only one of these words, *piquinini*, is of probable Portuguese origin and that this fact disproves that bozal was a creolized code. The difficulty resides in identifying all possibility of pidginization and creolization with the theory that traces the origin of all Caribbean creoles to a Portuguese-based African creole, later relexified. Today the monogenetic theory is in a frank process of revision.²⁸ What is important about these word lists is that they document the existence of a simplified code which made use of reduplication (a frequent feature of pidgins) and which served a communicative purpose between slaves and plantation administrators. Furthermore, plantation slaves rarely shared the same "tribal or cultural origin" (Moreno Fraginals 1978:8). This means, then, that the pidginized code had to serve as well as an elementary form of communication among many Africans who did not share a common language. It does not seem probable that a stable pidgin emerged in Cuba. Rather, the conditions in which rural slaves lived required a rapid expansion of the pidginized variety in order to more adequately satisfy their communicative demands. Although not a great deal of data on which to base my hypotheses exists, the historical information seems to indicate that Cuba must have passed from a "pre-pidgin continuum" to an accelerated process of creolization.

Some nineteenth century Cuban writers referred to Afro-Cuban bozal speech. Esteban Pichardo (1875:x, translation mine) describes it thus in his *Diccionario Provincial casi razonado de Vozes y Frases Cubanas*:

Another relaxed and confused language can be heard daily throughout the island, *everywhere*, among blacks who come from Africa, as it happens with the French Creole of Santo Domingo: this language is common and identical among blacks, be they from any nation, and they keep it forever, unless they have come as young

children: it is a disfigured, mumbled Castilian, without agreement, number, declension nor conjugation, without a strong R, without final S or D, LL is frequently confused with N, E with I, G with V, etc.; in other words, a jargon that results more confusing in those who have most recently arrived; but which can be understood by any Spanish speaker, with the exception of some words that are common to all and that need to be translated. . . . Blacks born in Cuba speak the same as whites in their vicinity, although in Havana and Matanzas there are some called *Curros*, that use an I instead of an R or an L [sic].

Pichardo's observations, although inaccurate in some respects, are of extraordinary documentary value for several reasons. First, the scholar points out that bozal was a language *common to all slaves*, "be they from any nation." I have already stated that Africans of very diverse ethnic and linguistic provenance were brought to Cuba as slaves. If bozal is simply a "corrupt" variety of Spanish, disfigured by the interference of multiple African languages, no one would expect such a code to be described as a language that is common to all. On the contrary, one would expect the members of each group to introduce specific features from their native tongues. In addition, Pichardo—like Duque de Estrada before him—describes some of the grammatical traits of bozal and I can corroborate that they coincide with those found in my corpus. Finally, the scholar very perceptively points out that bozal is similar to the "Creole French" spoken in Santo Domingo, in other words, to Haitian Creole.

One of Pichardo's affirmations, however, seems to disprove that a process of creolization took place in Cuba. It is well known that the principal creators of a creolized code are the members of the second generation—the children of foreigners—who expand it and use it as a native language. Pichardo states that "blacks born in Cuba speak the same as whites," a thesis also sustained by Bachiller y Morales (1881:100-101) and apparent in the 19th century vernacular theater, in which bozal speech was exclusively reserved for African characters. The answer to this apparent contradiction can be found in the following affirmation of José María de la Torre (1854:54, translation and emphasis mine):

Blacks born in Cuba can also be divided into those born in cities and towns, and those born and raised in the countryside (called *criollos de campo* [countryside creoles]) since the latter possess *peculiar and rougher language and manners*.

In other words, the authors cited previously (including the vernacular theater playwrights) based their observations of bozal on the speech of *urban* blacks, whose living conditions disfavored the preservation of a creole language. De la Torre simply confirms an undisputable fact: in certain *rural* areas where the black population had little contact

with whites, many descendants of African slaves regularly used bozal. This situation persisted until well advanced the present century. Once more Lydia Cabrera's informants provide proof: Francisquilla Ibáñez, Calixta Morales, José de Calazán Herrera, Juan O'Farrill, J. S. Baró—none of them was born in Africa. All of them spoke in bozal well into the 20th century. By that time, however, use of bozal was exceptional, rather than common.²⁹

Just as historical developments favored the formation of Afro-Cuban bozal, further historical events provoked its demise as an everyday language and promoted its displacement by standard Cuban Spanish. During the 1860s, the slave trade was abolished and, with it, the continued linguistic contact with the African continent. Later, the Ten Years War (1868-1878) and other developments led to the eventual abolition of slavery in 1886. The change from slave to free labor coincided with a period of revolution in the sugar industry. Small, traditional sugar mills were displaced by huge centrales that attracted workers from many different parts of the country toward the central and eastern regions. A massive process of internal migration took place and substitution of bozal by Spanish intensified. Blacks and whites fought together in the War of Independence (1895-1898).³⁰ Later, in the Republican era, the railroad—which brought together eastern and western Cuba at the beginning of the twentieth century—and the construction of the Central Highway had a strong integrative impact on the Cuban population. The use of standard Spanish was also favored by increased access to formal education and to the media, particularly to radio broadcasts. These are some of the reasons why usage of bozal as a regular system of communication was restricted by the 1950s to older people, especially in those regions where the black population remained relatively stable and isolated. It is precisely in those areas—some towns of Matanzas like El Perico, Pedro Betancourt, and Unión de Reyes, for instance—where the original African tongues were preserved as vernacular languages for a longer period of time. Today, all Afro-Cuban languages (Lucumí, Congo, and Abakuá) as well as bozal are used exclusively for religious purposes.

III. Religious Usage

Both *Regla de Ocha* (*Santería*) and the various *Reglas Congas* (*Palo Mayombe*, *Kimbisa*, etc.) make use of Afro-Cuban bozal speech. Congo rituals rather early initiated a process of shift from the original language toward Spanish, as can be observed in the many *mambos*, or songs, that are intoned in standard Spanish. Many others, as can be

attested by attending congo liturgies and by listening to Lydia Cabrera's (no date) music recordings, are entirely in bozal. This language is also the preferred means of addressing the spirits of the dead during congo ceremonies. Lydia Cabrera (1979:121, translation and emphasis mine) explains:

It is curious that the *Nganga* priests that we have met, who spoke and knew long prayers in "Congo language", would mix the Bantu words with Spanish ones pronounced as *bozales* in addressing the spirits, something that does not happen in the case of the *Olorichas* (*santeros*) who know their language well and address their gods in *Anagó* (Yoruba). An old Congo priest explains, with more or less accuracy, that "this was done by Congos and their children for the benefit of the *rellollos* (members of the third generation) at a time when everyone spoke Spanish, just in case a *munangüeye* (a brother) could not understand them and *because this is the way the dead people liked to talk, since they spoke in bozal.*

In other words, members of the very pragmatic congo Reglas, devoted primarily to the cult of the dead and to their manipulation through magical means, use bozal or Spanish in addressing the spirits, since the African tongue may not have been their native language. On the other hand, members of Regla de Ocha trust in the linguistic competence of their *orishas* (deities), who may understand Spanish, but prefer their native Yoruba.

Both *paleros* and *santeros* frequently participate in *misas espirituales* (spiritual masses), that is, syncretic rituals whose primary objective is to seek communication with and protection from the spirits of the dead, particularly through the provocation of the state of trance in one or more mediums. In all the *misas espirituales* attended by me, trance speaking has been in bozal. Although most speakers employ a number of traditional bozal features (verbal invariability, paratactic constructions, lack of gender and number agreement), by no means is the bozal used in these sessions a uniform code. Some, for instance, employ verbal inflections more frequently than others. It is believed that the closer this *lengua* (language) resembles Spanish, the more "refined" the dead person was in his or her life. Nevertheless, it is important to keep a formal distinction between Spanish (the language of everyday interaction) and the code supposedly employed by the spirits of the dead. This distinction serves two principal purposes: 1) it emphasizes the difference between "normal" profane talk and communication with the spirits; 2) it symbolically distinguishes between the initiated, adept at understanding bozal, and the beginners or uninitiated, who miss a great deal of what is being said due to their lack of competence in this code.

Some features observed by me in one informant are the following:³¹

1. Unification of subject and object pronouns:

Tá minf kun yo.
Literally: She/he is coming with I.

Akoddá ri yo.
Literally: He remembered I.

2. Lack of verbal inflections and regularization of forms:

Tá minf
Is coming

Murú
Dead

3. Variable substitution of /d/ by /r/ in initial position:

Rió [Dios]
God

Risi [dice]
Say

4. Variable raising of /o/ into /u/ and of /e/ into /i/, particularly in unstressed final position:

Murú
Dead

Malafu [malafu]
Firewater

Ri [de]
Of

5. The lexicon is for the most part Spanish, but there is a frequent substitution of more contemporary or "sophisticated" terms by older or simpler ones, sometimes associated with the slave experience: *baracón* (*barracón* [slave quarters]) instead of *casa* (house); *agua ri Papa Rió* (literally: *agua de Papa Dios* [water of Daddy God]) rather than *agua bendita* (holy water); *karo mucho buya* (literally: *carro mucha bulla* [car lots of noise]) in place of *ambulance*; *welerura* (*hueledura*) instead of *perfume* (perfume).

It is important to stress that, in spite of variations, there is a considerable degree of internal coherence in the bozal speech of this informant, and that communication is rapid and fluid. It is evident in

listening to her that her speech performance, far from being chaotic or random, is governed by grammatical and phonological rules. It is obvious, moreover, that this person could not have attained this linguistic competence by simply reading written sources in which bozal appears. Attendants to the *misas espirituales* speak to the spirits in Spanish, who always respond in bozal. Since some may not understand what is being said to them, certain older and more experienced members of the religious community assume the role of interpreters and translate the spirit's messages. Bozal, then, still plays an important role in Afro-Cuban religion and it is solely in this context that it has been preserved until today.

Any attempt at verifying prior creolization must take into consideration, as Rickford (1977) has pointed out, linguistic and sociohistorical criteria. Both are essential in analyzing the peculiar fate of Afro-Cuban bozal and its accelerated rate of change. A plantational economy and society emerged and disappeared in Cuba in record time: a little over a century of profound technical, demographic, political, and social transformations. In parallel fashion, the sociolinguistic profile of the island suffered radical alterations. One of them was the emergence of a creolized language called bozal, which in the same period of time was born, developed, and disappeared as a regular means of communication, while retaining important religious functions. Language is always intimately related to the ways in which people think, feel, work, and live. The evolution of Afro-Cuban bozal speech vividly illustrates this relationship.

Notes

¹ "Exclamations by a black man during the festivities celebrated on the occasion of the inauguration of the patron saint of this town of San Marcos, on April 25th, 1857." In Fernández de la Vega and Pamies (1973:125).

² For the ease of readers not familiar with Spanish and Afro-Cuban speech styles, I have translated the examples of bozal into English. To facilitate locating and referencing the different examples, I have numbered them; numbers appear in parentheses and are not part of original texts.

³ For a comparative study of bozal in various Spanish-speaking contexts see Granda (1968 and 1978) and Lipski (1986 and 1987).

⁴ Cabrera (1970:80). Cabrera's informant is referring to the central myth of the Afro-Cuban Abakuá Secret Society, according to which Tanze (the sacred fish) became Ekue,

the holy drum. Cabrera (1975:111) has gathered an anaforuana or Abakuá ritual drawing which depicts the moment in which the fish is transformed into the sacred drum.

⁵ A very stereotyped bozal can also be found in old Cuban songs interpreted by the likes of Celia Cruz and Miguelito Valdés, but here its use is purely rhetorical.

⁶ Each of these languages exists as part of a specific Afro-Cuban religious tradition.

⁷ Francisquilla Ibáñez used bozal speech almost exclusively. Calazán Herrera, on the contrary, would speak in standard Spanish in everyday interaction but would move toward bozal when he got mad or excited. Both were born in Cuba, of African parents. (Lydia Cabrera, personal communication).

⁸ For instance, *dó* (two), *tré* (three), *mucho* (many), and *tó* (all).

⁹ Here I use the term *presupposed* in Bickerton's (1981:248) sense, to indicate information presumed shared by speaker and listener.

¹⁰ Cases such as (16), (17), and (18) require an article in standard Spanish.

¹¹ I found only one instance of "esa" in my corpus.

¹² For clarity, the references from the examples in the chart are listed here:

- (26) Cabrera 1971:14;
- (27) Cabrera 1974:58;
- (28) Cabrera 1973:27;
- (29) Cabrera Paz 1857:120;
- (30) Cabrera 1979:88;
- (31) Cabrera 1971:77;
- (32) Morúa Delgado 1891:124;
- (33) Cabrera Paz 1857:125;
- (34) Cabrera 1979:167;
- (35) Cabrera N.d.: Record Number 14, side 2;
- (36) Suárez y Romero 1880:69;
- (37) Cabrera 1970:263;
- (38) Cabrera 1979:81;
- (39) Barnet 1966:154;
- (40) Suárez y Romero 1880:69;
- (41) Cabrera 1979:43;
- (42) Cabrera 1979:137;
- (43) Cabrera 1970:88; and
- (44) Cabrera Paz 1857:125.

¹³ I have provided a literal translation (not very grammatical in English) to illustrate the feature of subject copying being discussed here.

¹⁴ See, for instance, Bickerton (1981:34-37) who argues that these constructions are rudimentary strategies of relativization. See also Romaine (1988:241-251). In two of my samples [the second clause in (45) and in (47)] I find the relative pronoun *que*, yet a personal pronoun still copies the subject. The scarcity of my data precludes a detailed analysis of this feature.

¹⁵ In standard Spanish these noun phrases would be: *Gallina de Guinea* and *el botón de la camisa*.

16 Another example is

Ese son ereniyó *de* mué. . . .
Those are the eyes of the woman. . . .

The Abakuá word *ereniyó* means *eyes*, but it also stands as a term that designates the ritual drawings of the Afro-Cuban Abakuá Secret Society. For information on these fascinating *ereniyó* or *anaforuana*, see Cabrera (1975) and Thompson (1983).

17 These same informants said, for instance: "pilita fula" (a small pile of gunpowder), "botón camisa" (shirt's button), "casa lo ingenio" (the sugarmill's house). At the same time, I found a few exceptions to the general principle I have just outlined. Francisquilla, for example, also said: "maca *de* buey" (an oxen's mark). Tá Mónico, on the other hand, once said: "suede lo rey Ekoi" (the charm of the Ekoi king). The latter also seems to optionally employ a contraction when the preposition *de* precedes a third person personal pronoun like *e*: "con cuero *dé*" (with its skin), "con ropa *dé*" (with his clothes).

18 The "Cosa-Mundo" is the name of a cauldron or *nganga* used in the Afro-Cuban Congo religion.

19 Please notice that in this example a verbal form marked with *tá* occurs at the same time as an inflected form that signals durativity (*gonizando*). This is very infrequent, since verbal invariability is present in 87.6% of all sentences in my corpus. For a comparative study of the feature *tá*, see Lipski (1987).

20 [+punctual] indicates a single action, [-punctual] indicates a habitual or continuing one. Please observe the contrast between "E mimo dici tú tá olé" (he himself said that you are stealing) and "E tá dici: tú búca la cosa güeno" (he is/was saying: look for a good thing). Stative verbs do not admit a *tá* marker. In my corpus, for instance, we find "yo sabe que son" (I know what it is) and "yo no sabé ná" (I didn't know anything), but "yo tá sabé" is not possible.

21 Please note the contrast between examples 67 and 64.

22 San Basilio de Palenque, near Cartagena, was originally a settlement of maroon slaves. With regards to the Palenquero language, see Escalante (1954), Bickerton and Escalante (1970), Granda (1978), Friedemann and Patiño (1983), Megenney (1986), Lipski (1987). Mintz's arguments are the following: in general terms, Spanish colonies in the Caribbean were not demographically dominated by inhabitants of African origin; also, in these colonies the transit from slavery to freedom was, in most cases, relatively rapid and continuous. López Morales (1981) bases his objections on the fact that there is no evidence that slaves who were brought to Cuba had prior knowledge of a Portuguese-based Creole. He believes that bozal merely illustrates a little uniform process of Spanish acquisition.

23 For a detailed study of the presence of blacks in Cuba, see Castellanos and Castellanos (1988 and 1990). For a good outline of pre-plantational economy in Cuba, see Knight (1970, chapter 1) and Manuel Moreno Friginals (1964).

24 In Marrero 1980:160.

25 Moreno Friginals (1978:208) indicates that the first edition of this catechism goes back to 1796. There was a second one in 1818 and a third one in 1823. Recently, Javier Lavifia (1989) has published an excellent critical edition of this text, and the paragraph

cited appears on page 67. I also worked with a microfilm of the original manuscript (no date and no page numbers).

26 Marrero (1984:226, translation mine) adds: "In these new communities, created for the sole purpose of producing sugar, the composition of the population was numerically dominated by the slave caste, constituted for the most part by bozales brought from Africa under the command of overseers and drivers, and by a minimal proportion of whites or freedmen, most of them wage earners and their relatives."

27 López Morales (1971:39) says that Ortiz and Pichardo quote these terms "without any other source than their personal experience." Moreno Fraguas (1978:8) has found a list of 56 terms written by the administrator of a sugar mill. This list can be found at the Fondo Valle archive, in the city of Sancti Spiritus, Cuba. This finding confirms the existence of a primitive vocabulary employed in sugar mills to communicate with recently arrived slaves, in other words, it attests to pidginization.

28 A discussion of this topic goes beyond the possibilities of this article. For a summary of the diverse hypotheses that attempt to explain the origin of pidgins, see Romaine 1988, chapter 2.

29 Given the social conditions of linguistic heterogeneity and relative isolation that characterized Cuban plantations, it is not surprising that the members of the first generation had to initiate the process of expansion of the pidginized code. Some authors do not consider this to be an abnormal situation. See Woolford (1983:5) and Hymes (1971:79).

30 My own first contact with bozal was through my paternal grandfather, who participated in the War of Independence in spite of his youth (he was only fifteen at the time). Through his contacts with blacks, he "picked up" a few bozal phrases and would use them as interjections in everyday conversation. It was only much later, when I was studying this code, that I realized that my grandfather's "peculiar" expressions came from Afro-Cuban *bozal* speech. I wish to dedicate this essay to his memory.

31 This is supposedly the spirit of María Josefa, an old black slave who does not like to drink *aguardiente* (rum) but anisette. This spirit always manifests itself through the same medium, and the latter refers to it as "*mi negra*" (my black woman). Although in previous examples I have kept the orthography used by the authors, in these I follow a more phonetic transcription. Since recording and note-taking are strictly forbidden in these ceremonies, I decided to concentrate on the speech of only one informant, one who speaks a great deal and in a loud voice.

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