

## Book Review

Byrd, Steven. *Calunga and the legacy of an African language in Brazil*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2012. Pp. 278.

Reviewed by TJERK HAGEMEIJER

### Description

Calunga is a currently disappearing and ill-described Afro-Brazilian speech variety which is mainly used in and around the town of Patrocínio in the state of Minas Gerais by an estimated couple of hundred of mostly older men, the so-called *calungadores*, i.e. speakers of Calunga. The main difference between this speech variety and regional Brazilian Portuguese can be found in the lexicon, which exhibits a substantial number of items derived from Western Bantu languages. Calunga is used as an in-group language related to secrecy and solidarity. Studies on Calunga are recent, dating back to the mid-1990s.

The book is structured in two main parts, each of which contains three chapters, followed by an appendix, abbreviations, endnotes, references and an index. The illustrations include ten figures, which come in the form of black and white photos, two maps and twenty three tables with linguistic information.

The first part of the book, “Overview” (pp. 1-100), contains three chapters: an introduction, a historical overview and a linguistic overview. The introduction provides basic information on Calunga, including a small sample text with translation, and lays out the aims of the book, which is to place this speech variety in the larger picture of language contact in Brazil,

in particular with respect to the contribution of African languages. The chapter further holds brief information on the data collection and the resources used, as well as a 4-page glossary of terminology frequently used throughout the book and assumed to be less familiar to the readership. The second chapter, “Historical overview”, deals with the period of Portuguese maritime expansion and slave trade in the Atlantic area. Chapter three, “Linguistic overview”, presents the consequences of language contact between Portuguese and African languages during this period of history. From pidginization and creolization in the Atlantic sphere, the book takes us to the role of African languages in Brazil, which expresses itself in specific speech varieties such as Calunga and Cafundó, and possibly also at a more widespread level in the lexicon and grammar. Parallels with Afro-hispanic contact varieties are also briefly addressed in this chapter.

Part two of the book, entitled “Linguistic description” (pp. 103-198) starts out with sociolinguistic and sociohistorical considerations regarding the Calunga speech community. The author suggests that Calunga is likely to be the product of contact at the colonial haciendas and hints at the historical importance of cattle driving in the region. The sociohistorical setting is followed by two chapters that deal with the linguistic data. Chapter five provides a Calunga glossary of 307 items and their respective meaning, proposed etymologies and a lexical analysis. It is argued that the Calunga lexicon is particularly frequent in certain semantic fields and thus more like a jargon that is used for selected topics and not for general communicative purposes. Many of the items are africanisms that can be traced back to western Bantu languages, in particular Kikongo, Kimbundu and Umbundu. We also learn that a subset of the analyzed Calunga lexicon is also found in the surrounding regional variety of Portuguese. The specific lexical items are by and large nouns, but a small number of verbs are also provided. The final part of this chapter contains an extensive table comparing Calunga items to those found in other varieties of Afro-Brazilian speech (*Língua Negro da Costa*, *Diaeto Crioulo Sanjoanense*, *Undaca de Quimbundo*, *Cafundó* and *Falares Africanos da Bahia*) and goes on to conclude that there is only a partial lexical similarity with respect to the africanisms in these other speech varieties.

Chapter 6 provides a description and analysis of Calunga grammar. The Bantu items are argued to be fully integrated in the phonology of (regional) Brazilian Portuguese. The section on morphosyntax shows that most specific features of Calunga also occur in regional Portuguese (e.g. occasional number mismatches in the DP, reduction of verbal inflection). The appendix following the final chapter contains parts of transcribed interviews with Calunga speakers and their translation.

## Evaluation

This title is a valuable contribution to the available literature on the impact of African languages in Brazil and to the debate on the status of Afro-Brazilian speech communities. The author lays all his cards on the table by including plenty of data samples in the second part and in the appendix of the book, providing the reader with a thorough insight into Calunga's specific lexicon and its behavior in context.

Afro-Brazilian speech varieties and so-called Brazilian Vernacular Portuguese (BVP) have been the object of a significant amount of studies and controversy. Some authors, such as Guy (1981, a.o.), Holm (2004), and Mello (1997) have placed BVP in the realm of creole studies, whereas others, such as Naro & Scherre (2000) have rejected the creole connection, emphasizing the role of drift. However, despite the lack of consensus, most studies seem to agree on the fact that historically non-native adult language acquisition and nativization played a role with respect to shaping BVP. In their comprehensive study of Afro-Portuguese speech in the state of Bahia, Lucchesi, Baxter & Ribeiro (2009) strongly focus on the role of second language acquisition and irregular linguistic transmission as the driving force behind the formation of BVP. Hence, it might actually be the case that terms such as creole, semi-creole or even anti-creole (Couto 1992) have been hindering the debate on BVP, which would probably benefit from a stronger focus on historical SLA and the degree of contact, rather than on a specific, inherently controversial type of outcome.

Although the author does not take a strong position on the status of Calunga throughout the book, he argues, on p. 191, that a "(...) mixed (or intertwined) language model is also appropriate to consider for Calunga (...). That is, Calunga features a strong lexical component and uses the dominant grammar of the immediate surroundings, and the speakers have a sense that the speech pertains to a specific ethnic group." Under the mixed language hypothesis, which typically requires bilingualism at an initial stage, Calunga would be similar to, for instance, Anglo-Romani, which mixes English grammar with Romani lexicon and where the group shifts to the L2. However, it is rather unlikely that Calunga qualifies as a case of mixing in the sense of, for instance, Bakker & Muysken (1994). Additional lexical studies on Calunga could prove useful, since the whole lexicon of an intertwined language is predominantly derived from one source, setting these cases apart from extensive borrowing, where the percentages of lexicon from the external source are much lower and typically have a small impact on the core lexicon (Winford 2003: 173). As Byrd himself points out on p. 141, "(...) calungadores typically do not engage in lengthy conversations about daily topics in Calunga; instead, it is usually reserved for a number of select topics (...)". To this we should add the fact that the number of African-

-derived verbs is highly limited (22 verbs are listed on p. 142) and they have all been integrated into the class of *-ar* verbs (e.g. *assungá(r)* ‘to come, to leave’). Here it should of course be noted that *-a* is also the typical final vowel of the verbal complex in Bantu. One of the verbs, *aprumá(r)*, actually covers many different meanings and can be considered a hallmark of Calunga (ex. *aprumá calunga* ‘speak Calunga’, *apruma um zipaque* ‘give me some money, etc.’). Since Calunga is predominantly used by male speakers for cowboy-related issues, it makes sense to describe this speech as a jargon relying on considerable lexical borrowing. The only functional domain where Calunga is claimed not to follow BVP are the personal pronouns (e.g. *(o) camano-cá* ‘I’; *os camano-aí* ‘you’ (pl., masc.)). However, note that this strategy employs Portuguese function words (determinants – *o, os* ‘the’; adverbs – *cá* ‘here’, *aí* ‘there’) and does not appear to follow Bantu languages either. Moreover, a close look at the corpus in the appendix shows that regular Portuguese pronouns also occur to some extent.

The following excerpt from the appendix illustrates the Calunga speech variety:

*“Muintus cumba, camanu! Ai camanim, agora vortanu a falá lá donde cê tá aprumanu cuzeca, eu fui aprumá ua marafa na cupia, camanu, lá naquei...”* (Translation: “Many years, man! There, boy, now returning to speak about where you were sleeping, I went to drink cachaça [sugar cane rum], man, there in that...” (p. 217)

It follows from this example that functional material is from Portuguese, such as *a, donde, cê, eu, ua, na, naquei* (Standard Portuguese *a, donde, você, eu, uma, na, naquele*). Portuguese morphology is also present, for instance in *muintus*, form Ptg. *muitos* (masc., pl.), which agrees with the (invariable) Bantu-derived item *cumba*, corresponding to Ptg. *anos* ‘years’, and in the gerund forms *vortanu* and *aprumanu* (Ptg. *voltando* and “*aprumando*”), or the irregular inflection *fui* ‘I went’ from the verb *ir* ‘to go’. As a side comment, any connection with “traditional” creole languages can be readily discarded in the light of these morphological features. This is particularly relevant since a speech variety similar to Calunga, namely Cafundó, spoken in the state of São Paulo, is incorrectly listed as a creole language in the current Ethnologue edition. Calunga is not on this list and hopefully will not be.

The treatment of the African lexicon, which is of course the hallmark of Calunga and, correspondingly, a central aspect of the linguistic description, has a few shortcomings. Chapter 5 provides a list of Calunga lexicon, which consists predominantly of bantuisms, together with proposed etymologies, but instead of a phonetic transcription these items have been adapted to Portuguese spelling rules. Fortunately, the phonetic and phonological analysis provided in Chapter 6 is based on phonetic transcriptions. Moreover,

not all the etymologies are easily acceptable because in a number of cases it is unclear how certain sound changes would have applied. For instance, Calunga *mucafo* 'old' is claimed to be derived from Kimbundu *mukulo*, *mukulu* 'old' and *camano* from Kimbundu *muana*, *mona* 'sun, daughter' or genitive *kamona* 'of the son'. In the latter case, because of the [u]-ending, one could think that Ptg. *mano* 'brother' would even stand a better chance. Diminutive *camanim* (cf. excerpt above) could then be related to BVP *manim* (for standard *maninho*) 'little brother'. The phonetic transcription of the Bantu items, including information on the Bantu stress or tone patterns, would also have been useful for a more in-depth comparison. The author further assumes that bantuisms in Calunga are loanwords lacking an active Bantu noun class system. While this is obviously true, it would have been interesting to analyze to what extent the original noun classes are still visible and what they tell us about the process of lexical borrowing from languages with noun classes. In general, the book could be more informative about the African contribution. In fact, some lack of familiarity with African languages seems to follow from a quote in the terminology in Chapter 1, where it is stated that "Greenberg (1966) has categorized Bantu with Mande languages of West-Africa, which together form the Niger-Congo language family (...)". Niger-Congo of course includes many other West-African families, one of which is the Benue-Congo family, from which Bantu branches as a subfamily. Moreover, the rather short section on morphosyntax (Chapter 6) would have benefitted from aligned glosses in addition to the translation, in particular for those who are not so familiar with Portuguese.

Since the book contains a wealth of sociohistorical background information and a non-theoretically informed linguistic description, it will certainly appeal to a wider audience interested in language contact on Brazilian soil. The author does a good job describing a badly known speech variety and placing it within the wider, ongoing debate on contact between Portuguese and African languages. The degree of satisfaction obtained from this book will depend strongly on the readers' expectations. If you are interested in the broad sociolinguistic and sociohistorical settings of Calunga, data samples and an extensive review of the literature, this book is highly fulfilling. If, on the other hand, you are looking for an in-depth linguistic analysis of Calunga or strong claims concerning the exact place of Calunga in contact linguistics, your expectations may not be fully met. Irrespective of your background, however, *Calunga and the legacy of an African language in Brazil* will lure you into new and old questions regarding the formation of Brazilian Portuguese in all its many dimensions.

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Tjerk Hagemeyer  
Faculdade de Letras da Universidade de Lisboa  
Centro de Linguística da Univ. de Lisboa  
t.hagemeyer@clul.ul.pt