

Atlantic features in Asian varieties of Creole Portuguese*

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Abstract

This article identifies five Atlantic features in Asian varieties of Creole Portuguese. These reflect common substrate influence from Niger-Congo languages converging with Portuguese forms. This study supports the hypothesis of Dalgado (1917: 41) that the frequent contact between speakers of the different varieties of Asian Creole Portuguese had led to a partial reciprocal diffusion of these creoles' features, setting this scenario within the larger context of the hypothesis of Clements (2000) that there existed both a general pidgin (spoken in Africa and Asia) and distinctive regional pidgins more influenced by local substrate languages. After examining the possibility that the Malayo-Portuguese feature of marking distributive plurality through noun reduplication may have spread to Indo-Portuguese, this study claims that at least five features of Portuguese-based creoles in Asia had their origin in Africa: (1) the form vai 'to go'; (2) completive kaba; (3) the coordinating conjunction ku; (4) the preposition na; (5) the negator nunca. This leads to the conclusion that what the Portuguese brought with them to Asia in the 16th century was a general Portuguese pidgin that had been developing in Africa during the second half of the 15th century. This pidgin must have been far more variable and much less developed (i.e. less influenced by substrate languages) than the modern creoles-in all probability a pre-pidgin foreigner talk continuum.

1. Introduction

Sun Lok Kee, one of my favorite restaurants in New York's China Town, offers a dish called "Scallops in Portuguese Sauce." It is a curry sauce, and

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perhaps evidence for Dalgado’s theory of partial reciprocal transfusion (1917: 41) since the Cantonese clearly associated the Indian spice with the Portuguese traders who may have introduced it to them as they continued travelling eastward from India. My culinary clincher is the “creole” dish I had in Macau, which was very African.

This study is about Atlantic features in Asian varieties of Creole Portuguese, a subject that has interested me since I surveyed these creoles in Holm 1989 (pp. 259-303). As luck would have it, I’m now in a better position to recognize Atlantic features in Asian creoles since the publication of *Comparative Creole Syntax* (Holm & Patrick, eds., 2007), which makes it easier to identify structural features common to the Atlantic creoles based not just on Portuguese but on other languages as well. These frequently reflect common substrate influence from Niger-Congo languages, and – particularly relevant here – these shared features sometimes suggest convergence between Portuguese and African languages. Of course these features could also have converged further with language universals or features in those languages with which restructured Portuguese later came into contact in Asia .

2. Partial reciprocal diffusion

Dalgado (1917: 41) hypothesized that the frequent contact between speakers of the different varieties of Asian Creole Portuguese had led to a partial reciprocal diffusion of these creoles’ features. Evidence that these include morphosyntactic as well as lexical features can be found in the fact that Diu Indo-Portuguese (DIP) has more than one strategy for marking plurality. Most often it uses grammaticalized *tud* [‘all’] as a plural marker:

- (1) DIP *mĩ* *tud* *amig*
 1s.POSS PL friend
 ‘my friends’ (Cardoso, 2009: 165)

But, more relevant to Dalgado’s hypothesis, is the fact that Cardoso’s DIP “corpus contains rare examples of nominal reduplication with a pluralising function”:

- (2) DIP *es* *tud rækri* *tud* *ε* *də* *moyr~moyr*
 DEM all food.stall all COP.NPST of Muslim~Muslim
 ‘All those food stalls belong to Muslims.’ (ibid. 178)

Cardoso notes that “nominal reduplication imparts a distributive meaning...[and] used to be more prevalent in past stages of the language” (ibid. 177-178). In fact, reduplication is the only pluralizing strategy found in the earliest known DIP corpus (Schuchardt, 1883).

The relevance of the latter structure to Dalgado's hypothesis is that it may have originated not in Indo-Portuguese but rather in Malayo-Portuguese. Regarding the Indo-Portuguese of Ceylon (modern Sri Lanka), Dalgado (1998[1900]: 81) noted that "Em regra, os substantivos formam o plural com o acrescentamento de um *s*: *animals, reptils, pãos, corações, pecadores*." ['As a rule nouns form the plural by adding an *s*....'] but he went on to list a number of exceptions, including a word meaning 'sons and daughters', *fifes* or *fifi* (ibid.), noting that in the indigenous languages there are words equivalent to *mother father* for 'parents' and to *daughter son* for 'children of both sexes.'

Ferraz (1987: 352) notes that the reduplication of nouns to indicate plurality

"...occurs in Indo-Portuguese, and Dalgado posited a tendency for features to occur in an easterly direction...it might not be irrelevant that reduplication of nouns is a common way to express plurality in Malay, as in *sayur-sayur* 'vegetables', from *sayur* 'vegetable'. This construction could have spread from Malayo-Portuguese, on the Malay model, to the other Portuguese Creoles of Asia" (1987: 352)

He goes on to cite reduplicated plural forms in the creoles of Singapore and Hong Kong, as well as the Indo-Portuguese of Mangalore and Nagappattinam.

Then he suggests that forms like *fifes* or *fifi* in the creoles of Diu and Sri Lanka cited above "could assist in incorporation of other forms." As a matter of fact, Malay has not only strict reduplications like *sayur-sayur*, but also conjoined nouns like *ibu-bapa*, literally 'mother-father' for 'parents' that seem likely to have served as models for such creole constructions as Papia Kristang *mai-pai* 'parents' (Kaye & Tosco, 2001: 89). Albring & Lourenço (2004: 30) attribute the presence of reduplicated plurals to the influence of Malayo-Portuguese on the Indian varieties due to "a presença...de malaios em Sri Lanka e na Índia, canalizados, por exemplo, para o serviço militar, sobretudo pelos Holandeses" ['the presence...of Malays in Sri Lanka and India, brought in, for example, for military service, especially by the Dutch'].

3. A debate: is Africa part of Asia?

The east coast of Africa is on the Indian Ocean, and historically coastal Mozambique was part of Portugal's colonial *Estado da Índia* for nearly 500 years. The question is whether the restructured Portuguese of Africa played a role in Dalgado's partial reciprocal diffusion. Given what we know about the diffusion of lexical and grammatical features of restructured English from the Atlantic area to the Pacific (e.g. Holm, 1992), as well as Caribbean words in the French-based varieties of the Indian Ocean (Chaudenson, 1974), it would be surprising if there had been no influence of the restructured Portuguese of Africa on that of Asia. However, Ferraz found that "the Portuguese Eastern Creoles...are unrelated to those of West Africa" (1987: 337).

To be fair, Ferraz's study was a product of its times, motivated in part by Ferraz's rejection of the excessive claims made by both the monogenetic theory of the 1960s and 70s and Bickerton's Language Bioprogram Hypothesis (1981) to account for the structural similarities among creoles. Hancock, for example, had claimed that although

“Malacca Creole...has only ever been spoken in Asia, but descends, with comparatively little modification, from a variety of contact Portuguese which came into use specifically for communication with North and West Africans....Papia Kristang is Asian and African” (Hancock, 1975: 217-218)

Earlier Thompson (1960: 292), referring to the Portuguese-based creoles of Macau, Hong Kong, Java, Malacca and Singapore, had stated flatly that “Todos estes dialectos apresentam um aspecto parecido com os da Índia e da África Ocidental.” [‘All these dialects are similar to those of India and West Africa’ – my translation]. Not only did Thompson gloss over any real and substantial differences among these varieties, but he introduced misinformation into the debate: he claimed that *lo* was the future preverbal marker in Cape Verdean (Thompson, 1961: 110), and then other monogeneticists cited this “fact” linking it to the Asian varieties of CP. In all fairness, such information about creoles was much more difficult to ascertain a half a century ago, but sources did exist. Ferraz (1987: 350) asked tartly, “Since *lo* does not occur as a verbal marker in the Portuguese Creoles of West Africa, are we to surmise that Papiamentu *lo* originated in the Portuguese Creoles of Asia? That seems an unlikely possibility.”

Ferraz clearly believed that Thompson had been carried away by his enthusiasm and quoted him gushing “...what could be more exciting than that we should prove that this [Universal Creole] Grammar was a development of that of a Mediterranean *lingua franca*?” (Thompson, 1961: 113; cited by Ferraz, 1987: 340). Ferraz concluded that his comparison of the Portuguese-based creoles provided evidence for

“what Dalgado aptly called a partial reciprocal transfusion. It is clear that the *substrate* accounts for many affinities between certain creoles. This provides strong evidence against the hypothesis that resemblances are due to...what Thompson called a Universal Creole Grammar...or to what Bickerton has described as an innate language bioprogram” (1987: 356) [my italics]

However, not all linguists considering possible links between the restructured Portuguese of Africa and Asia were as excitable as Thompson. The Dravidianist Ian Smith also found it reasonable that “the pidginized forms of Portuguese which emerged during the course of the very earliest contacts between the Portuguese and black Africans were then used by the Portuguese in their subsequent explorations”—e.g. the Portuguese system of verbal inflections was replaced “with a simplified system of marking tense categories with reduced auxiliaries (*ta*), or adverbs (*ja*, *logo*)...[which] would have

provided part of the T[arget] L[anguage] input to new contact situations” in Asia (Smith, 1984: 299).

I quoted Smith in my chapter on the Portuguese-based creoles in Holm 1989 (pp. 265-266), pointing out that “the Portuguese reached Asia in 1498, when the African creoles were still in an early stage of their development, so it seems likely that the contact language used by Portuguese sailors and traders in Asia contained fewer specifically African features than monogeneticists assumed (c.f. the CV syllabic structure of the Gulf of Guinea creoles, which is not found in the Asian creoles)” (ibid.).

I then provided a table of the *Verbal markers in the Portuguese-based creoles* (Holm, 1988-89: 267) “for the light it might cast on the question of the relationship between the African and Asian varieties” (ibid.). I noted that although the patterns which emerged from this table are not particularly tidy, they do suggest two significant points: “(1) the Portuguese-based creoles are all related to one another not only through their European-derived lexicon but also through some common syntactic features that cannot be derived solely from European Portuguese (e.g. the use of verbal markers of whatever form to mark tense and aspect rather than inflectional endings); (2) the patterning of verbal markers supports the subgroupings proposed by Ivens Ferraz (1987), i.e. the Upper Guinea Creoles (Cape Verde and Guinea-Bissau CP) and the Gulf of Guinea Creoles (São Tomé, Angolar, Príncipe and Annobón CP). While the Asian Creoles are clearly a related but separate group, it may no longer be possible to gather the data needed to justify further divisions (e.g. into Indo-Portuguese, Malayo-Portuguese, and Sino-Portuguese), although a commonality of substrate languages would support each of these subgroupings” (Holm, 1989: 266).

After weighing whether language attrition might have affected the combinability of verbal markers in Malacca CP and Macao CP, I went on to consider further support for these groupings: “The division of the Portuguese-based creoles into at least these three subgroupings (Upper Guinea, Gulf of Guinea, and Asian) is supported by further data in Ivens Ferraz (1987) including phonology and phonotactic rules, the structure of the noun phrase (especially possession and pluralization), lexicon, etc. However, the overall interrelatedness of the Portuguese-based creoles is also supported by other common features, e.g. forms for ‘to go’ in African, Asian, and New World creoles derived not from the Portuguese infinitive, as is the case of most creole verbs, but rather from *vai*, the third person singular form of the present indicative” (ibid. 267-268). Forms from *vai* appear to be a very early convention in Portuguese pidgin or foreigner talk; one occurs in 1562: *Logo a mi bae trazee* “Right away me go bring” (Naro, 1978: 329). Clements (2000: 189) reasons that it was the form of *ir* that Africans would have heard most often, and thus it was they rather than the Portuguese who contributed this form to the early pidgin. If his reasoning is correct (and I can find no grounds for rejecting it), then *vai* in its various forms is the first African grammatical feature documented in the Asian varieties of Creole Portuguese, as distinct

from the lexical items provided by Dalgado (1919-21: lxvii) and cited by Tomás (1992: 100). Cardoso (2009: 114) points out that in the inflected Indo-Portuguese of Diu, *vay* is the non-past form, but that *vay* varies with *ir* as the infinitival form, apparently under pressure from the standard. Similarly, the acrolectal past form is *foy* and the [past] participial form is *id*, although the latter also occurs as *foy-d* elsewhere in his dissertation (p. 165).

To conclude this survey of the literature regarding Atlantic features in Asian varieties of Creole Portuguese, Tomás (1992) provides not only lexical but also cultural evidence of the African presence in Portuguese Asia, including songs in “Cafre creole, commonly used by the slaves from Africa and other places” in Daman (Dalgado, 1921: 6) and three *Neger Lieder* or ‘Negro songs’ from Diu recorded by Schuchardt (1883: 13), suggesting a distinct lect used by Africans or their descendants which disappeared as this group was absorbed into the general population.

Clements (2000) takes the bull by the horns and focuses directly on the issue of the relationship of restructured Portuguese in Africa and Asia, suggesting that there existed both a general pidgin (spoken in Africa and Asia) and distinctive regional pidgins more influenced by local substrate languages. He demonstrates this commonality by again examining patterns in verbal markers (citing Holm, 1989 and others), noting that *ta* marks the progressive in both Africa and Asia and that forms of *já* are verbal markers in both areas (with a mysterious prefix *bi-* of unknown origin in Fa d’Ambu, p. 191). However, *ja* or *za* marks the completive in Africa and the anterior in Asia (Holm, 1989: 267). He further demonstrates fragmentation by examining patterns in question words, noting that forms derived from the archaic or regional Portuguese expression *que laia* ‘what manner’ are all restricted to Asia (p. 194). He concludes that “long-distance” influence was unidirectionally eastward, and that bi-directionality took place only on a local level, i.e. within groupings. He cites my objection that reduplication in Indo-Portuguese appears to have come from Malayo-Portuguese as a possible counterexample, countering that reduplication must have been a feature in the general pidgin since it is also found in African varieties. I would here counter-counter that observation by distinguishing the intensifying nature of reduplication in African CP from its distributive/ pluralizing nature in Asian CP (see discussion in section 2 above). However, I think his broader hypothesis holds in that the influence of Malayo-Portuguese on Indo-Portuguese should be considered local (within a grouping) rather than long-distance.

4. Other Atlantic features in Asian CP

4.1. Forms of *vai*

So far we have only one grammatical feature in Asian varieties of Creole Portuguese whose origin we can reasonably attribute to Africans rather than Portuguese: the various forms of *vai* for ‘go’ instead of *ir*. I would like to add

a few more items to that shortish list, but because I accept Clements' 2000 theoretical model of there having been not only a single general pidgin but also a number of local ones that gradually developed relatively independently into the modern creoles, I don't think it is particularly surprising that we don't find an overwhelming number of Africanisms in the Asian varieties of Creole Portuguese, i.e. I think the pidginized Portuguese taken from Africa to Asia in the early 16th century was much more variable and less developed (i.e. less directly influenced by substrate languages) than the modern creoles.

4.2. Completive *kaba*

This verbal marker is found throughout the Asian creoles (Papua Kristang, Macao CP, and in the form *kā* in Sri Lankan CP; Holm, 1989: 267) but less often in African varieties of CP, e.g. Principense *kabá* (Boretzky, 1983: 132), although it may be the origin of the Upper Guinea anterior marker *ba* (ibid.) and most African varieties of CP have a full verb *kaba* 'to finish, complete' (Rougé, 2004: 42). It is generally derived from Portuguese *acabar* idem., although Holm (1989: 163) contends that it converged with "...Bambara *ban* /*bã*/ 'finish'...with the infinitive marker *ka*" which is also used after verbs to convey completive aspect. The form seems likely to have emerged in Africa early on, given that it is also found in Papiamentu and Philippine Creole Spanish, as well as well as the English-based creoles of Suriname, the Creole French of Guyane, and Negerhollands Creole Dutch (in the form *ka*) (ibid.).

4.3. Coordinating conjunction *ku*

Cardoso (2009: 33) notes that in Diu Indo-Portuguese "The coordinator *ku/ko* 'and' (equivalent to the comitative/instrumental preposition) is reserved for NP conjunction." For example,

- (3) DIP *nə* *Go* *yo* *te* *bastāt* *cousin* *ku* *auntie*.
 LOC Goa 1s have.NPST many cousin and auntie
 'In Goa I have many cousins and aunties.' (ibid. 137-138)

He further notes that "The most common coordinator in DIP is *i* 'and', which can conjoin NPs, predicates, clauses...or any other units":

- (4) DIP *nəx* *põy* *pimēt* *dəpoy* *põy* *pok* *grāw*,
 1p put.NPST pepper then put.NPST little gram
ayl, *jīviv*, *tud* *əkəl* *i* *məy*.
 garlic ginger all DEM and grind.NPST
 'We put pepper, then a bit of gram [i.e. chickpeas], garlic, ginger
 and all that and (we) grind (it).'

In Korlai CP only *ani* (which also joins other structures) can join noun phrases according to Clements (2007: 170). In Kristang (KRIS), Baxter (1988: 115-116) notes that “NPs may be conjoined by means of the comitative relator *ku* ‘with’ thus:

- (5) KRIS *yo sa papa ku yo sa kanyóng ta bai mar.*
 1s G father C 1s G elder brother -P go sea
 ‘My father and my brother are going fishing.’

The second NP and the comitative relator may be shifted to the right of the verb:

- (6) KRIS *yo sa papa ta bai mar ku yo sa kanyóng*
 1s G father-P go sea C 1s G elder brother
 ‘My father is going fishing with my elder brother.’

Baxter (personal communication) notes that colloquial Malay has the relator *sama* whose meanings include ‘with’ as well as ‘and’; it can be used in structures parallel to those of Kristang *ku* in (5) and (6) above. Malay *sama* does not appear to be used in conjoining substantial clauses. In Macau CP, Fernandes and Baxter (2004: 54) note that *cu* has the same meaning as it does in Portuguese. Ian Smith (personal communication) notes that Sri Lankan Portuguese “also has *kum* as an NP coordinator. Its grammar is not calqued on the substrate languages, in that it does not mark the final coordinate (NP1 *kum* NP2, not like Ta[mil] NP1-*um* NP-*um*). However, its restriction to NP coordination could be seen as substrate influence.”

The use of *ku* to conjoin noun phrases (as opposed to a different conjunction to join sentences and other structures) is widespread in the Atlantic creoles. Among the Portuguese-based creoles of Africa, this use of *ku* is found in Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau and São Tomé while the form *ki* is used in Angolar and Principense according to Rougé (2004: 113), who notes the origin of *ku* in archaic Portuguese *co* ‘with’. However, it is worth noting that Balanta, a substrate/adstrate language of Guinea-Bissa CP, has a parallel conjunction of the same form, although it is conceivable that it was influenced by the creole:

- (7) BALANTA *ngol ku ncufa*
 hyena and hare
 ‘the hyena and the hare’ (Holm & Intumbo 2009: 264)

Parallel usage is found in Berbice Dutch, Haitian CF, Ndjuka CE, Negerhollands CD, Palenquero CS, Papiamentu CS and Seychellois CF (Holm & Patrick, eds., 2007). Sylvain (1936: 164) traced the Haitian usage to an African parallel, noting that Haitian *ak* ‘with, and’ (cf. French *avec* ‘with’)

was identical in form and function to Wolof *ak*. Homburger (1949: 116) pointed out that “In the majority of Negro African languages the conjunction ‘and’ and the preposition ‘with’ are rendered by the same particle (when ‘and’ joins nouns).”

4.4. The preposition *na*

Cardoso (2009: 136) notes the use of *nə/nu* ‘in’ in Diu Creole Portuguese. Building on the work of Taylor (1971: 294-295), Hancock (1975: 220) reported the form *na* for ‘in’ and a number of other locational relationships in the Portuguese-based creoles of Asia (Kristang, Macau, Java, Ceylon and Bombay) as well as Africa (Annobon, São Tomé, Angolar, Príncipe, Guinea-Bissau, Cape Verde), not to mention Saramaccan, Papiamentu, Ermitenho and the Lingua Franca. Taylor (1971: 294) mentions that “In São Thomé (and Príncipe?) *na* alternates with *ni*.” Fontes (2007: 75) gives São Tomé *na* only as the first element in the discontinuous negator *na...fa*, but confirms *ni* as ‘in’ (ibid. 77), accepting Rougé’s etymology: Yoruba *ní* converging with Portuguese *na, no* (2004: 340). The form *ni* occurs as well in the vernacular Portuguese of Brazil, where it is also derivable by analogy with the local pronunciation of *de* and its contracted forms with articles as [*dí*]; *da, das; do dos*, i.e. *ni*; *na, nas; no, nos*. As for Príncipe, Maurer (2009: 229-230) gives only *na* as ‘in’, *ni* corresponding to Portuguese *nem* ‘not even, nor.’ Taylor (1971: 294) notes that “‘locative *na*’....occur[s] in Ibo with the same range of functions as in the creoles, whereas neither Ptg *na* ‘in the (fem.)’ nor Dut[ch] *naar* ‘to, after’ has such a wide semantic range.” Finally, *na* seems likely to have emerged early on in the pidgin since it appears to have influenced other forms ranging from Creole French *nã* to Jamaican CE *ina* (Holm, 2000: 123, 229). In consideration of the above factors, as well as the observation of Clements (2000: 189) regarding forms of *vai* noted above in section 3, this contribution to the early pidgin seem more likely to have been made by Africans than Portuguese, so it is included here.

4.5. The negator *nunca*

Hancock (1975: 223) notes that “The common creole negative morpheme is frequently a derivative of Portuguese *nunca* ‘never’, rather than *nã*: PK [Papia Kristang] *ngkã*, Ceylon *nunka, nuka, nuku* etc., Guiné *ka*.” Rougé (2004: 216, 314) contends that the Upper Guinea negator *ka* resulted from the convergence of *nunca* as a simple negator-which Teyssier (1983) traced to usage in southern Portuguese dialects-with negators in African languages such as Manjaku *dika* or Mancanha *nkë*. Naro (1978: 330) traced this use of *nunca* to sixteenth-century foreigner talk: a woman in a play commands her African servant to come out, and the latter replies, “Seora, *nunca* poder” ‘Madam, I can’t.’ Naro notes that “there can be no question of negation over a time span, such as would be required by the meaning ‘never.’”

5. Conclusions

Five might not seem like a lot of Atlantic features to find in the Asian varieties of Creole Portuguese, but that does not mean that these features are insignificant. As I pointed out above, I find the theoretical model suggested by Clements (2000) to be convincing. I think he is right in postulating that what the Portuguese brought with them to Asia in the 16th century was a *general* Portuguese pidgin that had been developing in Africa during the second half of the 15th century. This pidgin must have been far more variable and much less developed (i.e. less influenced by substrate languages) than the modern creoles. I believe Arends (1993) was right in his assessment that the development of creole grammars was a fairly gradual process that included the incorporation of features from a pool of variables such as translated structures from substrate languages used by bilinguals. The speech of these communities and the other communities that they interacted with gradually developed relatively locally and independently into the modern creoles, which may or may not have continued to coexist with the general pidgin until it died out during the 19th century. A number of communities were largely cut off from this pidgin after the Portuguese ceded many of their possessions in Asia to the Dutch and others after 1640, or after settlers arrived in Curaçao from Brazil shortly afterwards.

The proof of the variability of the general pidgin is that some creoles got the wrong substrate features if we were to judge these from the modern creoles. Remember Ferraz's rhetorical question: "Since *lo* does not occur as a verbal marker in the Portuguese Creoles of West Africa, are we to surmise that Papiamentu *lo* originated in the Portuguese Creoles of Asia?" (1987: 350).

No, we can surmise that *lo* was one of a number of variables in the earlier general pidgin used in constructions referring to the future—probably an adverb, to judge from its unusual position outside the verb phrase in the modern creole. Similarly, the Papiamentu possessive *mi uman su kasá* 'my sibling's spouse' doesn't need to have been influenced by the same substrate language that led to Indo-Portuguese *Salvador-su cruz* 'the Savior's cross' (Holm, 2000: 219). In sum, it is not surprising that we don't find an overwhelming number of unmistakable Africanisms in the Asian varieties of Creole Portuguese. The general pidgin that arrived with the Portuguese in Asia in the early 16th century was in all probability a pre-pidgin foreigner talk continuum that had not yet developed into anything like the modern creoles.

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