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COIMBRA UNIVERSITY AS AN INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH CENTER IN CONTACT LINGUISTICS

1. Introduction

I would like to talk to you this morning about how Coimbra University has become a research center in contact linguistics with an international reputation¹. Because I am myself a contact linguist here at Coimbra University, this puts me in the awkward position of having to sing my own praises. It is not conventional to do this, and I'm sure you can imagine how reluctant I am. However, language being a social activity makes linguistics a social science, so sometimes linguists must grant themselves permission to suspend conventions when they need to examine certain social phenomena. For example, lexicographers who want to include taboo words in their studies may ignore those conventions that would prohibit the very pronunciation of these words, conventions that would force them to say something like "the F-word" instead of the word itself. That's fine unless it's unclear which "F-word" they have in mind, in which case they need to get to the point and say what they mean.

So I'm asking your permission to say directly what I mean, not least because the rise of research in contact linguistics to a position of international prominence at Coimbra University reveals some very interesting facts not only about the different individuals whose combined efforts made this happen, but also facts about how academia and the diffusion of knowledge work.

¹ Conferência de Abertura do Primeiro Encontro de Pós-Graduação em Linguística do Centro de Estudos de Linguística Geral e Aplicada, Faculdade de Letras da Universidade de Coimbra, 10 de dezembro 2010.

2. Coimbra creolists and JPCL

12 But first I think I should defend my claim that Coimbra University has attained a position of international prominence in research in contact linguistics. You only need to refer to the tables of contents of the last three issues of the leading journal in the field, the Journal of Pidgin and Creole Languages, published by John Benjamins twice a year in Amsterdam and Philadelphia. I don't think there could be any argument that the JPCL is not intended for an international readership, if only because it, like the Journal of Portuguese Linguistics, is published in English in a country where English is not the national language (although I would be among the first to recognize the usefulness of Portuguese in the international diffusion of knowledge). It should also be noted that the JPCL is a peer-reviewed scholarly journal, meaning that all the articles it publishes have to be reviewed and recommended for acceptance by at least three scholars whose expertise in their field of specialization within contact linguistics is fairly widely recognized. This is not a particularly pleasant process, and thanking anonymous reviewers for their helpful suggestions is most often done through gritted teeth. Still, it is the only way to prevent a scholarly journal from becoming the private fiefdom of an editor who can bestow or withhold publishing favors to his personal friends. Thus in its evaluation of the quality of the work published by the research institutes that it supports financially, the Portuguese Ministry of Education's Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia is always interested in whether or not the journal in which a work is published has an international readership and is peer-reviewed.

The tables of contents to which I referred you indicate how many of the authors whose works appeared in the last three issues of JPCL belong to CELGA's Research Team in Creole Linguistics: more are from Coimbra than from any other single university. Of course I'm only talking about three issues of the journal, but they're the last three issues, and this means we're doing very well indeed in relation to our colleagues (and competitors) around the world.

To give credit where it's due, I should say a word about the articles and their authors. The 2009 article (JPCL, volume 24, number 2) was written by

Incanha Intumbo and me and is entitled “Quantifying superstrate and substrate influence.” It’s the main article of that issue, some 57 pages in length. It represents a new way of answering the perennial question of which languages were more influential in shaping the grammar of creoles: the European languages which supplied their vocabulary, or the African languages used by the earliest creole speakers? Intumbo is from Guinea-Bissau and has two first languages: Creole and Balanta (one of the country’s 22 African languages). We took some 100 grammatical structures that are often different in creole languages and their European lexical-source languages and compared their equivalents in Guinea-Bissau Creole, Balanta and Portuguese. We found that 11% of the structures are the same in Creole and Portuguese (but not Balanta); nearly 30% are the same in Creole and Balanta (but not Portuguese); but almost 33% are the same in Creole, Balanta and Portuguese. However, if we consider these three categories together—superstrate and substrate influence combined with convergence—they account for an overwhelming 74% of the Creole’s structures, resolving the perennially unanswerable question of where the grammar of creole languages comes from.

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The next article (JPCL, volume 25, number 1, 2010) was written by Hugo Cardoso, a Coimbra student who studied with me for his licenciatura and became interested in creole linguistics, which he later pursued as a doctoral student at the University of Amsterdam. They sent him off to India to see if there were still any speakers of creole Portuguese in Diu. He found 125 of them and wrote an excellent dissertation about their speech, part of which formed the basis of this article, “The African slave population of Portuguese India: Demographics and impact on Indo-Portuguese.” He and his doctoral advisor, Umberto Ansaldo, have done much to revive scholarly interest in the creoles of Asia, particularly those based on Portuguese. First, they used the occasion of Cardoso’s 2009 doctoral defense, which brought together specialists quite literally from around the globe, to hold a workshop on the Portuguese-based creoles of Asia in Amsterdam, then they edited these papers for a special edition of the *Journal of Portuguese Linguistics* (volume 8, number 2). After Cardoso accepted a post-doc at the University of Macau and Ansaldo a professorship at the University of Hong Kong, the latter took on a guest editorship of this special issue of JPCL dedicated to pidgins and

creoles in Asian contexts (25:1). We feel very lucky that Hugo Cardoso has again chosen to make Coimbra his intellectual home by opting to join CELGA, our linguistic research institute.

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The latest issue of JPCL in which Coimbra creolists cast a long shadow is volume 25, number 2, also published in 2010. The main article, 54 pages in length, is by Bart Jacobs, a scholar who has just joined the CELGA team as a researcher in contact linguistics. It is entitled “Upper Guinea Creole: Evidence in favor of a Santiago birth.” I realized how important this article is when I heard a leading linguist refer to it at a conference in Paris last summer even before it had been published. Jacobs has taken on and apparently resolved another perennial debate about the origin of two very similar creoles based on Portuguese, that of Cape Verde and that of Guinea-Bissau, which along with the creole of Casamance in Senegal are called the Upper Guinea Creoles. The similarity of their vocabularies and grammars allows speakers of these varieties to understand each other, unlike speakers of Gulf of Guinea creoles like Santomense. It has long been thought that the Upper Guinea creoles must have a common linguistic ancestor, but the question was whether this proto-creole first emerged in what is today Cape Verde or in Guinea-Bissau. By using newly uncovered linguistic data and reanalyzing established sociohistorical facts, Jacobs argues convincingly that the port of Cacheu in what is now Guinea-Bissau was founded and settled in the late 16th century by Cape Verdeans coming from the island of Santiago who brought their language with them. Jacobs came to work with me at the University of Coimbra from the Netherlands under the Erasmus program, where he had been working on his master’s thesis on Papiamentu, a Caribbean creole based on both Portuguese and Spanish. When he completed that, he won a full scholarship to do his Ph.D. at the University of Munich on a co-tutela with me at the University of Coimbra, which allows him to be a part of our linguistic research institute. You’ll note that he has published a review in the same issue of JPCL on a book on the African element in Cape Verdean.

I was also lucky enough to get a book that I co-edited reviewed in the same issue of JPCL: *Contact Languages: Critical concepts in language studies*, co-edited by Susanne Michaelis of the Max Planck Institute in Leipzig, Germany, which has been cooperating with teams from Coimbra’s CELGA

and many other research institutes in a massive project to produce the Atlas of Pidgin and Creole Structures, or APiCS. I say we were “lucky” to get our book reviewed not because our names are obscure in the field but rather because this set of five volumes has 2,300 pages and costs \$1,390. At that price the publisher was not eager to give away free copies to any reviewers, and getting them to supply even this single review copy was something of a triumph. In fact, the reviewer says that the set of books “...covers over two centuries of writing and theoretical thinking on language contact....and as such is a goldmine for students and researchers alike....The only real drawback of this anthology is its cost” (Mather 2010: 390). However, Routledge know their market, and the set has been selling well to university libraries in the Far East, which for historical reasons often did not acquire the books and journals from which most of the articles in this anthology are reprinted. In fact, one of the factors that motivated me to take on a project of this size—selecting the articles, introducing them to make clear the intellectual context in which they were written and the reasons they are of lasting importance—was the hope that it could provide a virtual library in contact linguistics for the many new universities and research institutes that are emerging in the former colonies where pidgin and creole languages are spoken today. Having taught at the College of the Bahamas for two years, I know that these are exactly the institutions in the most need but also those least likely to have the necessary funds for expensive academic books. My goal is to find a way match such institutions with stipends from non-governmental organizations such as UNESCO, and the publisher has agreed to supply the set to such institutions at cost.

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3. Creole linguistics in Portugal

I trust that this look at the last three tables of contents of the Journal of Pidgin and Creole Languages will convince you that the University of Coimbra is one of the bright spots on the world map as seen by contact linguists. But how did this happen? Some twenty-five years ago when I was writing *Pidgins and Creoles* (Holm 1988-89), contact linguistics in Portugal

did not seem to be going anywhere. There had been a very promising start a century earlier when the publications of Coimbra's Adolfo Coelho had come to the attention of the German father of creole linguistics, Hugo Schuchardt, working at the University of Graz in Austria. Coelho had been collecting samples of Creole Portuguese spoken in colonies from Guinea to Macau, and Schuchardt appreciated their value as data for building linguistic theory. Silvio Sousa (2007), who traced the development of Portuguese linguistics during this period, notes that Schuchardt's interest inspired a number of speakers of not only Portuguese but also of Creole Portuguese to collect and publish more data on a number of varieties from Capeverdean (Brito 1887) to Indo-Portuguese (Dalgado 1900-1901). Despite the work on Portuguese-based creoles by linguists as distinguished as Leite de Vasconcellos (1901) and others, the interest in them that blossomed in the late 19th and early 20th century gradually waned, although they continued to receive the occasional attention of Portuguese dialectologists and missionaries. By the second half of the 20th century, the few Portuguese linguists who worked on these languages such as Graciete Nogueira Batalha and Jorge Morais Barbosa were largely outnumbered by non-Portuguese linguists such as France's Alain Kihm, who deplored the lack of scholarly attention the Portuguese-based creoles were receiving in his 1980 dissertation on the Creole of Guinea Bissau, concluding that "Les absents ont tort" (Kihm 1980:3), i.e. that those not working on the Portuguese-based creoles were simply wrong not to be doing so.

4. Becoming a creolist

I came to the study of the Portuguese-based creoles through the backdoor: I was interested in Black and Creole varieties based on the European languages I knew, which included Spanish. I was born in 1943 in the American Midwest, which was less linguistically isolated than it might have seemed because of immigration: my mother had been born in a German-speaking community in Russia (so she spoke German with her family after they immigrated to Michigan) and my father's family had immigrated from

Denmark (so he spoke Danish with his family) but my parents spoke English with one another and that became my mother tongue. My father had been a sailor as a young man and learned the value of languages in traveling. They both managed to get a university education in the 1930s despite the economic depression and they were both on the political left. I remember that we all started learning Spanish in the early 1950s because my parents were seriously considering emigrating to Uruguay: Americans on the political left were losing their jobs because of a fear of Communism led by Senator Joseph McCarthy. Soon, however, McCarthy was censured by the Senate, my father kept his job and we stayed in Michigan. Later my family drove to Mexico on a vacation to practice our Spanish and I had a wonderful time: it made me understand that even though it's a lot of work to learn another language, it's really worth the effort.

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In the 1950s there was segregation or separation of the white and black races even in northern states like Michigan. My parents belonged to a political organization, the Fellowship of Reconciliation, which trained whites and blacks to cooperate to undermine the laws that kept public places like restaurants segregated. Not everyone in Jackson, Michigan believed that these anti-segregation tactics were a good thing, but eventually they succeeded in ending legal segregation. I went to an integrated elementary school and had black friends, but by the time we were in high school and started dating, teenage social groups had segregated themselves and young people realized that there were two different societies and we only belonged to one of them.

I studied German in high school and hoped to study in West Germany during my junior (or third) year of university, but I was also interested in other languages and cultures and decided to study Spanish and Russian in high school as well. When I graduated in 1961 I got a summer job as a cook at a tourist resort at the Grand Canyon out West in Arizona. I managed to get fired within three weeks. I was too embarrassed to go back home to Michigan in disgrace, so I decided to hitch-hike to California and then Mexico to try to get a job as an interpreter. A friend at the Canyon agreed to forward the letters I would continue writing to my parents that didn't mention this change of plans. With the \$85 I had earned at the Grand

Canyon I managed to get to Mexico but I didn't manage to get a job interpreting (Mexicans talk too fast) so I went on to Central America.

18 I ran out of money in Managua, Nicaragua and got a job as a gardener for some North American missionaries who eventually put me on an airplane back to the United States in time to start university. One of the most amazing things I discovered there was that black people from Nicaragua's Caribbean coast spoke what they called "Pirate English"—a Creole English that I could hardly understand.

At the University of Michigan in the 1960s a lot of students chose to ignore the social barriers between America's blacks and whites, supporting the desegregation of schools in the American South. The next summer I worked as a camp counselor in a Jewish summer camp outside New York City, which made me more aware of Jewish culture and ended my plans to study in Germany. I decided to study in Paris during my junior year instead, but I didn't have much time to learn French so (leaning on my knowledge of Spanish) I took the first and third semester courses and skipped the second and fourth, and hoped I could get by. I managed to get a job as a counselor at a summer camp in southern France in 1963, and by the end of the summer my French was fluent but bad.

I had a wonderful semester rather than year at the Sorbonne. I got too greedy for more languages and took an evening course in Italian in Paris and then left in March to travel on the cheap (hitch-hiking and youth hostels), spending one month in Vienna and then another in Italy. My father, an electrical engineer, was working in Pakistan's new capital, Islamabad, and I found there was a special bus for students going from London to New Delhi for only 100 pounds that I could take to visit my parents. They had a more realistic knowledge of traveling by land in that part of the world and hastened to assure me that there was no need for me to come, and they encouraged me to continue traveling in Europe instead. I went on to Greece, Turkey and the USSR, and finally visited my cousins in Denmark before returning to the United States for my last year of university. I had majored in English mainly because I liked to read, but as graduation approached in 1965, I realized I didn't actually know how to earn money. Some South American friends suggested that I apply for a job teaching

English as a foreign language at the University of the Andes in Bogotá, Colombia. I got the job and enjoyed it and finally became fluent in Spanish. I decided to go back to the United States and get a master's degree at New York City's Columbia University, where I eventually switched from English literature to Teaching English as a Foreign Language. This got me a job teaching in the German-speaking part of Switzerland, first in Zurich and later in the Alpine canton of Obwalden for a total of three years.

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When I returned to Michigan I found a job teaching at the Detroit Institute of Technology, a small downtown college that had suddenly found itself without students after the 1967 race riots triggered an exodus of its white population to the suburbs. Its interim solution was to accept hundreds of students from India's Gujarat state who had not had English-medium instruction: I was to teach it to them. They also began recruiting students from among Detroit's black population, so I also taught standard English to students who spoke what is now called African American English. I became very interested in why its grammar was so different from other English dialects. Sociolinguists had begun to publish on American Black English, linking it historically to Caribbean varieties of English and African languages. I received a grant to pursue my study of African American English at the State University of New York in Cortland and eventually at the University of London. There I wrote my doctoral dissertation on the Creole English of Nicaragua's Caribbean coast, the variety which I had first encountered in 1961 and which I returned to Nicaragua to study in 1976. I used this creole to link certain grammatical features in American Black English to their counterparts in African languages.

I also became very interested in the problems that speakers of Black and Creole English had in learning the standard variety, which led me to a teaching job at the College of the Bahamas in Nassau. I realized that many grammatical problems were linked to differing subcategorizational rules in specific words, so I began to collect data on these words systematically on cards. When I ordered these alphabetically I realized I had the beginning of a dictionary that no one had ever written. I finally published the Dictionary of Bahamian English with Alison Shilling in 1982; we recently turned over the copyright to the College of the Bahamas so they could make it available

on line at www.dloc.com, and I'm happy to report that it's getting over one thousand hits a month.

20 In 1980 I accepted a job teaching English and linguistics at Hunter College of the City University of New York. There I taught students who were native speakers of other languages as well as those whose first language was Black or Creole English. I edited a book on Central American English (Holm 1983) and co-edited another on Caribbean English in general (Holm and Görlach 1986). Eventually I was promoted to full professor and began teaching in the Ph.D. Program in Linguistics at the City University of New York's Graduate Center, where I had a number of talented doctoral students from a number of different countries who wanted to write their dissertations on the many creole and semi-creole languages that immigrants had brought to New York City.

For my first sabbatical year (1986-87) I got a Fulbright scholarship to teach a course in creole linguistics at the University of London and to finish writing a two-volume survey called *Pidgins and Creoles* for Cambridge University Press (Holm 1988-89), which became something of a standard work. I had tried to use my knowledge of Spanish to read the works in Portuguese on the creoles based on that language, but I realized I wasn't understanding enough so I began to study Portuguese formally (New York City offers courses on a surprising number of languages, and I was also able to study Dutch, Haitian Creole, and Yoruba, a Nigerian language). A fieldtrip to Bahia in Brazil in 1983 got me interested in Afro-Brazilian varieties of Portuguese, and then in the summer of 1988 I came to Coimbra University to take a more advanced course in Portuguese for foreigners.

Meanwhile creole linguistics had taken off as an academic discipline in the United States as well as northern European countries such as France, Holland and Germany. I attended the first international colloquium on Portuguese-based creoles held in Portugal (University of Lisbon, 1991). I received another Fulbright scholarship to spend my second sabbatical year (1993-94) at the University of Coimbra, where I taught another course on creole linguistics and worked on two long-term book projects: one on the partial restructuring of languages (later published as Holm 2004) and another on comparative creole syntax (Holm and Patrick 2007).

5. Coimbra creolists

In 1998 I accepted the offer of a permanent position at the University of Coimbra as a *professor catedrático convidado* (I didn't understand all the implications of being *convidado* until it was too late, but later I was able to get rid of this part of my title by becoming *agregado*). Again I was lucky enough to start off with some intellectual stars among my students, particularly Liliana Inverno and Dominika Swolkien. The creation of the master's program in Descriptive Linguistics later revealed the talents of two creole speakers who are talented linguists, Carlos Fontes and Incanha Intumbo (for their accomplishments see our website, <http://www.uc.pt/creolistics>) as well as Hugo Cardoso and Bart Jacobs, whose work I discussed above. Christina Märzhäuser, on a co-tutela from the University of Munich, wrote a fascinating doctoral dissertation on Capeverdean lyrics in Lisbon rap music and Sandra Madeira is about to publish her master's thesis, Towards an annotated bibliography of restructured Portuguese in Africa. And we have some new stars in the making...

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Of course this didn't happen over night. Coimbra's creolists have benefitted not only from the organization of appropriate graduate courses at this university but also from the growing interest in contact linguistics in Portugal. The creolists at Lisbon's universities (both the Clássica and the Nova) supported the creation of a learned society for the study of Portuguese-and Spanish-based creoles at the 1999 *Workshop sobre Crioulos de Base Lexical Portuguesa* to provide an accessible forum for creolists and their post-graduate students to present and debate their research. This led to the first meeting of the *Associação: Crioulos de Base Lexical Portuguesa e Espanhola* here at Coimbra University in June, 2001 in a joint meeting with the Society for Pidgin and Creole Linguistics (SPCL, based in the USA). So far we have met not only here in Coimbra (2001, 2006) but also the Universidade Clássica de Lisboa (2002), the University of A Coruña (2003), Curaçao (2004), the University of Orléans (2005), the University of Amsterdam (2007), the Universidade Nova de Lisboa (2008), the University of Cologne in Germany (2009), the Centre National de Recherche Scientifique in Paris (2010) and next July we will meet at the Universidade do Porto (2011). We try to have joint meetings with

societies like the SPCL , which met with us in Coimbra and Amsterdam as well as Curaçao, where we were also joined by the Society for Caribbean Linguistics, based in the Anglophone Caribbean. We also cooperate with the *Comité International des Études Créoles* (CIEC) in France and the *Associação Brasileira de Estudos Crioulos e Similares* (ABECS), which has invited the ACBLPE to meet with them in São Paulo in 2012. Our members regularly publish in their journals and we now have our own on-line journal, the *Revista de Crioulos de Base Lexical Portuguesa e Espanhola* (RCBLPE). It is based at the University of Macau, while our website is based at the University of Orléans. The ACBLPE has four working languages (Portuguese, Spanish, French and English) in which members can present their work.

Coimbra creolists have also benefitted from the support of Coimbra's linguistic research center, CELGA, whose three main approaches to the study of Portuguese are based on diachrony, synchrony and contact. I have had the honor of coordinating the third group of researchers, and I am deeply proud of what my collaborators have accomplished thus far. I will retire in a couple of years, but it is my hope that the University of Coimbra won't give up its position as an outstanding international research center in contact linguistics.

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