Slaves and interpreters in the origin of Pidgin Portuguese

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Abstract

This study contributes to the discussion about the origin of pidginized Portuguese that came to be spoken in Portugal and the Cape Verde Islands, beginning even before the 15th century. Contrary to Anthony Naro’s argument that it began in foreigner-talk that was taught to slaves in Portugal I submit evidence that there were enough slaves living on the Iberian Peninsula to have created a very different Portuguese idiom by means of faulty second-language acquisition. The study also demurs with respect to the claim by Alain Kihm and Jean-Louis Rougé that African slaves who served as interpreters were the principal figures in its origin. Finally, it is suggested that the role of alleged interpreter be understood with circumspection, a caution that arises from the study of colonization of central Africa in the 19th century.

Key words: basic variety (of language), Cà da Mosto, Cape Verde Islands, children as interpreters, contact languages, ‘corrupt’ language, creoles, creolized pidgins, extended pidgins, foreigner talk, Guinea-Bissau, historiography, history in linguistics, interpreters, Kikongo, Kituba, lançados, language in trade and colonization, Língua de preto, lingua francas, linguister, Luso-Africans, Mediterranean Sabir, nativization, pidgin origins, Pidgin Portuguese, Portuguese Creole, restructured language, Sango, second language acquisition, Senegambia, slaves, theories of pidgin origins,

1 This is a revision of a study I was just about to submit for publication when the admirable work by Jacobs 2010 appeared and then Kihm & Rougé 2013. Because I have a slightly different perspective and focus on matters that were not extensively treated, this essay may find a place in the study of trade and colonization in Africa.
1. Introduction

Any attempt to discuss the origins of a pidgin is obviously seeking to establish the time, place, and means—among other possible topics—of the emergence of this type of language. In the impressive body of literature that has been produced on pidgins and creoles only a small part deals with origins. Linguists seem to have concerned themselves with this topic mostly because they sought to understand or to explain certain linguistic features in a particular pidgin or a set of pidgins. The undertaking is, of course, a daunting one. (1) It is an enterprise that is not properly linguistic. For that reason reviewers for linguistic journals are not favorable to historical treatises on this topic. (2) It is an enterprise that requires historiographical skills that linguists, as linguists, do not generally acquire until they have to. (3) It is an enterprise whose conclusions will in many, if not most, cases be probabilistic. (Dell Hymes once set aside discussion of the origin of Chinook Jargon in a conversation with me with the observation, “We will never know.”) (4) We never have as much data as we would like or data of the kind that we would like most, and we have to be satisfied with saying that in this particular case such and such is a more likely explanation than another. This aspect of historical research is put as follows: “No facts speak for themselves to lighten the historian's test...[P]roof is rare and probability comes in many sizes, only to be judged with art and a sense of responsibility” (Shafer 1980:53). (5) Research on the origins of pidgins is extremely costly in time.

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2 Although these remarks apply to creoles as well, these are ignored.
3 A colleague whom I have a great deal of respect for disagreed with me when I suggested that a department of linguistics should have a course on the history of the discipline and, in fact, it should be required of every graduate student. If there were such a course, he said, it should be in the history department. I find that attitude deplorable.
What is needed is a change in attitude to what constitutes explanation in this endeavor. When we examine the handbooks on pidgins, we find a single perspective. By way of example, we can consider the works by Loreto Todd (1974), Peter Mühlhäusler (1986), and Suzanne Romaine (1988). Each of these has a chapter on origins. Those found in Todd’s and Mühlhäusler’s books are identical in name: “Theories of origin.” Romaine calls hers “The origin of pidgins.” Mühlhäusler is rather clear in explaining what he means by the phrase ‘Theories of origin.’ He is concerned, he says, with the “linguistic and structural characteristics of pidgins and creoles.” He asks this question: “Why do pidgins and creoles exhibit structural affinities among themselves which are often closer than their affinities with perceived lexifier languages?” (1986:96). Todd says that the theories on origins are meant to explain both the genesis of and the similarities between [extended pidgins] (1974:28). The topics that are covered by these three linguists are very much alike. They are:

- The Baby Talk and Foreigner-Talk Theory. This is the view that adult native speakers of a language modify their speech in certain ways in talking to foreigners and to children.
- The Nautical Jargon Theory. This view holds that in the past the crews of ships over the seas of the world consisted of men speaking many different languages. To communicate among themselves they created a jargon, and this, Todd says, “became the nucleus for the pidgin” (1974:32). (It is not clear what pidgin she is referring to.)
- The Monogenetic or Relexification Theory. This view holds that “all European-language based pidgins and creoles derive from a fifteenth-century Portuguese pidgin” (Todd 1974:33; Holm 1988(1):44-52).
- Universalist Theories. (If Todd is referring to the same thing, she calls this view simply a “synthesis.”) This view holds that “the linguistic nature of pidgins and creoles is universally motivated” (Mühlhäusler 1986:113). In Todd’s view (1974:42) pidgins and creoles are alike possibly because “fundamentally, languages are alike and simplification processes are alike.”
- The Independent Parallel Development Theory. This view, attributed to Robert A. Hall, Jr., holds that although a number of the pidgins and creoles of the world developed independently, their development was parallel, because they used common linguistic material—European and West African languages—and were formed in similar physical and social conditions.

We begin by examining the widely accepted explanation for the origin of the variety of pidginized Portuguese that came to be spoken in Africa as a creole (Naro 1978, 1983, 1988 and Goodman 1987). It seems to support the view that

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4 Fascination with the origins of pidginized languages has led me study the subject with respect to Bandala-Lingala, Chinook Jargon (Wawa), Kituba, Sango and
people in a position of power deliberately simplify their language in speaking to
people in a subordinate position relative to themselves, thereby illustrating the so-
called Foreigner-talk hypothesis. My treatment is historical, as I address myself
to Naro’s argument. In Kihm & Rougé 2013 one finds a different history of pidgin
Portuguese in some details and more study of samples of the alleged variety of the
language. Whereas these authors agree that Portuguese pidgin’s birthplace was
“first and foremost Portugal itself” (page 4), they do not believe, as I do not
believe, that this was a version of Portuguese that was TAUGHT to them. They,
however, do not argue that latter point. They simply claim, beginning with a report
by Cà da Mosto (Ca’ da Mosto, Cadamosto, etc.) about his expedition in 1455, that
slaves acquired in Africa had become Christians in Portugal, where, according
to these authors, they had acquired the Língua de preto [the blacks’ variety] by
means of “ordinary” second-language-acquisition processes, which resulted in a
Basic Variety of language. (For the latter variety see their work just cited.) As for
the introduction of a modified form of Portuguese on African soil, they make
black INTERPRETERS responsible. Their view is summarized below. My
contribution to the discussion that continues to fascinate linguists is a very modest
one: Besides presenting a résumé of Naro’s arguments, I introduce reasons for
believing that the pidginized form of Portuguese could easily have appeared in
Portugal without its having been TAUGHT to the slaves and that the founding role
of interpreters is also less credible that alleged.

Here is a reappraisal of the widely accepted explanation by Anthony J. Naro
for the origin of Pidgin Portuguese that came to be spoken in the 16th and 17th
centuries (and later creolized in some regions) out of the kind of Portuguese that
was taught to slaves in Portugal. Its main arguments, in my opinion, are the
following:

1. There are samples of non-standard Portuguese being used
between whites and slaves in literary works dating from 1455 to
1570, but no proof of non-standard pidgin features coming from
Africa before the end of that period.
2. Captives from the coast of Africa were taught Portuguese in
Portugal and used as interpreters along the coast.

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\(^5\) Foreigner talk has been defined as a register of adjusted speech that is used when
speaking to people who are learning one’s language that makes the message easier
for the learner to understand and to respond to (Hatch 1983:64, 65; Naro

\(^6\) Alvise Cà da Mosto was born in Venice in 1432 and died there at the age of fifty-
six. Retained by the influential and enterprising Prince Henry the Navigator of
Portugal, he embarked on an expedition on 22 March 1455 to the Madeira and
Canary Islands and then the coast of Africa as far as the Senegal River.
Continuing the voyage, he explored the Cape Verde Islands and again Africa to
what is now Guinea-Bissau.
3. There were not enough slaves in Portugal—nor did they have enough contact with each other—to have developed a pidginized form of Portuguese on their own.

It seems to support the view that people in a position of power sometimes deliberately simplify their language in speaking to people in a subordinate position relative to themselves, thereby illustrating the so-called foreigner-talk hypothesis.

1.1. The historical evidence

According to the current view, based on historical chronicles, travellers’ accounts, missionaries’ reports, and other documentary sources (315), one is led to the following five conclusions by Naro.

1) In the 15th century Portuguese was taught to some captives or voluntary visitors (‘ambassadors’) who were brought to Portugal (339). Teaching Portuguese was official policy, according to Naro; in 1494 there was a royal order to this effect (317). The basic structural peculiarities of Portuguese pidgin “resulted primarily from conscious modifications of their speech by the Portuguese” (341, see also 320, 335, 339, 340, 341; 1983:109; 1988:95); the basis [for this variety of Portuguese] was “substantially, if not entirely, formed in Europe long before it became current in Africa” (334; 1988:97). Although the Portuguese “deliberately” and “consciously” modified their speech making their role “essential,” “primary,” and “central” in the emergence of pidginized Portuguese (340, 335, 341, 342; cf. Naro 1988:95, 96), it was not created entirely by Portuguese; blacks also played a role “during the initial stages of pidginization in

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7 All simple parenthesized numbers refer to pages in Naro 1978. In quotations, words within brackets are mine.
8 This project, and possibly only an ephemeral one, we add, may have been for dealing with the Berbers, not with Negroes.
9 Elsewhere Naro says the “initial pidginization” of Portuguese in the fifteenth century started on the side of the native speakers (1983:111).
10 At the time of publication of Naro 1978 creolized meant the use of a pidgin as the first (or native) language of speakers. — The doctoral research of Charlotte Emmerich on the Indians of the Xingú reserve in central Brazil is said to support his account of the way pidginized Portuguese was taught to Africans (Naro 1983). References to the works in Portuguese by Mollica et al. (1996) and by Gomes (1994) were kindly provided by Naro. Supporting publications in English have not been found.
the 1440s in Portugal” (342). See also Naro 1983:110, 111. For some critical dates see the Appendix below.

The numbers of language learners, we must note, are not known, and we have no information on how long this kind of training might have lasted. Only a relatively small number of bilinguals (if they deserve this characterization) were needed, both in Portugal and in Africa, and as soon as the number of slaves grew in Portugal, there was less need for any kind of ostensibly ‘formal’ teaching. Those who had learned some Portuguese might have been instructed to teach others, and, of course, they would have learned something from the other Africans. The captives, we should understand, could very well have been captured for the purpose of enslaving them. Indeed, as we learn from Kihm & Rougé, Cadamosto states that the interpreters on his ship and that of Antoniotto Usodimare (c1416-1461) were slaves, and he explains how much he paid their masters for them and how many voyages they had to accompany acting as interpreters in order to be set free.

(2) It took some time before pidginized Portuguese was established in Africa, Naro claims, “up to approximately the last quarter of the 15th century [1475], Portuguese was unknown [emphasis added] in West Africa” (317); “It seems quite unlikely [he also claims] that knowledge of Portuguese was at all extensive in any part of West Africa before the last quarter of the 16th century [i.e. 1575]” (316). He does, however, cite a Portuguese trader in 1594 who reported that the Africans around the city of Cachêu (Guiné-Bissau) spoke Portuguese very well (315). How well Portuguese was spoken is, of course, impossible to determine. (Extensive reading of colonial literature leads one to be wary of evaluations, all of them of a subjective nature. One notices, for example, that at the end of the 19th century and early 20th, French writers seem not to have complained about how poorly Africans spoke their language, but found their English almost incomprehensible.) For Cachêu we must admit the possibility that at least some, if not most, of the speakers used varieties of ‘restructured’ Portuguese. Supporting this hypothesis is Boulègue’s statement that at the beginning—and one might say somewhat before that—was an important center for Luso-Africans (1989:57, 18), for whom see below. They therefore would have been speaking what he calls creole.

(4) Naro continues by declaring, “There is no reason to suppose that, once in Portugal, the Africans had extensive contact with other Africans” (335). After all, few households could afford more than one slave; and since they were household slaves “primarily, if not exclusively in domestic service (e.g. household servants and artisans)” [Naro 1988:97]), they would have had little contact with

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11 Not mentioned by Naro is the claim that Diogo Cão (Diego Cam, b. 1450, d. 1486) in his first trip (1482-1483) down the coast of Africa returned with four “indigenas” to Portugal and in the following year took them back to the Congo “já ensinados na lingua e costumes de Portugal” (‘already instructed in the language and customs of Portugal’ (Raimundo 1933:12).
each other. “The only occasion for contact with other Africans would be the few minutes of rest that slaves might be able to steal at the water fountain” (335).

(5) And in a subsequent publication Naro claims, “[T]here is ‘no explicit proof of the use of any non-standard pidgin features’ in the documents from Africa dating from the first years of the 17th century or earlier” (Naro 1988:96, quoting from 1978:315; cf. p. 320).

However, information not used (perhaps not known) three decades ago by Naro documents that “trading relations were established by 1450 with the rulers of all the states of northern Senegal — Waalo, Kayor, Jolof, and Tukulor (Elbl 1986:204), but Boulègue 1989 states that at the time when the Portuguese first came to Senegambia there were two states: that of Jolof and that of Mali; see this work for a map showing the extent of the Jolof empire.) (The Wolof language belongs to the Atlantic, Northern Branch, Senegambian family of languages [Bendor-Samuel 1989].) The majority of the inhabitants of Waalo and Kayor (Kajoor or Cayor), north of Dakar along the coast, were also speakers of Wolof.) The earliest date we are given by Naro is 1442, at which time there was contact at what is known as Rio de Oro and the Spanish Sahara, straddling 25º N. lat. (317).

On this occasion two captives were taken, an old Berber man and a black woman slave, with whom the Portuguese could not communicate in any language. From 1442 on, contact along the west coast of Africa was allegedly made either without linguistic communication or with interpreters. From the north to Rio de Oro (a region, not a river, immediately north of Senegal) the Portuguese used speakers of Arabic. Further down the coast they used African captives who had been taught Portuguese “in some variety” or “version” (318, 320). (However, the inhabitants of the region of Rio de Oro and the Senegal River probably spoke Arabic or Berber, not African languages, except, one would suppose, the African slaves.)

Since the first captives (from Guinea), were taken in 1444, we are led to believe that instruction in Portuguese on the Iberian Peninsula possibly began soon after. (In the early years, according to Raimundo 1933, all the coast from the Casamance River to the mouth of the Niger River was referred to as Guinea.) Portuguese (whites, we assume) did not start arriving on the African mainland to establish “permanent households” until sometime after 1462, according to Naro (334), when the Cape Verde islands were first colonized. By 1508 their inhabitants were numerous. In 1583 the island of Santiago had 2,700 free inhabitants, including 600 whites and mixed and 400 free and married blacks, and 5,000 slaves (Boulègue 1989:18). Around this time, we should note, the buurba (apparently some kind of leader) of Jolof in the 1460s was buying for his own use horses at Siin that were brought on European ships (Elbl 1986:10). (The indigenous islamicized States in this region were hierarchically structured.)

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12 According to Boulègue, however, the first mention of a “creole” was of a “corrupt” Portuguese that was spoken by everyone, both men and women at Rufisque (Recife) in 1666 (1989:51). This is a town and port not far from Dakar.
Although, in Naro’s words, “a veritable school of interpreters seems to have been maintained by the King” [of Portugal] (317), we should not allow ourselves to visualize these captives (possibly few in number at any time and place) sitting in language classes for a certain number of hours per day. (Thomason and Kaufman share this incredulity [1988:354, fn. 5]). What the king wanted and what his ‘teachers’ did were quite different. The so-called teaching must have been extremely casual. Most of what was said in Portuguese by whites, we assume, was surely in giving orders and teaching a few skills. A minimal acquaintance with Portuguese would have been sufficient, as a reading of Africanist literature reveals, to make the slaves useful in negotiating with Africans; they did not have to be interpreters or translators as we conceive of them today. In so many cases what whites wanted most was that their blacks would convince Africans to cooperate with the foreign traders.

1.2. The linguistic evidence

Evidence of pidginized Portuguese, according to Naro, occurs in the language that is put in the mouths of Africans in poems and plays (321, 322, 334, 343, 344) dating from 1455, 1510, and later. (One date is contested in Goodman 1987.) Europeans in Portugal, however, were admittedly “extremely inconsistent” in the way they spoke to blacks and in their use of “pidgin features” so that there was “great variability” (333; cf. 1988:95, 99). These different forms of Portuguese, nonetheless, became “eventually conventionalized” (1988:99; 1978:334). In other words, whites and blacks took a more or less stable form of language from Portugal to Africa before the Cape Verde Islands and São Tomé were settled, 1462 and 1485 respectively. Although the literature cited by him as evidence does illustrate features of PIDGINIZATION, it does not necessarily reveal the existence of a PIDGIN.

2. Slaves in Portugal

Other documents have recently been discovered that reveal that in Portugal there were many more African slaves than imagined.

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13 My glimpse into the teaching of a colonial language is made possible by what administrators wrote on the topic for the early years of what eventually became the Central African Republic.

14 We are frequent witnesses by means of television of speech-interpreted events in Iraq and Afghanistan, where the allied soldier seems to be putting on a show for the journalists and his English-speaking countrymen and women instead of making the local and usually elderly inhabitants understand the issue at hand. The speech-givers seem not to have been trained to speak in a certain way for these events.

15 This system was a “reconnaissance language” (320, 321 fn. 8, 323, 343), but also called “Pidgin Portuguese” (96), and pidgin (1988:100).
(1) Although, as Naro claims, only the rich in general could afford slaves (but perhaps only in the early period, we might add), in Oporto, merchants and even tradesmen owned them. Slaves were so profitable for the many ways they could earn money for their masters that one could buy a slave every year off the latter’s earnings (Saunders 1982:27, 79).

(2) Although it is uncertain how many slaves actually arrived in Portugal from any source in Africa, the first person to take slaves from African soil was Antão Gonçalves in 1441. Colonial slavery in Portugal therefore began before colonization elsewhere (Verlinden 1964:34, 35). From 1441 to 1448 at least 927 slaves (Moors and Negroes) were sent to Portugal (Verlinden 1955:615, 617, 618, 628). In the 1480s and 1490s there were about 1800 slaves per year coming from the Upper Guinea area (Elbl 1986:477). Another reports that in this period about 1000 slaves were traded each year from El Mina (now in Ghana), with no mention of their destinations (Renault & Daget 1985:74). Slaves represented at one time three per cent of Portugal’s population, and around 1600 they constituted about ten per cent of Lisbon’s population, for which see the chronological table below (Saunders 1982:55, 58, 59).

(3) Spain and other parts of Europe must be included in the discussion about slavery in Portugal. There were black slaves in Europe from the 13th century, probably from North Africa. Some slaves certainly came from the Canary Islands off the west coast of Africa as early the 14th century. The ones from the Canary Islands were Guanches, that is to say ethnolinguistically Berber. (Some of them might have spoken the Mediterranean Sabir.) And there were black slaves in eastern Spain, Southern France and Italy before 1442. At one time there were about 100,000 slaves of all origins in Spain. Although some of them might have come from Portuguese merchants (Saunders 1982:60 Andalusian interloping in Guinean waters took place as early as 1453 (Elbl 1986:250–251, 341). Formal Castilian claim in West African territory dates from August 19, 1475, following a war between Portugal and Castile. In Seville, slaves made up an important and apparently close-knit community. It has been said, “As early as the mid-15th century, there were Negro slaves in Seville brought into the city by Portuguese slave traders and Andalusian ship owners, who were also engaged in the African slave trade during this period. Seville’s Negro population grew so large that by the reign of Ferdinand and Isabella they had their own district, chapel, ordinances, and special police.” And in Barcelona around the middle of the 15th century there was a confraternity consisting of free Christianized blacks. In 1474—quite a few years before the 16th-century plays already cited—the Catholic kings appointed a Negro named Juan de Valladolid, who was judge and official leader of Seville’s Negro community, both slave and free (Pike 1966:168–169, fn. 15). Seville also produced a great deal of olive oil and soap, where slaves were employed, a fact that challenges the allegation, “The social activities and, in particular, the linguistic interactions of African slaves in Europe during the mid-15th century cannot be known with any degree of certainty” (Naro 1988:97). As for Italy, 34 black slaves were sold by Portuguese merchants between 1449 and 1455, 15 of
whom were female, and from 1449 to 1495 58 women and 42 men were sold. In the last decades of the 15th century blacks furnished the largest part of workers for hard labor (Verlinden 1955:320–323, 329).

(4) Scholarship does not support the allegation, “In general terms, slavery in 14th to 15th century had become an essentially urban phenomenon” (italics in the original); “There can be absolutely no doubt that the first black African slaves to arrive in Portugal were placed in the court and in wealthy households” (Naro 1988:97–98). First, two of the sources are not convincing. One, a scholarly work (Lovejoy 1983:35, citing but not quoting a work from 1955), says only, “some slaves were taken to southern Europe for employment as domestic servants...” The other (Osae, Nwabara, and Odunsis 1973:164) says something similar: “They [the slaves] were mainly employed in domestic service...” Here no source is cited at all, a fact that is not surprising given that this book is only a textbook as part of the “West African History Syllabus issued by the West African Examinations Council for the General Certificate of Education Ordinary Level examinations.” Second, we note that in continental Catalonia, as well as the Balearic Islands [off the coast of Valencia], slaves were employed both in agricultural labor as in other economic activities. They cleared land, drained marshes, and worked in the salt-pans (Saunders 1982:28, 58; on Valencia see Verlinden et al. 1985).

(5) Slaves and freed slaves were not isolated from each other but enjoyed a considerable amount of freedom in interacting with each other. Freed female slaves were innkeepers, and they had an important economic role as vendors in Lisbon. Slaves, as well as whites, were sellers of water; in general slaves spent their working days outside their masters’ supervision, drank in taverns, and entertained other slaves where they lived (Saunders 1982:78-79, 112, 124–125, 145).

3. A nursery for the origin and spread of pidginized Portuguese

It is a mistake to ignore the possible role of the Cape Verde Islands in the development of pidgin Portuguese. Discovered in 1455 by Cà da Mosto perhaps, they received their first settlement in 1462, when Antonio da Noli brought slaves from the Guinea Coast with the aim of starting sugar plantations (Meintel 1984:31). The island of Santiago was settled in 1466. In the 1490s the settlers were still trading about 850 slaves per year, and in 1514 slaves accounted for 95 per cent of all imported commodities. This would mean from the coast of Africa, perhaps dealing with lançados, for whom see below. So successful were the colonists that they quickly represented a serious competition for the Crown and its leaseholders. For this reason as early as 1472 Dom Affonso V attempted, without great success, to limit the scope of privileges that had been granted to the Cape Verdians. By 1472 From Santiago settlers go to the Guinea Coast contrary to the will of the Crown, according to some interpretations. At first they were white, often Jews; free blacks and mulattoes followed them. (One should not presume opportunism and adventurism on the part of the Jews; they were being sorely
persecuted in Portugal, a topic about which there is abundant literature. For an introduction see Boulègue 1989.) The blacks were treated by West Africans as “guests” instead (or and) of “traders” (Meintel 1984:33, 34). A slightly different picture, but not necessarily contradictory one, is given by another researcher, who observes that many of the entrepreneurs on the Cape Verde Islands were slaves, former slaves, or descendants of slave mothers. On the islands the slaves were even permitted to travel and trade independently, undoubtedly sharing a part of their profits with their masters, as noted above for Portugal. Not supplying these facts or others, Boulègue simply states that creole was formed on these islands as well as on the coast. (For some of the information in this paragraph see Elbl 1986:330–331, 344, 360, fn159, 453, 476.)

The picture that we get of the Cape Verde colony is one of great activity. It played an important role in acquiring slaves and shipping them to Portugal in addition to trading, most certainly, in other commodities. This commerce existed in part because Cape Verdians were in touch with settlers on the African mainland, the suppliers of these human and non-human commodities. The settlements on the Islands and on the mainland—where slave, freed slaves, and mulattoes, Luso-Africans, according to Boulègue 1989, were speaking some form of imperfect Portuguese—must certainly be considered as centers where pidgin Portuguese was becoming stabilized and creolized among the linguistically diverse population, as noted above.

Although lançados do not figure in the alleged emergence of Pidgin Portuguese on the mainland, they should be mentioned here because they were participants in Portuguese colonization and the rise of Portuguese Creole.16 (The term appears in different forms in 1517 and 1542 and disappeared in the course of the 17th century.) Kihm & Rougé say little about them, and do not seem to consider them to be significant in the emergence of African Portuguese. They are described simply as smugglers, ostensibly on the grounds that they traded without the Crown’s permission, having settled in villages along the Senegalese Petite Côte and down to Casamance and the Geba River (now Guinea-Bissau), trading in slaves and other goods with crews of any European nationality. According to Boulègue, they were men who had been banished from Portugal or the islands or were fugitives from justice, lawless and without respect for anything except their own desires. Some of them may not have been Portuguese at all. Although Portuguese were already on the island of Santiago in 1466 according to Boulègue, the islands having been uninhabited before then, and were allowed by the Crown (Alphonse V) to carry on some commercial activities with Africans, there was no Portuguese authority on the coast. On the other hand, there was an alliance between whites based in Africa and the Cape Verdians; both were competing with the Crown in trading ventures with Africans. Lançados who went to Africa were all males. Only a few were ever able to return to Portugal, clandestinely for the most part. Those who remained in Africa took African women as mates and

16 Much of this paragraph is based on Boulègue 1989. The work is small enough so that documentation is found easily.
produced a mixed population, more or less assimilated to African culture, who came to be known as Luso-Africans (Portuguese-Africans or Afro-Portuguese). Some were polygamous; some maintained a few tokens of Christianity. There were no communities to begin with, just small collections of the Portuguese and their offspring. Despite what seems to have been a long time of residence in Africa, it was not until 1620 that an English traveler to Gambia described them, by which time many were indistinguishable physically from indigenous Africans.

Even the islands of São Tomé and Principe should be considered in attempting to explain the origin of pidgin Portuguese. Charters were given to settlers in 1485 and 1493. Very quickly, by 1506 to be exact, “there were [on one or both of these islands; the source is not clear about this] 2000 settled slaves serving some 1,000 settlers, and 5,000 to 6,000 trade slaves ...” (Elbl 1986:260, 474). Twenty years later they produced large quantities of foodstuffs. Once slaves became useful at a task, they were undoubtedly moved about from one place to another.

4. So-called interpreters in European expansionism

Since Kihm & Rougé seriously consider the possibility of interpreters having introduced what we might lightly call ‘broken Portuguese’ to Africans on the Guinea Coast and suggest (page 56) that more research should be devoted to the subject, we welcome this opportunity to continue with the discussion. I, for one, would like to encourage the collection and analysis of data on the use of interpreters as bridges of communication in instances of linguistic hiatus. Here we summarize their view and then the alleged role of interpreters in the creation of Kituba, adding a bit on children as interpreters in the Ubangi River basin at the end of the 19th century.

We should begin with the realization that we must be critical of all reports, as do Kihm & Rougé, on the alleged skills of interpreters. In the 19th-century colonization of Central Africa, for example, there was rarely an office of ‘Interpreter’ among foreign Africans, despite a few gratuitous references to them by whites. Take the report of the “court interpreter” (interprète du parquet) at Matadi in 1895 (and perhaps even in 1892), “un jeune garçon intelligent,” who was one of the two corporals, Egyptian in origin and having already had policing experience, commanding the detachment of about twenty men (indigenous, it appears) being trained as policemen. This young man, his officer reports, spoke six languages “couramment:” French, English, Arabic, Fiot (some form of Kikongo), Bangala (the jargon that would become Lingala, Samarin 1990/1991), and Swahili (Wolters 1895:15). Of course, since the latter three idioms are Bantu, he might have created a personal “makeshift” jargon that suited most of his needs while impressing his officer in doing so.

4.1. Portuguese
Kihm & Rougé agree with Naro that the birthplace of Língua de preto was in Portugal and that the first contacts in West Africa “mainly went on through interpreters” who knew “the local language” except when signs [gestures] had to be used. They cite as evidence a statement by Cadamosto that when they anchored at one place south of the Senegal River, they sent an interpreter ashore. He was a black who had been brought from Portugal. He and other interpreters on their ships had been sold as slaves by a “lord of Senegal” to the “first Portuguese Christians” who had come to discover “the land of the Black.” (The first purchases of slaves must have involved no language, Arabic, or, we might add, a variety of Berber.) The slaves had become Christians in Portugal and had acquired the “black’s language” by means of “ordinary” second-language-acquisition processes. In repayment for their service as interpreters their masters were given one slave from the cargo (presumably of slaves with whom they were returning). After the interpreters had done this four times, they were freed (but we do not know where). According to them, “a significant number of them earned their freedom and stayed” in Africa. (Up to this time there was no variety of Portuguese along the Senegambian coast.) Therefore interpreters—and also maybe African ship-jumpers—introduced pidgin Portuguese [in Senegambia], and from then on Portuguese and other Europeans “could be confident” about being understood in pidgin Portuguese.

4.2. Bantu languages in central equatorial Africa

Interpreters—West Africans in particular—are also attributed a special role in the development of Kituba. Salikoko Mufwene would like to believe that when in the latter part of the 19th century they came with Europeans to penetrate the interior of Africa, they tried using the alleged Bantu lingua franca that already existed in the Lower Congo at the end of the 19th century with the indigenes of the area. In the process, they modified (“restructured”) it. And then the indigenes, notably the Bakongo, took this “distorted” Kikongo to be the colonial way of speaking their language and learned to speak it in the novel fashion (Mufwene 1997:191, 192, 194, 195; 2005:11, fn. 1). (West Africans figure in Mufwene’s interpretation of my suggestion about the influence foreigners may have had in the origin of Kituba’s isolating syntax as opposed to a Bantu agglutinating morphosyntax.)

Since this idea is attributed to me I need to correct the mistake. I am supposed to have demonstrated that “West Africans as interpreters between the Europeans and the Bantu populations were instrumental” in the “development” of these places (i.e., colonial posts, factory towns, and missions, and centres

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17 One might consider Sine to be related to Sin, the name of a dialect of Serer (Bendor-Samuel 1989).
18 My view was and still is the following: “[Kituba] clearly emerged as the result of labor recruitment—especially for porterage—among these people after Europeans began going up to the [Stanley] Pool” (Samarin 1986:139).
I find no such claim in my works. I do not believe that interpreters—and they could have been children and women as well as men—played any significant role in the creation of Central Africa’s lingua francas. The only reference in one of my works to interpreters is in a discussion of “Central African bilingualism” (at the beginning, the Haut-Oubangui, then Oubangui-Chari, and at independence the Central African Republic), where I say that “What Europeans found [instead of lingua francas in a technical sense] were many individuals who had acquired the knowledge of other languages, and these were used as guides and interpreters” (Samarin 1990:52).

When Europeans arrived at the Congolese coast at the end of the 19th century they of course took advantage of anyone who could communicate with the indigenes. There is considerable evidence for the linguistic competence of bilinguals involved in pre-colonial trade in the Lower Congo. There was even a name for them: linguisters (probably from Portuguese linguistas), some of them, besides speaking Portuguese, knew English, or French in modified forms (Samarin 1989:9, 86, 224). It was by good fortune that whites often acquired interpreters, as they were called. On a scientific expedition in 1818—to determine, among other things, if there was a lingua franca in the Lower Congo—one of Captain Tuckey’s men, recruited in Sierra Leone, had been a slave from the Congo and still spoke some indigenous language (Tuckey 1818). In May 1883 Stanley had with him, when he launched his expedition up the Congo river from Stanley Pool, slaves apparently acquired at the coast: one a man from Mswata and two others from Ibaka (Stanley 1885(2):3, 73, 443). Mswata was near the mouth of the Kasai River on the left side of the Congo, where people of Bobangi or Yanzi ethnicity were to be found; Ibaka, another Bobangi settlement, was at the mouth of the Alima River, also on the right side of the Congo (see Samarin 1989:87 for full documentation). They would have been extremely useful when stations were being created near the equator, but they appear in no document known to me. Recalling this period, Emile Coquilhat, building the first of Stanley’s stations upriver of the Pool, reports that his much praised interpreter was a Zanzibari named Omar, who served in making treaties as early as December 1882. He had learned “Kibangi,” Coquilhat observes, in his personal relations and spoke the language “fluently” (Coquilhat 1888:89). This was quite soon after he had arrived presumably with Stanley’s 68 Zanzibaris at the mouth of the Congo in August 1879. Stanley did not reach the Pool where the language might have been spoken, but not indigenously, until May 1881(Alexis 1890:82-83). But there was no real activity at this site until April 1882, when a station was being established (Bontinck, 12 June 1987, personal correspondence). After an absence of about five months from the Congo because of illness Stanley is occupied with transporting and then assembling the little steamboat ‘En Avant.’ Its maiden voyage up the Congo from the Pool began on 19 April 1882 (Stanley 1885:394). It is curious that when the Equator station is founded in June 1883,
this interpreter is not there, and Coquilhat, who, naturally, did not know the local
language, had no interpreter (Cuypers 1959:13). And Alphonse Van Gele, who led
the first white expedition into the Upper Ubangi region, went without an
interpreter even though he was charged to make treaties. But he was lucky: he had
a slave whom he had acquired on the Upper Congo River who, unbeknownst to
him, apparently knew a language with which he could communicate with speakers
of a Bantu language on the left bank of the Ubangi. (There is still a sliver of
Ngombe people in this area, where Ubangian languages otherwise predominate.)
Van Gele, at least, thought so.²⁰ (This discovery has never before appeared in
print, but it is being prepared for publication.)

Two other remarks need to be made. (1) The number of persons in daily
interaction sufficient for the creation of a new way of speaking is much higher
than Mufwene seems to believe. A new language does not emerge with a few
resourceful assistants as easily as a prairie can be set afire with a discarded match
or cigarette. Not every white needed an interpreter or needed one frequently. They
figured significantly only in formal situations. Their real role was that of
mediator: If he (or she) were told to instruct someone that forty baskets of manioc
‘bread’ were needed by a certain date, they were successful if the provisions
arrived. How that was accomplished was of little concern to the white. The case
of Pidgin Portuguese is different, because the Europeans stayed long enough to
arrive at a stabilized manner of getting along verbally.

Since we continue to discuss the way Pidgin Portuguese emerged, I make
bold to suggest two complementary explanations. (1) The first is mentioned by
Kihm & Rougé, cited above: The black’s way of talking Portuguese may have
been introduced by ship-jumpers as well as interpreters. This was not a
profession, of course! They were escapees, refugees from the rigors, frequently
brutal and savage, experienced by the “makeshiñ” crews of the ships of the era.
And they were certainly multinational, if the term is not too elegant for them.
Sure, they could falar Portuguese also!

For the origin of Pidgin Portuguese we must return to the discussion of
maritime or nautical jargons (for which see Mühlhäusler 1986 and Arends,
Muysken & Smith 1995). They have been related to the origin of Nootka and
Chinook Jargon (Samarin 1988). Although English certainly came to dominate the
communicative field in the Pacific Northwest, we must acknowledge that ships
brought with them men speaking other languages. There must have included
Russian, indigenous Siberian languages, Aleut, Eskimo, Hawaiian, Portuguese,
several varieties of Amerindian languages among the crew of the Spanish in

²⁰ “… j’avais parmi mes hommes un indigene [sic] d’Upoto dont le langage fut
compris par les Bakombe [sic]; je pus ainsi me faire entendre jusqu’aux rapides de
Cétéma [just upriver of Mobaye], car pendant toute cette marche, nous avons
rencontré quelques Bakombe dans les villages riverains, où il nos servaient
d’interpretes. Je pense que les Bakombe s’étendent sur un grand espace dans
l’intérieur [which is true of the agricultural Ngbandis]” (Alphonse Van Gele
Papers, Musée Royal de l’Afrique Centrale, Tervuren, Belgium, Booklet 1887).
addition to Alaskan Athapaskans, and others. Crew members would have been familiar with Pidgin English in one of its varieties or jargonized English. But we must throw a larger net to encompass all forms of the intensive use of waterways by linguistically diverse crews. For the origins of Lingala and Sango, for example, one is encouraged to study the use of the Congo and Ubangi rivers with steamboats and canoes.

4.3. Children as interpreters

Returning to Portuguese, we propose the possibility of bringing African children to Portugal to introduce them to western culture and the Portuguese language. This is a reasonable strategy, because it has been reported anecdotally in different parts of the world. It would have been easy for whites to purchase young slaves who were already competent in their ethnic language; in fact, whites would probably have kidnapped some. In Portugal, they would have learned a lot of the language in five years, for example, while retaining some knowledge of their first language. We can cite a Portuguese slave of nine years, a girl, sold in Italy, as noted above. Since the use of so-called interpreters in the first stages of contact with unknown ethnolinguistic groups has not been studied as it needs to be, the following report, not a complete one by any means, gives us an idea of what mediated contact was in the Ubangi River basin when representatives of the Congo Free State and France were exploring and colonizing the region.

In the first year of French presence on the upper Ubangi—that is, 1889–1890—contact with the indigenous populations around Bangui was infrequent and tenuous (Samarin 1984). Interpreters seem to have been rarely used. Indeed, Paul Crampel, leader of an expedition going to the Chad, reported in 1890 that whites, French as well as Belgian, were not making an effort to establish relations with the natives and that not even a single interpreter had been formed on either side.\(^{21}\) It is possible, of course, to interpret the expression “train an interpreter” as referring to someone from the local population, which would require that he learn some French or one of the languages spoken by the expatriate black personnel. Foreign blacks were just expected to pick up local languages willy-nilly, so to speak, and their white superiors encouraged the processes. Casimir Dybowski, another explorer going northward from the Ubangi River, tells how he did this in 1891, the year expeditions were going further upriver and also inland north and east of Bangui. He wrote, “I had taken the precaution of having at the beginning sent to the chief Bembe [upriver of Bangui] two of my soldiers so that they could learn the language and serve as interpreters. They had hardly been living in the Gbanziri village a month before they could make themselves understood in this simple and easy language” (Dybowski 1894:216, my translation). This must be the village where three Senegalese soldiers were left as guards in January of 1891.

one of whom is already recognized as interpreter.\footnote{Edouard Ponel, Bangui, 30 March 1891 (France, Archives Nationales Section Outre-Mer, Gabon-Congo, Aix-en-Provence, 4(3)D1).}

The Gbanziri language might have appeared simple and easy to learn to a white because it is extremely different morphosyntactically from Bantu languages found all the way down the Ubangi and Congo rivers to the coast. But it is not impossible that jargonized Ngbandi was the target language here: the earliest form of Sango. In any case, we cannot ignore the fact that whites did not “train” their intended interpreters, and the same kind of \textit{laissez-faire} policy was probably followed in Portugal despite one alleged case of teaching.

The other way for the whites to acquire interpreters (as well as guides and informants) was to take children into their service as servants to give them the opportunity to learn French. The first such case of kidnapping among the French in the Upper Ubangi seems to have been that of the alleged son of Bembe, possibly in 1891.

Mr. Dybowski, while on the expedition to the Chad, had, without previously informing him [the father], sent prince Bonga, his eldest son about ten years of age, to Brazzaville.\footnote{Referring to this boy as a “prince” is an example of the deceitfulness of colonial rhetoric—unless these words were once used in a public forum where the audience could perceive the irony and humor in the speaker’s words. In this part of Africa there were no kings, not even “chiefs.”}

We were returning this young prince to the aroused tenderness of his family, who in washing our dishes, had learned a few French words. He was returning loaded with gifts, because he had given us valuable information about his tribe and we had rewarded him for it liberally.

This child, the first of his race to speak French, is bound to render many services if we know how to use him (Chapiseau 1900:38–39, translation from French).

Nine more children were obtained in September of 1893, when Monseigneur Prosper Augouard came on a visit to make decisions about the planting of missions in the region. They were taken to Brazzaville so that they could become accustomed to the ways of whites and to learn French. A few months seemed to have suited the missionaries because the children returned in February of the following year. (For more on children in the work of the Spiritain missionaries [Congrégation du Saint-Esprit] see Samarin 1989:204–211.)

5. Conclusion

Although it is reasonable to assume that a \textit{PIDGINIZED FORM} of Portuguese might have emerged in Portugal before it took root in Africa, I am not convinced
that the Portuguese created it. I believe that with a high number of slaves in Portugal, a variable slave variety of Portuguese could have developed and survived, perhaps, for a generation. Whether the earliest written text of slave-Portuguese reproduces this idiom is another matter. It may very well have been a parody of the way slaves were thought to have spoken. Since slavery in Europe was widespread before the Portuguese began to import Africans from the coast, the earliest non-standard speech might have been modelled on what these slaves spoke. The simplest and most reasonable explanation for the origin of pidginized Portuguese would be the role that captivos meninos (child captives, cativos in modern Portuguese) had in helping whites in Portugal and along the West African Coast even though other foreigners ‘restructured’ Portuguese.
Appendix: Dates related to the origin of Pidgin Portuguese
based on references cited in this work.

1435 — Prince Henry orders his captains to capture potential interpreters.
1441 — The first slaves are taken from Africa to (presumably) Portugal.
1442 — First captives (one Berber man and one black woman slave) are taken in Rio de Oro.
1443 — Nino Tristão (Portuguese) builds a fort on the island of Arguim, and 80 slaves are captured here.
1444 — First captures are made in Guiné with Dinis Dias’s voyage to the coast of Senegal.
1447 — A captain sailing for Guinea coast takes two “natives of the land” as interpreters.
1453 — Portuguese attack Andalusian interlopers.
1455 — Cape Verde Islands are discovered explorers.
1455 — First known text in broken Portuguese.
1455 — Portuguese trading post on the island of Arguim is shipping 700–800 slaves to Portugal according to Cadamosto.
1455 — The Venetian, Cadamosto, makes voyages to Africa (1455–1456).
1460 — Sintra reports many blacks in Portugal (Verriers 1994:141).
1462 — First settlement in the Cape Verde Islands with slaves from the Guinea coast.
1466 — The island of Santiago (one of the Cape Verde Islands) is settled.
1466 — Colonists on Cape Verde Islands are given exclusive trading rights with the entire African mainland apart from Arguim.
1472 — From Santiago settlers go to the Guinea Coast, contrary to the will of the Crown.
1474 — Juan de Valladolid, a black, is judge and official leader of the black community of Seville.
1475 — Formal Castilian claim is made on the West African waters.
1484 — Diego Cam arrives at the Congo River and returns with four blacks to Portugal (Raimundo 1933:12).
1485 — Cam returns to the Congo with the Africans.
1485 — Charter is given to settlers of São Tomé.
1493 — Charter is given to settlers of Principe.
1506 — 2,000 settled slaves are on São Tomé or Principe.
1516 — There is “formal instruction in Portuguese at the court of Benin”. (source misplaced).
1551 — Slaves in Lisbon number about 100,000 or 10 per cent of the population.
1536 — Sample of non-standard Portuguese in a play.
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