

‘Black Spanish’ Speech as Ethnic Identity in Afro-Colombian Poetry: The Case of Candelario Obeso

by

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Abstract

The main purpose of this paper is to analyze the poetic discourse of Afro-Colombian writer Candelario Obeso, as exhibited in his *Cantos populares de mi tierra* (Popular chants of my homeland, henceforth *Cantos*). The approach taken in this paper is both linguistic and socio-ethnic. Thus, it describes relevant ‘Black Spanish’ (i.e., Afro-Hispanic) linguistic features, along with extra-linguistic entities naturally associated with ethnic, social, and cultural characteristics. It is shown that Obeso’s poetic discourse appears to be a peculiar speech form of Afro-vernacular Spanish. It will be also shown that the author makes use of this linguistic modality in order to express ethnic identity and as a reaction against linguistic and cultural discrimination during post-Colonial Latin America.

Research Word(s): Black Spanish, Afro-vernacular speech, socio-ethno-linguistic, literary imitations, identity.

Introduction

This paper presents a linguistic as well as a socio-ethnic analysis of Afro-Colombian poet Candelario Obeso's *Cantos populares de mi tierra* (Popular chants of my homeland, henceforth *Cantos*). Thus, it describes relevant 'Black Spanish' (i.e., Afro-Hispanic) linguistic features, along with extra-linguistic entities naturally associated with ethnic, social, and cultural characteristics.

The paper has two purposes, one general and one specific. The general purpose is to show that socio-cultural entities such as ethnic identity and race, group membership, and stigma/prestige formation are working concepts that may be reflected on literary discourse in terms of socio-ethno-linguistic variables. Such variables, however, are not reflected in the same way, as will be shown in the literary discourse of other Afro-Colombian writers.

The specific purpose of this paper is to account for the linguistic structure of 'Black Spanish,' as exhibited in *Cantos*, and to show that Obeso's poetic discourse appears to be a peculiar speech form of Afro-vernacular Spanish. It will be also shown that the author makes use of this linguistic modality in order, first, to reflect his ethnic identity and, secondly, to react against linguistic, racial, and cultural prejudice and, thirdly, to foster positive attitudes toward prestige formation in Afro-Hispanic traditions.

Biographical Note

The Afro-Colombian poet, Candelario Obeso (Mompox, 1849-1884), was an erudite, prolific, yet polemic writer, who lived intensely and underwent an early, tragic death. In fact, known as the founder of "Black poetry" in Colombia (Prescott 1985), Obeso lived in poverty, his life marked by frustrated romance events and various personal conflicts. Yet, he met remarkable goals, such as becoming an engineer, a military, an educator, a journalist and, even, a politician, not mention the fact that he was a successful writer. Not only he was a dedicated studious of Spanish grammar, but also knowledgeable in several languages; he translated Shakespeare's *Othello*, and works from Victor Hugo, Byron, Musset, and Longfellow, among others. He wrote poetry as well as prose (e.g., drama, comedy, and novel), at a time when Black writing was nearly unknown or unappreciated. Moreover, vernacular literature and cultural production was signaled by anachronism and prejudice, mostly fashionable imitations of European streamline. (Bolaños 2004).

Obeso pioneered a new vein by exploring and praising regional culture and vernacular art and language, as opposed to standard usage. Obeso reached out in search of his ethnic identity, thus he exalted Afro-descended traditions and regional folklore (Jáuregui 2000). In fact, what Obeso reacted against was 19th century Colombian racial, cultural, and linguistic anachronism, by writing in Black (vernacular) dialect, a regional Afro-Hispanic speech that gave a peculiar style to his poetry (Porras 2007).

To this purpose, he published a book of poems titled *Cantos populares de mi tierra* (Popular Chants from my Homeland) 1. Purist reactions emerged almost immediately both from Classic writers and intellectuals. Similarly, Obeso's articles published in mainstream Bogotá newspapers stirred bitter criticism during the last two decades of the 19th century. Interestingly, far from retracting from his actions, Obeso dedicated many of his poems to well-known literary writers and intellectual figures of his time. However, it was not until the second or third decade of the 20th century that literary critics paid him some attention; indeed, it was not after the New National Constitutional Reform of 1992 that aboriginal and multiethnic cultures in Colombia had a fresh and well-deserved recognition.

Although the actual circumstances of his death have never been cleared to satisfaction, two hypotheses stand out in the literature, one pointing to an accident with a gun (according to journal chronicles); the other pointing to a suicide (according to his friend, Juan de Dios Uribe). Uribe published an "Intima" note two years after his death, where he explained that, after a romantic disappointment, Obeso committed suicide by shooting himself in his stomach. His friends wanted to cover him before the priest by making up an accident, but the dying poet replied to the unconvinced priest with a humorous remark: —"Es verdad lo que mis amigos le dijeron, padre. Lo que pasa es que yo tengo pésima puntería. Le tiré al blanco y le pegué al negro" (What my friends told you is true, Father. What happens is that I am a terrible shooter. I shot at the target, (i.e., el blanco): the white), and I hit the black) 2.

Socio-Ethnic and Linguistic Framework

It is well known that language is not only used for the communicative function, but also to serve other functions such as individual/collective identities and to set up social group membership (See, among others, Edwards 2009; Gumperz & Hymes 1972; Hall 1996; Horowitz 1985; Sterling 2000). Although there is sufficient research evidence that relate language and identity, much of it is founded on non-linguistic grounds. To be sure, a socio-ethno-linguistic approach to the relationship between language and identity may reveal the intricacies of subjective and objective processes and their interface in terms of creative activity (e.g., literary writing).

Accordingly, it may reflect the interchange of intrinsic structural processes said in terms of linguistic variation, and extrinsic socio-cultural factors such as race, ethnic identity, and social stereotypes. This scenario is further complicated by the semantically nebulous nature of these terms (including language, of course). Hall, for instance, defines “identity” as a very abstract term with a never-completed process that is constructed inside discourse. For Horowitz: 53, “identity” is an umbrella concept that “easily embraces groups differentiated by color, language, and religion; it covers ‘tribes,’ ‘races,’ ‘nationalities,’ and ‘castes.’ According to this definition, “ethnic identity” is basically related with ideas of descent, nation, and sameness.

Consequently, the preceding considerations, with or without conceptual vagueness, no doubt affect crucial aspects of linguistic and literary activity, including historic, social, cultural, and specially, the so-called “ethnic poetry.” (Mühleisen 2002). In the particular case of Afro-Hispanic writers, where the polarity between prestige and stigma, as a socio-ethno-linguistic phenomenon, is in the center of the debate, the question may be posed as to which Spanish variety should be used in the literary discourse of Afro-Hispanic writers.

Although Afro-Hispanic writers rarely use vernacular ‘Black Spanish’ in their writings, thus showing preference for the standard, canonic linguistic variety, a few of them still choose the vernacular, informal variety (i.e., ‘Black Spanish’), specially when they need to add voice and sound to their narrations, that is, for example, quoted dialogues, letter of songs, ritual chants, and the like, in order to give a more lively and natural flavor to their characters, or to empathize more closely with them, like in the case of Candelario Obeso.

However, although the ‘Black Spanish’ variety is certainly not pervasive in Afro-Colombian or, more generally, Afro-Hispanic writers, literary discourse dealing with African related themes inevitably reflect some “impregnations” of linguistic and cultural traits, not just in grammar and style, but also in areas including personal names, geographical terms, and folkloric customs, which directly or indirectly help shape up Afro-descendent writers’ African identity, including their own professional and individual prestige. Yet, Obeso does much more than that: as shown below, not only he exalts and celebrates the daily life, spirit and customs of his homeland and people, but he does it in their own popular Afro-vernacular speech.

A Brief History of ‘Black Spanish’

This term has been used, pre-theoretically and informally, during the Spanish Golden Age and, later, in the New World, by classic literary writers who tried to imitate the speech of the enslaved African, mostly with a sense of mockery and buffoonery.

The exact linguistic characteristics of this supposedly creolized or ‘pidginized’ speech is to date uncertain, due to the fact that Classic literary writers were generally untrained in linguistic analysis, and documentation from the time are scarce if not strictly nonexistent; so, most of such imitations are deemed by linguists dealing with Afro-Hispanic Creolistics to be inaccurate and untrustworthy (see, e.g., Lipski 2005a, b.).

Other expressions have also been used to refer to the way the enslaved African spoke Spanish, including *habla de negros* and *bozal*. The former, not as used lately, means ‘Black speech’, probably after the Portuguese *falar de preto*; the latter expression became popular early in the sixteenth century as the enslaved African began to be known as *bozales* (i.e., clumsy, untamed, unskilled), and continues to be used specially by creolists (Cp, e.g., Lipski 1992, 1998, 2005a, 2007a).

The term ‘bozal’ then refers to the enslaved brought (mostly) from Western Africa, who spoke broken Spanish; so, *bozal Spanish* describes those enslaved African who learned Spanish as a second language and made errors typical of nonnative speakers. The question here is which, if any, were not second-language (L2) acquisition features.

Latin American Classic and non-Classic literary writers continued these imitation practices with similar drawbacks. Three writers, however, stand out to be proposed as having done a better job as imitators, that is, the Classic Mexican writer nun, (Sor) Juana Inés de la Cruz, the non-Classic Cuban writer, Lydia Cabrera, and the non-Classic Afro-Colombian poet, Candelario Obeso. In fact, these authors appear to possess a more adequate linguistic knowledge and training in Afro-Hispanic dialects. Besides, unlike Golden Age writers in Spain, and most literary imitators in Latin America, the above-mentioned writers, as explained below, did not use their imitations with mockery or debasement (See Megenny, 1985; Porras 2009; Zielina 2007 among others). But Obeso was the only writer in the list who published a book of poems written entirely in ‘Black Spanish’ speech (Porras 2007). Notice, however, that Afro-Cuban poet Nicolás Guillén, as well as Afro-Colombian writers Jorge Artel and Manuel Zapata Olivella, among others, did not use this linguistic variety in their writings beyond lexical and onomatopoeic terms.

Currently, ‘Black Spanish’, like ‘Black Portuguese’, ‘Black English’ and similar terms, is sometimes used loosely as a misnomer 3, to include those Spanish speech varieties exhibiting African based linguistic traits, that is, those ‘creoloid’ formations that are not exactly considered either as Afro-Hispanic (Creole) languages (i.e., Afro-Hispanic varieties, but not languages like Palenquero and Papiamentu), or as Spanish varieties such as popular Coastal Spanish (i.e., Caribbean Spanish), or other (native) archaic/rural/colloquial varieties.

This distinction is important, particularly in relation to the Afro-Caribbean Spanish speech used in Obeso's *Cantos*, spoken in Northern Colombia, as opposed to the Afro-Colombian Creole language, Palenquero, which is still spoken in Palenque de San Basilio (or San Basilio de Palenque), a 3000 African descendent resident village located 40 miles away from Cartagena.

The Debate: Modern Africanized Phonetic Features

There is an on-going debate among Afro-Hispanists as to what extent phonetic features of Black Spanish' (treated in this paper as synonymous to Afro-Hispanic speech), might genuinely be considered or not of an African origin. John Lipski, in a number of publications, has compellingly argued against most, if not all, of generally assumed modern Afro-Hispanic language phonetic traits.

His abundant and well-documented research (see some references below), lead to the conclusion that modern Africanized phonetic features in popular Spanish, unlike true *bozal* texts of earlier times, are nonexistent, or nearly so, and that such features are peculiar solely to certain coastal dialects of native Spanish. He argues particularly against contemporary 'Black Spanish' literary imitations, and points out that such imitations are merely the reflection of the speech of uneducated (native) speakers of the language 4.

It is hard to determine exactly what time span is supposed to be considered as "modern" in terms of linguistic changes in general and, more even so, in terms of Afro-Hispanic language development, where data collection is particularly problematic. Although it might be inappropriate to call "modern" the Spanish of *Cantos*, which was published during the second half of the nineteenth century, one still wonders whether data from the ALEC (Atlas lingüístico y etnográfico de Colombia), for example, which was gathered just a few decades ago, could be included in this category. If so, phonetic data findings by Germán de Granda, Montes Giraldo, Luis Florez and other researchers participating in the ALEC fieldwork, are to be considered valid as present-day phonetic attestations of 'Black Spanish' in coastal Colombia. Needless to say, these attestations were elicited from pure fieldwork, not based on literary imitations.

Linguistic Variation in Afro-Colombian Poetry

Standard vs. Vernacular: Artel's Tambores

Turning now back to *Cantos* and its socio-ethno-linguistic implications, both identity and prestige are concomitant to Afro-Colombian writers, albeit such properties are not always pursued in the same way. As a matter of contrast with Candelario Obeso's *Cantos*, let us consider the case of Jorge Artel, another Afro-Colombian poet, and his book *Tambores en la noche* (Drums in the night, henceforth *Tambores*). Although Artel's *Tambores* also deals with African-related themes, the book is written in Standard Spanish, except for one poem "Bullerengue" (noisy rhythm), which is written in Caribbean Spanish dialect. However, this poem, as well as the rest of Artel's collection, shows no Afro-Hispanic linguistic features (in the sense of phonetic/phonologic, morphologic, or syntactic structure), except for some lexical items related with folklore.

Some excerpts from *Tambores* are cited and commented upon below:

Quisiera bobbebme gaita
y soná na má que pa ti,
pa ti solita, pa ti
pa ti, mi negra, pa ti
(From: 'Bullerengue') 5

Notice that, besides the frenetic musical rhythm depicted in the poem, there is the Caribbean Spanish dialect typical of the Northern Colombian Coast, which exhibits such phonological features as deletion of consonants: 'soná' instead of 'sonar' (sound); 'má' instead of 'más' (more), and syllables: 'na' instead of 'nada' (nothing), 'pa' instead of 'para' (for). Also, observe the word 'bobbebme', which contains phonetic geminate/assimilation derived from the alveolar consonants l and r in 'volverme' (to turn myself into). The African-related themes described in Artel's *Tambores*, and the rest of his poetry, is rich and varied, ranging from tropical music, sea nights with rum and sensual *mulatas*, up to socio-ethnic struggles, nostalgic travels, and ancestral evocations, as evidenced from the excerpts below, written in Standard Spanish:

Amalgama de sombras y de luces de esperma
la cumbia frenética la diabólica cumbia
pone a cabalgar su ritmo oscuro sobre las caderas ágiles
de las sensuales hembras
(...)
Canto mi emoción de marinero,
la amarga paradoja
de mi dulce tristeza
(...)
un llanto de gaitas
diluido en la noche.
Y la noche, metida en ron costeño,
bate sus alas frías
sobre la playa en penumbra,
que estremece el rumor de los vientos porteños 6

Thus, musical terms such as ‘cumbia’, ‘cumbiamba’, ‘mercumbé’, ‘bullerengue’, ‘gaita’, ‘porro’, ‘currulao’, and the like, are pervasive in Artel’s poetry. A number of words have an African origin, like in the case of cumbia (a dance and rhythm brought as a ‘cumbé by the enslaved from Equatorial Guinea), and bullerengue (most likely a compound of ‘bulla’, noise, and the suffix ‘-erengue’, denoting frenzy music

Vernacular vs. Standard: Obeso’s Cantos:

Language varieties, considered as strategies for ethnic identity expression and the sociolinguistic implications thereof, is a widely represented topic in linguistic and literary research. Particularly, the study of Black Spanish varieties includes linguistic as well as historical, ethnological, socio-cultural, and pedagogical approaches, to cite only a few “. A historical example is the Ibero-Romance vernacular dialect formed during the Arabic invasion in Spain, known as “Mozárabe”. A pedagogical example involves the Spanish dialect(s) spoken in US schools by children of Latin American immigrants, known as “Heritage Spanish”.

In what follows, this paper intends to show that the peculiar ‘Black Spanish’ speech variety exhibited in *Cantos* has certain linguistic features, including phonetic, morphologic, and lexico-semantic, that are not resembling to or proper of other Spanish regional varieties of Colombia (such as Caribbean and rural Spanish), but instead they may prove to be akin or identical to those found in earlier stages of the Afro-Hispanic language development. Although aware of the limitations of this intent, we believe that *Cantos* is a good piece of evidence for the existence of Afro-creoloid Spanish formation in Northern Colombia, containing features that have been neglected or under-examined.

The Emergence of ‘Black Spanish’ as Vernacular Speech in *Cantos*

Obeso shares with Artel the gist of Afro-Caribbean spirit, the music, dances, folklore and, no doubt, also the ethnic empathy towards the life style of rowers and fishermen dwelling along the riverside and seashores of Northern Colombia. However, what he does not share with Artel is the peculiar Spanish vernacular dialect used in *Cantos*. In fact, unlike *Tambores*, *Cantos* displays a distinctive regional version of Afro-Caribbean Spanish, one that seems to transcend or detour from the grammatical characteristics of other regional Spanish dialects.

Thus, in addition to the Northern Colombia modality of Caribbean Spanish linguistic features found in Artel’s poem “Bullerengue”, for example, all poems in *Cantos* exhibit distinguishable traits not just of Colombian Caribbean and rural varieties, but mainly of a type of vernacular Spanish, including phonetic, morpho-syntactic, and lexico-semantic traits of probable African affiliation. However, again, all this remains a hypothesis that needs to be convincingly demonstrated or denied, altogether with the question as to what extent, if applicable, this aforementioned *Cantos’* Afro-vernacular speech could be considered to be ‘bozal’ Spanish.

At this point, a clarification is in order. While Obeso’s poetic work, as seen in *Cantos*, is entirely written in various popular, non-standard, dialects of Spanish (see below), his narrative works (including, but not limited to, the novel *La familia Pigmalión* (Pigmalion family), and a playwright, *Secundino el zapatero* (Secundino, the shoemaker), are entirely written in standard Spanish. Compare, for illustration, (a) and (b), below:

(a)-No detengas el paso. Ven. Prosigue
Y no mires atrás

(b)-Cara sé tiene en er mundo
apacte re la cotilla (...) 8

In (a), the standard dialect is used, where Spanish canonic rules apply, for example the command forms of verbs ‘detener’ (stop), ‘venir’ (come), ‘proseguir’, (go ahead) and ‘mirar’ (look) are conjugated with the familiar ‘tú’ (you-familiar) form of the second person singular, with no deletion or change of phonemes. Conversely, in (b), non-standard varieties of Spanish (consisting of the three above-mentioned dialects) are used, where ‘cara’ occurs instead of ‘cada’ (each), ‘sé’ instead of ‘sér’ (to be), ‘er’ instead of ‘el’ (he), ‘apacte’ instead of ‘aparte’ (in addition to), ‘re’ instead of ‘de’ (of), and ‘la cotilla’ instead of ‘las costillas’ (the ribs).

The Dialect Typology of Cantos

Three Spanish dialects are identified in *Cantos*: Caribbean, rural, and Black vernacular. Caribbean Spanish is spoken in coastal Latin American areas, including the Northern Coast of Colombia. Rural Spanish is spoken in countryside Latin American areas, including Colombia, and consists of regional colloquialisms and archaic forms. Afro-Caribbean Spanish is spoken in Caribbean countries such as Cuba, Puerto Rico, and Dominican Republic, and coastal areas of South America, typically Venezuela, Ecuador, Peru, and Colombia, which has two coasts, the Atlantic and the Pacific.

Although there may be some regional variation, both in grammar and vocabulary, in Caribbean and Rural Spanish, the Afro-Caribbean variety exhibits even more variation because of historical, national, and ethnic reasons. In fact, Afro-Caribbean Spanish in Colombia is spoken only by Afro-descendant residents of coasts and river ridges. As explained below, this variety differs from standard and Caribbean Spanish, in terms of its morphology/syntax, phonetic/phonology, semantics, and lexicon. In this study, special attention is paid to this Colombian Afro-Caribbean (black) vernacular Spanish, which has been profusely cited in literary and folkloric works of Afro- as well as non-Afro-descendant writers in Colombia, and also attested and analyzed by linguists dealing with Pidgins and Creoles, generally and specifically.

Because of its characteristic Creole features, Afro-Caribbean Spanish may be considered to be a part of the putative Afro-Hispanic language (as described e.g. in Lipski 2005), which also includes some mainland Latin American enclaves. The Afro-Caribbean Spanish variety exhibited in *Cantos*, is intricately mixed with linguistic traits typical of Northern Colombia and local rural Spanish colloquialisms. In an overall view, then, Afro-Hispanic languages, along with regional varieties including *bozal*, might probably have developed (diachronically) a relative degree of 'pidginization' and/or 'creolization'. Next, some regional Caribbean (CS), Rural (RS), and Afro-Caribbean (ACS) Spanish linguistic features are cited. (Examples from *Cantos* are given in (1)-(7). below):

Caribbean Spanish (CS):

- Deletion / aspiration of syllable / word final /-s/ and /-r/
- Word final nasalization of /-n/
- Generalized *Yeísmo* (change of / η / 'll' to /j/ 'y')
- Assimilation / Gemination of syllable-final pre-consonantal plosives

Rural Spanish (RS):

- Deletion of d in syllable internal position (also occurs in popular Andalusian)
- Deletion of syllable at post-tonic word position
- Aspiration of h at word initial position
- Metathesis and loss of consonants and syllables
- Archaic lexical items

Afro-Caribbean Spanish (ACS):

- Neutralization of /d/ - /r/ and /r/ - /rr/
- Neutralization of /r/ - /l/ (typically in *Cantos*, l to r)
- Massive elimination of word final consonants, specially /s/ and /r/
- Deletion of /s/ in first person plural verbs and nouns oeterminers of NPs
- Lack of agreement and marking in Gender/Number and Noun/Adjective

- Lack of agreement in Subject-Verb
- Epenthetic vowel s in onset monosyllabic words
- Preference for masculine gender as unmarked case
- Preference for the third person singular of verbs as unmarked form
- Invariable plurals (sometimes 'bare' plurals; /s/ only in the first element of NPs)
- Frequent deletion of a, de, en
- Frequent deletion of definite articles
- Preferential elimination of final /s/ in the verbal suffix -mos

The above features are redundantly representative of *bozal* Spanish (see note 9), and are widely covering in time and space (Spain and Latin America, most regions), but do not include all features of Afro-Hispanic languages (Palenquero or Papiamentu). As shown below, not all of these features occur in *Cantos*.

Let us begin with Obeso's most popular poem, 'Canción der boga ausente' (Song of the absent rower), copied in (1), below. Also, notice that this poem, like all poems in *Cantos*, may contain features of the three dialects:

(1) 'Canción der boga ausente'

Qué trijte que ejtá la noche,
La noche qué trijte ejtá;
No hay en er cielo una ejtreya ...
Remá, remá.
La negra re mi arma mía,

mientras yo brego en la ma,
 bañao en suró por eya,
 ¿qué hará?, ¿qué hará?
 Tar vej por su zambo amao
 doriente sujpirará,
 o tar vej ni me recuecda...
 ¡Yorá, yorá!
 Laj embra son como en toro
 lo r'ejta tierra ejgraciá;
 con acte se saca er peje
 der ma, der ma...
 Con acte s'abrada er jierro,
 Se roma la mapaná.
 Cojtante y ficme la penaj.
 No hay má, no hay má...
 Qué ejcura que ejtá la noche;
 ¡ la noche qué ejcura ejtá !
 Asina ejcura e la ausencia...
 ¡Bogá, bogá! 7

First observe that the words ‘trijte’, ejtá’, and ‘ejtreya’ in (1), show aspiration of s (i.e., the s is pronounced in the back of the mouth with a velar aspiration instead of being articulated in the front of the mouth with an alveolar friction); and the latter word shows yeísmo (i.e., pronouncing both the “ll” and the “y” as /j/, that is, pronouncing it as an alveo-palatal fricative instead of a palatal lateral). These two phonetic features, aspiration and yeísmo, are characteristic of Caribbean Spanish. Likewise, ‘er’ and ‘arma’ show r instead of l (‘er arma’ instead of ‘el alma’). a phonetic feature frequently cited as characteristic of Andalusian Spanish (see below for some discussion on this phonetic change within the framework of Afro-Caribbean Spanish, as exhibited in *Cantos*. In the meantime, the word ‘bañao’ shows deletion of d (bañado: bathed), a form proper of colloquial and rural speech, along with the word ‘asina’, instead of ‘así’ (so, this way).

What is particularly important, too, for the purposes of the present study is the change of d to r in ‘suró’ (sudor: sweat), and similar words, a feature deemed to be of African (Bantu) origin by linguists such as Lipski, Patiño, de Granda, and Schwegler, among others, and first noted by the famous Colombian philologist, R. J. Cuervo. In fact, Cuervo refers to Obeso’s (Afro-vernacular) Spanish in *Cantos* in his written correspondence with Schuchart in the late 19th century (See, e.g., Weiss 1984).

In those letters, Cuervo identifies as African the sound in ‘acte’ (arte) and similar words, which he considers to be not as aspirated, but rather as a ‘guttural’ or probably a voiced velar stop, close to a geminated sound like ‘gg’ (sic). In any case, such a sound, Cuervo claims, “does not look like Spanish”. Additionally, the word *peje* (pez) a paragogic vowel *e*, known as a characteristic feature of Afro-Hispanic language.

Worth noting here also is the fact that *Cantos* throughout contains the phonetic change of *r* in lieu of *l*, not just in syllable final position, like Andalusian, but also at the interior of the word, like in the case of ‘doriente’ (doliente). This fact suggests the likelihood of viewing this change as an influence of Afro-Hispanic *d > r*. With respect to the *l > r* change at syllable final position, Lipski (2005:221), claims that “while lateralization of *r* is very common in early *bozal* texts, conversion of syllable-final *l* to *r* is limited to only a handful of items”. However, due to the fact that this change is pervasive in *Cantos*... and is also attested in other Afro-Colombian literary sources such as Arnoldo Palacios’ *La selva y la lluvia* and Jorge Isaacs’ *La María*, this feature should be considered as characteristic of ACS.

Additional data selected from *Cantos* is presented in (2)-(7):

(2) “...probe animales lo palomos...” (pigeons, poor little animals)

-...la mimas pajas...	(the same straws)
-...plumas suficiente	(enough feathers)
-...re macdá la jembra	(meanly the females)
...su güevitos	(their little eggs)
-...la j’Ecucla	(the schools)

(Taken from “Los palomos”: pigeon)

(3) -...la melecina	(medicine)
-...y mié las avipa	(and honey of the wasps)
-...me ra enviria	(I am jealous)
-lo juraco y la j’endijas	(the holes and slits)
-...Rió	(God)

(Taken from “Epropiación re uno córigos”: Expropriation of some codes))

(4) -Uté, branco, ...puere rijponé re mi (you, White, can dispose of me)

-...jecho re la Magalena...ta’r sucucho a su mandá

(Taken from “Epresión re mi amitá” (expression of my friendship)

(5) -...los zambapalo (see below) ;
 -Rejpué re guapos (after becoming macho men)
 -...lo cachacos (nickname for people from inland cities)
 (Taken from “Serenata: serenade)

(6) -...mi rejricha (my disgrace)
 -...ar nacro güeleroso (to the fragrant tuberose)
 -Quérate siempre asina (always remain like that)
 (Taken from “Lucha y conquijta”: struggle and conquest)

(7) -Güérveme tu aferto a rá (give me your affection back)
 -No me juiga (do not avoid me)
 -Allí tengo malibú, ajtromelia y azajá (see below)
 -Palomita yullilona
 (Taken from “A mi morena”: to my brunette)

The data presented above illustrate linguistic features listed in 4 a-c, which contain other ‘diatopic’ (i.e., regional) and ‘diastratic’ (i.e., socio-cultural) variants such as ‘probe’, ‘jembra’, ancina’, ‘juiga’, etc. , as well as instances specifically relevant to ACS such as ‘re macdá’ (de maldad: meanly), ‘Riío’ (Dios: God), ‘branco’ (blanco: white) , etc. Worth mentioning, too, are some lexical items of uncertain origin such as ‘zambapalo’, ‘azajá’ and ‘yullilona’. Let us examine these data a little more carefully:

(A) Phonetic features

As mentioned above, *Cantos* exhibits features pertaining to three Spanish dialects: Caribbean, Rural and Afro-Caribbean. Data in (2)-(7) show mostly instances of the latter, that is, Afro-Caribbean Spanish (ACS). The phonetic characteristics of ACS, as appeared in this context, include:

- The use of /r/ instead of /d/: *re* (de: of, from) in (2), *ra* (da: give), and *Riío* (Dios: God) in (3), *puere* (puede: can) in (4); *rejricha* (desdicha: misery) and *quérate* (quédate: please stay) in (6). Referring to this change, Lipski states that “Only the pronunciation of intervocalic /d/ as [r], found in coastal Colombia and Ecuador (e.g. Candelario Obeso, Arnaldo Palacios) probably has its origins in the former prevalent use of Spanish as a second language among Africans”, but immediately he adds that “The feature is not uniquely African; indeed speakers of most languages, including English, similarly distort Spanish /d/, as any basic language teacher can attest.” 9.

However, examples in (2)-(6) show that the change occurs in other positions, including word and syllable initial. Besides, Granda (1991: 115-21) also finds occurrences of ubiquitous /d/ > /r/ in the north of Dominican Republic.

- The use of /r/ instead of /l/: *branco* (blanco: white) in (4), *ar* (al, contraction of a + el: to the) in (6), and *güerveme* (vuélveme: turn me into) in (7). Crucial here is the change l > r in syllable final position, as it is controversial. For one thing, it is a well-known feature of Andalusian dialect. However, in Latin America, it also occurs in consonant cluster onsets in some areas of Ecuadorian and Colombian Pacific coastal Spanish (Cp, e.g., ; de Granda ; Lipski ; Montes ; Schwegler). Besides, let us consider the following. An interesting fact to point out here is that most poems in *Cantos* contain the phonetic change of r in lieu of l, not just in syllable final position, like Andalusian, but also at the interior of the word, like in the case of ‘doriente’ (doliente). That is, /l/ > /r/ in all contexts in *Cantos*, and also appears in other Afro-Colombian literary writings . This fact may prompt the possibility for this change to be of African origin, or a phonetic dissemination influenced by /d / > /r/.

Referring to the l > r change at syllable final position, Lipski (2005:221), states that, “while lateralization of of r is very common in early *bozal* texts, conversion of syllable-final l to r is limited to only a handful of items”. Nevertheless, as mentioned above, this change is pervasive in *Cantos* and also occurs in other Afro-Colombian literary writers’ texts such as Arnoldo Palacios’ *La selva y la lluvia: (Jangle and Rain)* and Jorge Isaacs’ *La María*, this feature could be proposed as a feature of ACS, pending further research.

- *c* (sic in *Cantos*) instead of /r/ (sometimes through *l*) like in *macdá* (maldad: evil) in (2) and *nacdo* (nardo: nard) in (6). Obeso explains in his “Adertencia” (Forward) to *Cantos* (see below) that, “El sonido *c* es fuerte en las dicciones como éstas: *libectá*, *ficmeza*”. (The sound *c* is strong in expressions like these: *libectá* (libertad: freedom), *ficmeza* (firmeza: firmly). According to this description, Obeso’s *c* symbol could most likely turn out to be akin or identical to the voiceless velar stop /k/, which Granda (e.g., 1977: 94-115) describes as voiceless glottal (i.e., guttural) stop /ʔ/, according to his findings in the Pacific Coast of Colombia, during the ALEC surveys. This sound occurs in Palenquero (Schwegler & Morton 2003) and also in Papiamentu (McKenzie (2001: 149, 181-83)

- There are finally R(ural) phonetic changes in Northern Colombian Spanish (somehow involving /r/), such as metathesis in *probe* (pobre: poor) in (2), and vowel lowering in *melecina* (medicinas: medications) in (3), as well as several other common C(aribbean) S(panish) features such as deletion and aspiration of syllable final *s* and deletion of other word and syllable final consonants such as *l* in *mié* (miel: honey), among other cases.

(B) Morpho-Syntactic features

Afro-Caribbean Spanish (ACS) features characteristic of this category are limited in these data to the lack of gender / number agreement, as shown in the first three noun phrases (NPs) in (2), plus the NP *su güevitos* (sus huevitos: their little eggs), also in (2), where deletion of plural morpheme -s only occurs in the determiner; *las avipa* (las avispas: the wasps), where the reverse process occurs; *la j'endijas* (las rendijas: slits) in (3), and the first and last NPs in (5). These data support and expand Lipski's (1986: 212) assertion that, "Loss of s in Bozal Spanish during the Golden Age literary period and in Highland Latin America is more a case of morphological redundancy than phonetic evolution",

Likewise, it is worth noting that the use of the formal treatment personal pronoun *uté* (usted: you), instead of the informal *tú* (you), is not characteristic of the CS dialect, but may instead be historically related with the form *su merced* 10. In sum, no relevant syntactic cases are found in these data, so no instances of double negation, or transposed objects, for example, occur.

(C) Lexico-semantic features

Afro-Hispanic lexicography / etymology is by far one of the least seriously studied and understood topics in the field. The reason is obvious: the multilingual nature of African immigration. In Colombia, for example, very few researchers attempt such a task. Exceptions such as Del Castillo Mathieu (1982), although rather folkloric, are commendable. To cite just a couple of lexical items from the Atlantic Coast, deemed by Del Castillo Mathieu of an African origin, consider *chicombo* (black bean) and *sungó* (hairless). This author presents the history and semantics of these and other terms.

In *Cantos*, there are some lexical items in (2)-(7) of uncertain etymology, such as *juraco* in (3) and *sucucho* in (4). Also, at least one word claims an African origin, that is, the compound word *zambapalo* (< Sambia /zambo + Palo), the latter Spanish word meaning 'stick'. It designs a dance and music of the Western Indies practiced in Spain by African enslaved during the sixteenth and seventeenth century, which was brought to the New World and was spread throughout the Caribbean region (this, according to informal sources taken from Wikipedia and Google). However, a more accurate explanation is given, e.g., by Fra-Molinero (1991: 440 n.3):

“Zambapalo tiene un significado moderno en Colombia de “trifulca, desorden,” como lo tuvo el término “boda de negros” en España durante los siglos XVI y XVII. Zambapalo era un baile traído de América a España durante el siglo XVI, de carácter grotesco (Diccionario de la Real Academia). La propia palabra, “sambo” o “zambo,” ha venido definiendo desde la época colonial a una persona de ascendencia negra e india, además del significado de persona con las piernas separadas hacia afuera. Bailes como el zambapalo, del que Corominas asegura descende la moderna samba, estaban asociados desde principios del siglo XVI a los negros, no sólo en España, sino también en las colonias americanas. El origen africano del término “samba” como “baile” es verificable: en quimbundo, significa “excitarse, hervir.” En chiluba, “bailar agitadamente.” En nganlela, “brincar, saltar.” En kikongo “especie de danza” (Del Castillo Mathieu 222-23). Hay que notar que todas estas lenguas corresponden a la zona de la cuenca del río Zaire (Congo) y Angola, parte de la geografía esclavista del siglo XVI y XVII”

11.

To be sure, lexical items are always difficult to track, in terms of their African origin, due to their dialectal polymorphism, except maybe for topical and proper names, and folklore, like in the case of the above-mentioned compound word.

A further note on literary imitations

As has been already noted, literary imitations of Afro-Hispanic language have existed in the Iberian Peninsula and Latin America for several centuries now. Since the fifteenth century, many Spanish Medieval and Golden Age writers such as Calderón, Lope de Vega, Tirso de Molina, and Lope de Rueda, among others, included imitations of *bozal* Spanish, and other forms of Afro-Hispanic language, in their novels, poems, and plays. This practice largely continued on in Latin American literature.

Notwithstanding, literary imitations of *bozal* Spanish are being deemed as non-trustworthy by contemporary Afro-Hispanic linguistic researchers. Reasons for this basically include deficient linguistic analysis techniques, racial prejudice, and use of anecdotal data, all of which is charged to most literary writers (see, e.g., Lipski 1985; 1992; 2005a, b; 2007a). In his latter above-mentioned article (2007a), for example, Lipski states that, “Literary imitations – all of questionable validity – are insufficient... only first-hand data from legitimate Afro-Hispanic speech communities may shed light on earlier stages of language contact”.

This strong statement is ameliorated when he mentions elsewhere that the Cuban novel *Quiquiribú mandinga* (Se lo llevó el Diablo: Gone with the Devil), by Luis R. Nogueras, published in 1976, actually has remarkably accurate imitations of Cuban *bozal* Spanish (Cp.2005a: 151-52. Should Nogueras just be considered an exception?

Although this lack of confidence in literary imitations of *bozal* Spanish by literary writers is reasonably and admittedly justified, some other outstanding “exceptions” in Latin America are worth considering, besides the one just mentioned in the preceding paragraph. Let us just cite three of them here, in chronological order: Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, Lydia Cabrera and, of course, Candelario Obeso.

Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz (San Miguel Nepantla, Mexico, 1651-1695), is known as the first writer to describe the kind of Spanish spoken by the enslaved African during the seventeenth century New Spain, that is, *bozal* speech, which she represented theatrically with African characters in her *villancicos* (see, e.g., Arteaga 1997; Lipski 2005a; Megenney 1985; Porras 202, 2009a; Zielina 2007). Sor Juana’s literary imitations of *bozal* Spanish, as acted out by Black characters in her plays, despite some spelling inconsistencies, constitute a representative set of grammatical features that, partially but closely, match those described by Afro-Hispanic linguists. In fact, they appear to be fairly coherent with current research data on the topic.

Viewed from another perspective, Sor Juana was a well -seasoned intellectual and polyglot, who proved herself to be attentive to and inspired by the way the enslaved African spoke Spanish. During her covenant life, Sor Juana communicated with and learned from an African servant for a number of years. Referring to her qualifications to interpret African enslaved culture, Zielina (2007: 37) points out that, “Estos villancicos revelan la manera especial en que la monja mexicana definió, incorporó y revitalizó el proyecto de legitimación nacional abordada por el negro desde su llegada a América.” (These villancicos (carols) reveal the special way in which the Mexican nun defined, incorporated and revitalized the project of national legitimation addressed by Black Africans since their arrival to America”).

Lydia Cabrera (Havana, Cuba, 1900-1991) is well known as an ethnologist and a short-story writer. Famous are, among many other things, her collection of Afro-Cuban folklore and her magnificent personal library donated post-mortem to the University of Miami. Cabrera’s extensive record of publications includes twenty-three volumes about Afro-Cuban myths, languages, and cultures, and over one hundred articles and reviews. Of linguistic interest are her *Cuentos negros de Cuba* (1940 (Black stories from Cuba), originally published in French in 1936; it contains a collection of 22 folktales with quoted dialogues in *Bozal* Spanish and Spanish-Lucumí switches (See, e.g., Porras 2009b). *El Monte* (1954) (The Bush) is her noted study of the “Santería” religion; it discusses Santería’s merging of Yoruban deities with Roman Catholic saints and its herbal pharmacopoeia. *Anagó: vocabulario lucumí* (1957) (Anagó: Lucumí Vocabulary) describes the basics of Lucumí lexicon and its adaptation into Cuban Spanish. *Vocabulario congo: el bantú que se habla en Cuba* (1984) (A Congo Vocabulary: The Bantu Spoken in Cuba).

With this background, it sounds baffling to learn that her literary imitations of “Black Spanish” (particularly *bozal*) are mere “approximations written on the fly, or reconstructed long after the fact from the author’s recollections of the general speech patterns of her Afro-Cuban informants.” (Cp. Lipski 2005a: 167). Interestingly, the preceding statement contrasts with what Lipski himself wrote somewhere else, “The largest body of Caribbean *bozal* language comes from the extensive writings of Lydia Cabrera (...), whose amateurish but generally accurate reproductions of Afro-Hispanic speech which she heard during her first decades of her life correlate closely with empirical observations made by trained linguists (...) (Cp., Lipski 1998b: 65). At any rate, a detailed linguistic analysis of Cabrera’s literary imitations of Afro-Cuban *bozal* Spanish, remains to be seen.

Another outstanding exception is Candelario Obeso. As an experienced observer of *bozal* Spanish, Obeso knew firsthand how Black people along the Magdalena River spoke and lived their lives during the nineteenth century. These probably speakers of *bozal* Spanish, mostly rowers and fishermen along the Magdalena River side, were the African enslaved, or direct descendants of the African enslaved, who learned Spanish as a second language. Besides, being Obeso educated with and deeply knowledgeable of the standard Spanish grammatical norms of the time, his literary imitations of *bozal* Spanish speech should be credited as linguistically valid (Cp., e.g., Lipski 2005a, b; Porras 2007).

In order to help corroborate this validity, it is relevant to note that he included some grammatical observations on Spanish *bozal* speech in the original edition of his book (August 1877, p. 8). In fact, as has been mentioned in the phonetic section above, under the title “Advertencia del autor” (Foreword from the author), Obeso makes a set of remarks, some of which have been already mentioned in the (A) phonetic section above. (Note that the 19th century spelling system has been left intact). The following is another grammatical remark made by Obeso:

- “La *r* inicial tiene el sonido suave de la *n* inicial en las voces en que reemplaza a la *d*”. (Word-initial /r/ has the [same] lenis sound of the non-initial [r] in words where it [i.e. r] replaces /d/.

Obeso seems to mean that word-initial trill /rr/ is realized as a single tap /r/. If it is the case, it could imply that ACS probably lacks a trill, something that should be proposed as an Afro-Hispanic trait, with probable diachronic sources. In fact, Lipski (2004:121) states that “Most Equatorial Guineans do not distinguish between Spanish single /r/ and trill /rr/; at times the trill is pronounced instead of the single sound, although the opposite change is more frequent”. Although this statement does not imply that this change is characteristic of or actually existent in Afro-Hispanic language, it leaves open such possibility, especially considering Obeso’s attestation.

Other grammatical remarks Obeso made in his “Advertencia” to *Cantos*, include:

- “El de la articulación *j*, cuando suple a la *s*, es por extremo breve i un tanto cuanto oscuro.” (The articulation of [the sound] *j*, when it replaces *s*, is extremely short and as dark). He refers to the aspiration of /s/ in CS
- “*E* vale como *ej* (es), i muchas veces *re* (de), especialmente en las palabras compuestas (*lenga-e-vaca*), cuando así lo requiere la elegancia en la frase o la estructura del verso. “ (*E* is equivalent to *ej* (es) and often to *re* (de), specially in compound words (*lenga-e-vaca*), when required by elegance of the phrase or verse structure).
- “*Er* (se pronuncia eér), es equivalente de *der* (del), i se aleja de *er* (el) tanto cuanto así se alejan entre sí cantidades opuestas. Para establecer esta diferencia en lo escrito, marco este signo en aquella voz así: *ér*. –Que *ér* vale tanto como *dér* no puede revocarse a duda”. (*Er*, pronounced as eér, is equivalent to *der* (del), and differs from *er* as much as they differ from each other in opposite quantities. To make this difference in writing, I mark this sign on the former item like this: *ér*. That *ér* is worth as much as *dér* cannot be subject to doubt).

In sum, these three outstanding exceptions (leaving out some other probable Golden Age /Medieval and Latin American exceptions), show that not everything is invalid in regard with literary imitations. The data provided by Sor Juana, Cabrera and, particularly, by Obeso, are confirmed and recognized by renowned Hispanic linguists such as R. J. Cuervo, Patiño, de Granda, Lipski, and Schwegler, among others.

Conclusions

This paper made a linguistic and socio-ethno-linguistic analysis of Candelario Obeso’s *Cantos populares de mi tierra*, a book of poems which appears to exhibit linguistic features proper of Africanized/creole speech, a variety representing an Afro-Caribbean Spanish vernacular dialect in Northern Colombia. Likewise, this analysis showed that two other dialects also happen to appear in *Cantos*, which were found to be different from Afro-Caribbean (vernacular) Spanish, namely, Caribbean and Rural Spanish. The Afro-Spanish linguistic traits presented in this paper show that this Africanized Spanish variety is, at least partially, consistent with current research data on general Afro-Hispanic language. It is worth noting, however, that no definite claim has been made that the speech modality in *Cantos* is bozal Spanish. Thus, it remains to be definitely demonstrated.

As for the literary imitations made by Obeso in *Cantos*, the claim was made that they should be considered valid and trustworthy because of the author's remarkable linguistic qualifications. Two other writers are in this category, the Mexican nun Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz and the Cuban ethnographer and literary writer, Lydia Cabrera.

Finally, the paper showed that, from a biographical point of view, Obeso was a peculiar person. He lived a short but fruitful life in that he not only founded Black poetry in Colombia, but also used Afro-Hispanic vernacular speech in his poems to react against stereotyped Colombian Classic writers and to fight racial/ethnic prejudice in general.

Notes

1. Since its first publication in 1877, the one used for this article, *Cantos* has had several other editions (all in Bogotá), including 1950, 2004 and 2009. The 2004 edition, published by the Alcaldía Mayor de Bogotá, has the subtitle, *Antología poética de los olvidados* (Poetic Anthology of the Forgotten), the only edition with this subtitle
2. Uribe published this note in a biographical article about Obeso in 1986 in *El Espectador*, a major newspaper of Bogotá
3. 'Black Spanish', like 'black English' is a misnomer. Although metaphorical, this expression is inappropriate because it is stereotyped. Contrastively, for instance, White Spanish or White English do not refer to a substandard variety of these languages, but to a type of grape and a dog breed, respectfully
4. See, e.g., Lipski 2007a, and Note 9, below
5. "I'd like to become a gaita / And to play just for you / Just for you, for you, babie /
/ for you, my dear black girl, for you" (Our translation)
6. "Mixture of shadows and candle lights / the frantic cumbia, the diabolical cumbia /
/ Its dark rhythm starts riding / on the agile hips of the sexy females / I sing my sailor emotion / the bitter paradox of my sweet sadness A cry of gaitas / diluted in the night / And the night inserted in coastal rum / flaps its cold wings / on the beach at twilight / shaking the sound of port wind". (Our translation)

7. “How sad the night is / the night is so sad / No stars are in the star / No shining star in the sky / Row, row! / My black girl of my soul / while I am struggling in the sea / bathed in sweat for her / what is she probably doing?, what? / Perhaps she is deeply sighing / about her beloved mulatto / or perhaps she just remembers me / Cry, cry! / Females are like everything else / on this unfortunate earth / Skillfully you catch the fish / out of the sea, of the sea / Skillfully iron softens / Mapana snake is tamed / Constant and firm sufferings/ Nothing else, nothing else / How dark the night is / the night is so dark / Absence is as dark / Rowe, rowe!. “
8. (1) - Do not stop your walking. Come. Keep going / And do not look backwards
(2) – Each (human) being has in this world / In addition to the ribs (...)
9. Cited from the text of a John Lipski’s lecture addressed at the 12th Annual Graduate and Professional Symposium on Hispanic and Luso-Brazilian Literature, Language, and Culture, University of Arizona, February 15, 2002, pags. 23-24 (on-line published PDF document). Other citations from this lecture have been made in this paper for summarizing references.
10. *Su merced* (usually used as *sumercé*), an originally Medieval respectful pronominal form of address still in use in rural areas of Highland Latin America, was also used during the Spanish colony among Black servants when addressing their superiors (Cp., e.g., de Jonge 2005: 20 ss.)
11. “Zambapalo has a modern meaning in Colombia of ‘scuffle,’rumpus’, just like the meaning of ‘Negros wedding’ in Spain during the 16th and 17th centuries. Zambapalo was a dance taken from America to Spain during the 16th century, of a grotesque nature (Royal Academy Dictionary). The very word ‘Sambo’ or ‘Zambo’ has changed from the Colonial period to describe a Black-and-Indian descendent person, besides describing a person with his two legs abnormally pulled outwards . Dances such as Zambapalo, about which Corominas claims the modern Zamba comes from, were associated to Blacks since the beginning of the 16th century, not only in Spain, but also in the Colonies in the New World. The African origin of ‘Samba’ as a dance has been attested in Kimbundu with the meaning of ‘getting excited’, ‘to boil’, and in Chilaba with the meaning ‘dancing frenetically’; likewise, in Ngandela means ‘to jump’, to hop’, and, in Kikongo ‘sort of dance’ (Del Castillo Mathieu, 222-23). Note that all of these languages belong to the Zaire River basin (congo), and Angola, a part of the slavery geography of the 16th and 17th centuries”. (Our translation).

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