

Afro-Hispanic contact varieties as conventionalized advanced second languages

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Abstract

This article focuses on some linguistic aspects of Afro-Hispanic contact varieties that have traditionally been ascribed to their supposed creole origin. Conversely, the present analysis suggests that such linguistic features can be accounted for as the result of conventionalized advanced SLA strategies (Plag 2008a; Siegel 2008), which do not necessarily imply any previous creole stage. The theoretical framework adopted here is the one provided by the Minimalist Constructionism, which assumes that SLA is driven by UG through a path of “possible grammars” (Herschensohn 2000). In particular, the features under analysis are seen as possible L2 instantiations of UG, which crystallized under the form of L1 structures in the grammars of the following generations of speakers. In addition, this paper provides a reflection on the nature of these contact dialects and their contribution to the study of syntax and SLA from a microparametric perspective (Kayne 1996).

Keywords: Afro-Hispanic dialects; microparametric syntax; Minimalist Constructionism.

1. Introduction

Over the last few decades, the study of Afro-Hispanic contact varieties has grown substantially, to the point where in any subfield of linguistics one can find active scholars willing to explore the grammatical aspects of these languages (see for example Álvarez Nazario 1974; Álvarez & Obediente 1998; Granda 1988; Lipski 1994, 2005, 2008; Mayén 2007; Megenney 1999; Perl & Schwegler 1998; Ruiz García 2001; Sessarego 2011a, 2011b, forthcoming a, forthcoming b). From a strictly linguistic point of view, what is fascinating about these dialects is their richness in constructions which would be considered ungrammatical in standard Spanish. Nevertheless, such structures form the core grammar of these less prestigious, but equally efficient linguistic systems and a microparametric analysis of certain grammatical phenomena may be used as a powerful testing ground for formal hypotheses, which have usually been built on standardized language data (cf. Kayne 1996; Sessarego 2012, forthcoming b).

Due to several historical reasons, Spanish creoles did not evolve in the Americas to the extent to which we find these varieties for other European lexifiers (e.g., French, English) (cf. McWhorter 2000; Lipski 2005). The only two languages that are generally identified as Latin American Spanish creoles are Palenquero, spoken in San Basilio de Palenque (Colombia) and Papiamentu, spoken in Aruba, Bonaire and Curaçao (Dutch Antilles). However, also for these two contact varieties, several doubts have been cast on whether they should be called Spanish creoles or instead be identified as Portuguese contact languages which were subsequently re-lexified with a Spanish lexicon (for a detailed account see Martinus 1989; Schwegler 1993; McWhorter 2000; Jacobs 2009).

The rest of the languages that emerged from the contact between African slaves and the Spaniards involved in the conquest of the Americas have not traditionally been classified as creoles. In fact, even though they present phonological and morphological reductions and certain traces of African lexical borrowings, these varieties do not show the traces of more radical restructuring. A hypothesis which has often been mentioned in the literature to account for this fact is that of 'decreolization'. As defined by Whinnom in 1968, 'decreolization' would consist of the gradual approximation of a creole language to the superstrate lexifier from which it developed (Hymes 1971:111). Therefore, the 'decreolization hypothesis' would suggest that the current paucity of Spanish-based creoles in the Americas would be the result of a gradual process of a creole approximation to Spanish, so that only a few creole-like linguistic traces would be left nowadays in these contact dialects (cf. McWhorter 2000:28-31 for a review).

This idea has been suggested on many occasions, by different authors, for several varieties. Among many others, Granda (1970, 1988) proposed it for all Afro-Hispanic contact languages spoken in the Americas; Schwegler (1993, 1996), Otheguy (1973), and Megenney (1993) suggested a possible decreolization path for Caribbean Spanish; Álvarez & Obediente (1998) claimed the same for Afro-Venezuelan Spanish; Schwegler (1999) for Chota Valley Spanish; Lipski (2008) indicated that present-day Afro-Bolivian Spanish might be the result of such a process; while, more recently, Schwegler (forthcoming) has further backed the hypothesis of a now extinct Pan-Hispanic creole that would have been common to Cartagena (Colombia), Palenque (Colombia), Chota Valley (Ecuador), Yungas (Bolivia) and Palo Monte (Cuba).

Trying to prove or disprove these claims would require an in-depth linguistic and sociodemographic analysis of the history and evolution of each Latin American Afro-Hispanic contact variety. This is something which has been partially carried out by some scholars and that I will not be able to present here due to space limitations (cf. Lipski 1993; Díaz-Campos & Clements 2008; Sessarego 2011a, 2011b, forthcoming a, forthcoming b). Nevertheless, in the present article, I would like to focus on some common features that appear to characterize these Spanish dialects transversely and which, I believe, can be convincingly explained in light of recent findings on generative studies regarding SLA. In particular, what I would like to suggest is that these languages

can be seen as *conventionalized advanced second languages*, so that their features do not need to be ascribed to any previous creole stage.

As a reminder, in some early models of creole genesis, creolization was depicted substantially as a first-language phenomenon, while SLA processes would be primarily limited to the pidginization phase (cf. Bickerton 1977, 1981, 1984, 1999). However, it is now widely accepted that SLA processes have been key in the creation and development of creole languages (Andersen 1980; Arends 1993; Chaudenson 2001; Mufwene 2001; Siegel 2008). More recently, Plag (2008a, 2008b; 2009a, 2009b) has even proposed the *Interlanguage Hypothesis of Creole Formation* (see section 2.2 for a review). According to this hypothesis, creoles should be seen as conventionalized interlanguages of an *early stage* since many features allegedly found in creole languages (e.g. loss of inflectional morphology, the unmarked nature of many syntactic structures, etc.) are typical of the early stages of L2 acquisition and disappear when the speaker becomes more proficient in the target language¹. Conversely, my point in this study is to show that the “creole-like” features that have often been ascribed to Latin American Afro-Hispanic dialects are not only typical of the first stages of L2 acquisition; rather, they can be encountered in very advanced L2 grammars, varieties which approximate very closely to the target language and that did not go through any creole phase. The main point of this paper, therefore, is to show that certain grammatical features, which have traditionally been analyzed as cues of previous creolization, do not represent any evidence of such.

In the rest of this article, I will try to provide the reader with evidence showing that the “creole-like” features reported for these varieties are not exclusive for interlanguages of an early stage; rather, they are commonly encountered in *advanced* interlanguages and therefore, unless *additional* linguistic data indicate otherwise, they should not be taken *per se* as evidence of (de)creolization. In other words, we may say that the Afro-Hispanic varieties presenting these features can be seen as *conventionalized advanced interlanguages*.

The paper consists of the following sections: Section 2 presents the theoretical assumptions on which the paper is based. Section 3 provides an account of the morphosyntactic features, which have been commonly reported for Afro-Hispanic contact varieties, and shows how such features can be explained in light of recent SLA findings. Section 4 is a reflection on the nature of these contact dialects and their contribution to the study of syntax and SLA from a microparametric perspective. Finally, section 5 concludes.

1 See Siegel (2008) for a detailed account of SLA processes in creole formation.

2. Theoretical assumptions

2.1 Degrees of restructuring in contact varieties

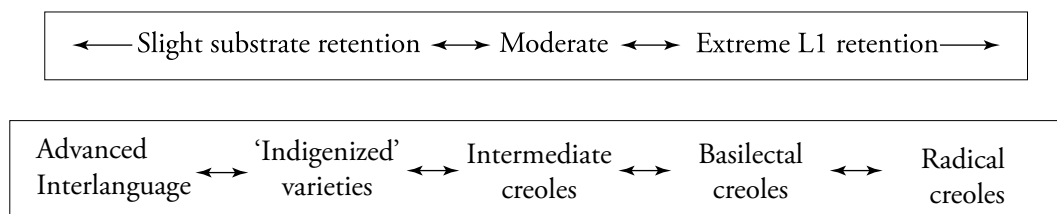
Research in creole studies has grown substantially in recent times, nevertheless, it must be said that consensus has never been reached among linguists on how to classify and define creole languages. On one hand, some linguists have proposed a feature-based classification, which would group these languages into a specific typological class (Bickerton 1981; Seuren & Wekker 1986; McWhorter 1998; Bakker *et al* 2011). On the other hand, there are scholars who reject such a categorization and prefer to describe creoles as languages which share a peculiar history, often connected to the European colonial expansion and the slave trade (Mufwene 1997; DeGraff 2005). Other linguists suggested that they should be seen as nativized pidgins (Romaine 1988) or as the byproduct of a cross-generational break in language transmission (Thomason & Kaufman 1988). More recently, Schwegler (2010:438) took an intermediate approach and indicated that it is the “combination of internal linguistic features and shared external history that gives creoles exceptional status” (2010:438).

The word ‘creole’ has been used to describe a vast variety of languages, which often present very different structures. This fact has prompted some scholars to provide further labels in order to differentiate among these contact vernaculars. The result of this operation was the creation of new terms such as ‘semi-creoles’ (Holm 1992) or ‘intermediate creoles’ (Winford 2000), vernaculars which would be located somewhere on a continuum of ‘creoleness’ (Parkvall 2000). Alleyne (1980:181) argues that:

Afro-American dialects can be plotted on a scale representing different degrees of transmission of West African elements, and differentials in degrees of transmission that are to be explained by differences in sociolinguistic circumstances in each area.

In other words, these vernaculars can be placed on a cline ranging from close approximations to the lexifiers to radical creoles.

Figure 1. A continuum of outcomes involving degrees of substrate and L2 input (adapted from Winford 2000:216).



While the fact that contact-induced restructuring operates on a cline is well known in Creolistics (cf. Thomason & Kaufman 1988; Siegel 2008)², often times people tend to assume that a vernacular currently found on the left side of the spectrum (see Figure 1) must have ended up there after an incremental leftwing shift, thus suggesting that in the past it was more radical. This assumption, which pictures a gradual decreolization path, is somehow misleading and, in several cases, clearly goes against the documented historical evolution of some present-day creoles, which appear to have become more ‘radical’ during the last couple of centuries; i.e., Haitian French (Lefebvre 1998) and Sranan Tongo (Migge 2003).

2.2 Creoles as Interlanguages

Schumann (1978) and Andersen (1980, 1983) were among the first scholars to identify a link between SLA and Creole studies. They hypothesized that pidginization may be seen as the early stages of SLA. In more recent years, Creolistics and SLA have developed stronger connections leading to a very productive interdisciplinary dialogue (cf. Kouwenberg & Patrick 2003; Lefebvre *et al* 2006; Siegel 2008).

One of the latest attempts to build a theory of creole genesis based on an SLA framework is Plag’s (2008a, 2008b; 2009a, 2009b) Interlanguage Hypothesis of Creole Formation, which relies on Pienemann’s (1998, 2005) Processability Theory. What is interesting about this approach is that it tries to account for the fact that there seems to be a common universal path in the development of second languages, independently of the speaker’s L1. The model relies on psycholinguistic accounts of speech production as those designed by Kempen & Hoenkamp (1987) and Levelt (1989). The central claim of Processability Theory is that the processing procedures follow a hierarchy of activations in language generation, which, in turn, drives their sequence of acquisition. Plag adopts this model to account for certain aspects of creole languages (e.g., loss of inflectional morphology, the unmarked nature of many syntactic structures, the conflation of phonological categories, cases of circumlocutions, etc.). His Interlanguage Hypothesis of Creole Formation goes as far as to state that creoles can be seen as *conventionalized interlanguages of an early stage*. Plag (2008a) also points out that SLA processes in creolization do not necessarily mean substrate transfer, as it has often been suggested in the literature. On the other hand, there may be transfer without SLA as, for example, in cases of early bilingualism (Kouwenberg 2006), and there are SLA processes involved in creolization that cannot be labeled as ‘transfer’, but rather they should be analyzed as gradual interlanguage evolutions, which obey hierarchical

2 Siegel (2008:210) states that “we would expect both more simplified features and more transferred features in contact varieties where, for social and/or ideological reasons, there was less complete SLA. This would explain the different degree of simplification and restructuring found in various contact languages, ranging from that of the “radical” creoles such as Saramaccan, to other creoles such as Hawaii Creole to semi-creoles such as Brazilian Portuguese, to indigenized varieties such as Singapore Colloquial English”.

chronological steps (Siegel 2008). In the present article, I will not go into the details of Plag's model, since the author developed it to account for 'radical' creole varieties. However, I want to acknowledge its importance by highlighting the idea that there is a clear universal hierarchy of second language acquisition and that it plays a crucial role in shaping the grammar of all contact languages.

The present study will analyze some cross-linguistic similarities which can be found in all Afro-Hispanic varieties spoken in the Americas. I will propose that these features are, indeed, common traces of *advanced* SLA strategies (rather than of *early* ones) and that recent generative findings can shed some light on their syntactic nature. In doing so, I hope to convince the reader that –at least from the linguistic perspective– the grammatical elements encountered in these varieties shouldn't necessarily be seen as the result of decreolization; rather, they can be perfectly explained as the expected byproduct of advanced SLA processes. This, however, does not imply that decreolization is impossible. My personal opinion is that it might well have happened for certain languages, but to support such a claim we need to provide clear socio-historical and linguistic evidence, since the presence of advanced SLA features in these contact varieties does not support per se any previous (de)creolization hypotheses.

2.3 Minimalist Constructionism

The SLA framework adopted here is the one pictured by the Minimalist Constructionism (cf. Herschensohn 2000). This model of second language acquisition rests on the assumption that cross-linguistic variation is limited to the lexicon and to its formal features (Borer 1984), while syntax is universal and therefore invariable (Chomsky 1995). Within this approach, the locus of cross-linguistic variation is limited to the features of lexical and functional items. Minimalist Constructionism also accounts for the fact that L2 development, in contrast with L1, is often incomplete and lacks spontaneity since the acquisition device is increasingly less available as children become older. This model argues that the acquisition of L2 features is gained through a phase of L1-L2 transition. Constructionism is based on empirical evidence supporting the idea that languages are acquired *gradually*. This fact may be formalized by saying that, during the acquisition process, certain features, after having lost their L1 values, are unspecified and will incrementally gain new L2 values, thus giving rise to variation. This process consists of the progressive mastery of the target language functional and lexical categories, through the gradual acquisition of its lexicon (Herschensohn 2000:81). Contrary to previous claims in SLA literature (e.g., Clahsen & Muysken 1986), within the constructionist framework, Universal Grammar (UG) is not only available during L1 acquisition; rather, it drives L2 development through a set of possible, acquirable grammars, thus suggesting that UG is fully accessible during L2 acquisition (cf. Epstein *et al* 1996; Schwartz 1996, 1998; Schwartz & Sprouse 1996). In Herschensohn words: "L2 grammars are constrained by universal principles in that intermediate and final state grammars are possible human languages" (2000:80).

The advantage of this approach on previous generative attempts –such as the Principles & Parameters model– is that parameter resetting is no longer considered as the fundamental difference accounting for L1 vs. L2 development. Rather this distinction is now explained as an incomplete command over a language particular lexicon that interfaces with the syntax. Instead of a ‘yes/no’ parameter switch, the gradual acquisition of the lexical and morphological features naturally accounts for the variability encountered in all second languages. L2 acquisition happens gradually and the most peripheral morpholexical items will be the last ones to be mastered since the learner constructs the “grammar from the core to the periphery” (Herschensohn 2000:81).

2.4 The proposal

I would like to propose that Afro-Hispanic contact varieties can be seen as *the result of L1 acquisition (nativization) of advanced L2 grammars*. This statement is based on the assumption that L1 and L2 acquisition are driven and constrained by UG. During childhood, first language acquisition develops naturally and instinctively –given that the child is exposed to enough linguistic input. L2 development operates somehow differently. L2 speakers have access to UG, but biological and social factors conspire against the full mastery of the target language (TL). In fact, the loss of spontaneity of acquisition and incomplete command of the L2 morpholexicon are two inevitable consequences of biological age maturation. Moreover, certain social aspects of L2 acquisition, such as lack of motivation, acculturation and free time, often times contribute to the incomplete mastery of the L2 (Herschensohn 2000:ch.3).

The basic idea behind the nature of several Afro-Hispanic languages is that African slaves had relatively good access to Spanish (TL)³, which allowed them to achieve a certain degree of mastery in it. Thanks to UG, each individual internalized one grammar out of a set of possible grammars (G1, G2, Gn). Their linguistic outputs (x, y, z) served as the primary linguistic data (PLD) for the following generation, which acquired this language natively. This model can be schematically represented in (1),

3 An anonymous reviewer points out that “in the case of contact languages, some speakers may have full access to the TL, whereas others only have access to approximations of approximations (according to Chaudenson (2001), depending on the linguistic ecology (demographic and other variables). Hence, it is not the case that for all Afro-Hispanic varieties, all slaves had evenly equal access to TL in a uniform way”. I do agree with this claim that this was certainly not the case for all slaves. However, I would like to suggest that overall Spanish slaves probably had more chances to learn the language of their masters than English, French, and Dutch slaves had. This has been suggested for the Caribbean (Mintz 1971; Laurence 1974; Lipski 1993) and for several Mainland colonies (Sessarego forthcoming a for Ecuador; Sessarego 2011a, forthcoming b for Bolivia; Díaz-Campos & Clements 2008 for Venezuela, etc.). Obviously, not everybody agrees with this hypothesis (cf. McWhorther 2000). The debate is still open and, as Lipski correctly stated (2005:304) “the last word on the status of Afro-Hispanic language in the Americas has yet to be written”.

where Grammar 1 (G1) and Grammar 2 (G2) represent two possible grammars with different parametric configurations⁴:

- (1) a. Individual from Generation 1:
TLy → UG driving L2 acquisition → G1 → set of outputs X
- b. Individual from Generation 2:
PLDx → UG driving L1 acquisition → G2 → set of outputs Z

In this model, the L1 acquisition of Generation 2 represents the process of nativization. The result of this is an L1 grammar (G2), built on L2 inputs. G2, therefore, will present crystallized aspects of an L2, which are acquired as an L1.

3. The Afro-Hispanic varieties of the Americas

There are regions of Latin America where Afro-Hispanic people represent the majority of the population. Perl (1998) provides a report of the geographical distribution of black communities across this area. He includes Cuba, Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, parts of Northern Colombia and Venezuela, the coastal regions of Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Panama, the Pacific coastal regions of Colombia, Peru and Ecuador, as well as, some small minorities in Mexico, Belize, Trinidad and Tobago. The Bolivian region of Los Yungas, home of an Afro-Hispanic group recently brought to the attention of the linguistic community by Lipski (2008), should also be added to this list. Klee & Lynch (2009:6) offer an updated version of Perl's (1998:3) map to account for these geographic regions (Figure 2).

In the rest of this section, I will focus on some common features which have repeatedly been reported for the vast majority of these Afro-Hispanic dialects (e.g., Afro-Venezuelan Spanish (Megenney 1999); Afro-Bolivian Spanish (Lipski 2008); Afro-Caribbean Spanish (Álvarez Nazario 1974; Lorenzino 1998; Álvarez & Obediente 1998); Afro-Peruvian Spanish (Lipski 1994); Afro-Mexican Spanish (Mayén 2007); Afro-Panamanian Spanish (Lipski 1989); Chocó Spanish (Ruiz García 2001); Chota Valley Spanish (Lipski 1987); etc.) and in some cases that have been identified as potential indicators of a previous creole stage. Our goal will be to show that these features can actually be explained as advanced SLA phenomena. In particular, I will discuss: (a) use of non-emphatic, non-contrastive overt subjects; (b) invariant verb forms for person and number; (c) lack of gender and number agreement in the DP; (d) presence of bare nouns in subject position; and (e) non-inverted questions. Table 1 reports such features with examples taken from some of the Afro-Hispanic dialects presenting them.

⁴ Cf. Pires & Thomason (2008) and Pires & Rothman (2009) for a similar account of cross-generational language change. The main difference between their accounts and the present one consists of the fact that example (1) pictures a case of contact-induced change, where SLA processes are involved. See also Veenstra (2008:234-235) for a similar yet different account of nativization in creole genesis.

Table 1. Five commonly reported Afro-Hispanic features.

Phenomenon	Examples
Use of non-emphatic, non-contrastive overt subjects.	<i>Yo tando muy pequeña conocí a una señora</i> ‘When I was young I met a woman’ (Barlovento Spanish, Megenney 1999:117). <i>Ta bien nomás uhtede tomó sus cajuecito nojotro ya tomó.</i> ‘Okay, you had your coffee, we already had some’ (Afro-Bolivian Spanish, Lipski 2008:100).
Invariant verb forms for person and number.	<i>Yo sabe [sé]</i> ‘I know’; <i>yo tiene [tengo]</i> ‘I have’; <i>yo no pue [puedo]</i> ‘I cannot’ (Afro-Puertorican, Álvarez Nazario 1974:194-195). <i>Yo quiele sé diputá</i> ‘I want to be a deputy’ (Afro-Peruvian Bozal Spanish, Lipski 2005:253)
Lack of gender and number agreement in the DP.	<i>Tán chiquito puej mij nene[s].</i> ‘My kids are so little’ (Afro-Mexican Oaxaca Spanish, Mayén 2007:117). <i>Gente branco [blanca].</i> ‘White people’ (Cuban Bozal Spanish, Álvarez Nazario 1974:189).
Lack of subject-verb inversion in questions.	<i>¿Onde tú taba, mijito?</i> ‘Where were you, my son?’ (Barlovento Spanish, Megenney 1999:118). <i>¿Qué tú comes?</i> ‘What do you eat’ (Caribbean Spanish, Lorenzino 1998:36)
Presence of bare nouns.	<i>Me metía en [el] pueblo con [los] trabajadores.</i> ‘He put me in the village with the workers’ (Chocó Spanish, Ruiz García 2001:45). <i>Porque [el] próximo pueblo puede ser Salinas.</i> ‘Because the next town could be Salinas’ (Chota Valley Spanish, Lipski 1987:163).

I will now proceed with a closer analysis of these commonly recurring features to show that not only are they not diagnostics of creoleness; rather, they often can be found in quite advanced interlanguages. Let us have a closer look at them.

Use of non-emphatic, non-contrastive overt subjects is a linguistic phenomenon related to the acquisition of the null-subject parameter. Subject expression in null subject languages like Italian or Spanish requires the mastery of the syntactic/pragmatic interface, since both structural and discourse features are involved. In fact, the null subject (*pro*) is usually used in topic and non-contrastive focus contexts. An example of the use of *pro* in Spanish is provided by Montrul *et al* (2009:303) in (2), where it expresses old information.

- (2) *Juan* llegó a su casa del trabajo. Primero *pro* se cambió de ropa y luego *pro* decidió ponerse a preparar la cena.
Juan came home from work. First *he* changed his clothes and then *he* decided to make dinner.

Figure 2. The Afro-Hispanic areas of Latin America (Klee & Lynch 2009:6).



Generative studies on the acquisition of such a parameter in L2 have long reported the over production of overt subjects in contexts requiring a null realization (White 1985, 1986; Phinney 1987). In particular, recent findings have suggested that even advanced L2 learners tend to show a surplus of overt subject pronouns because topic features are complex to acquire and therefore a native-like use of overt and covert pronouns is not likely to be obtained (Sorace 2000, 2003, 2004). In fact, according to Grimshaw & Samek-Lodovici (1998), the difference between an overt subject and *pro* in a pro-drop language is the presence of a [+topic shift] feature in the former which would be absent in the latter. Such a distinction does not exist in non-pro-drop languages such as English, where all subject pronouns must be spelled out. These data are perfectly in line with the idea that some aspects of Afro-Hispanic contact varieties should be seen as advanced second language phenomena. In fact, given that the correct use of *pro* in Spanish implies the simultaneous, proficient knowledge of syntactic and pragmatic features, encountering an overuse of non-emphatic, non-contrastive overt subjects in these languages is not completely unexpected.

Another aspect of natural languages which involves the interaction of two different linguistic dimensions has to do with the acquisition of uninterpretable phi-features (gender, person, number). In fact, current syntactic theory (Chomsky 1995) distinguishes between interpretable and uninterpretable features. Certain features have an interpretation at Logic Form (LF), thus they are semantically interpretable elements. Other features, on the contrary, lack such semantic import and are present in the system to trigger necessary syntactic operations during the derivation. One such operation is *Agree*. Chomsky (2000, 2001) argues that *Agree* consists of a relation between two elements within a syntactic domain: a probe and a goal. Chomsky suggests that agreement is the consequence of a situation in which an unvalued instance of a feature F c-commands another instance of F. The probe consists of an unvalued set of phi-features on a functional head, which is uninterpretable as such and must receive a value from some other syntactic constituent (Béjar 2008:133-134). According to this view, *Agree* serves the purpose of deleting uninterpretable features, which are unreadable at the syntax/semantic interface and –if not eliminated– would cause the derivation to crash. Deletion takes place in a cyclical fashion at the end of each phase. As uninterpretable phi-features do not contribute to the semantic interpretation of phrases, the complete mastery of such elements occurs late in L2 acquisition and often times is not obtained (Franceschina 2002). As far as Spanish L2 grammars are concerned, the slow acquisition of phi-feature specifications results in Spanish interlanguages presenting varying degrees of morphological marking incompleteness across their nominal and verbal domains.

For this reason, invariant verb forms for person and number are frequent among L2 varieties of Spanish and in child language (Bybee 1985). In these cases, the use of 3rd person singular as the default form is common. The Afro-Hispanic dialects found in the Americas display variable levels of subject-verb (dis)agreement, which in turn

reflect an aspect of their degree of restructuring (cf. Figure 1). In some varieties, 3rd person singular default forms can be commonly encountered (e.g., Afro-Bolivian Spanish), while in others, they are very rare (e.g., Chota Valley Spanish).

Cases of variable subject-verb agreement can be formally captured by postulating that in these dialects two different Tense Heads (T) are potential candidates to enter the lexical numeration: T1 and T2 (cf. Adger & Smith 2005 for a similar account for Buckie English). T1 bears tense, case, number and person features, like in standard Spanish; while T2 lacks number and person features. The result of the operation *Agree* (and *Merge*) between a subject pronoun and T1 will be a verb form conjugated for tense, number and person. On the other hand, the same operation involving T2 will result in a verb form conjugated for tense, but showing default features for number and person. These operation can be schematically represented for the verb *bailar* 'to dance' and the pronoun *nosotros* 'we' in example (3) and (4).

- (3) T1 [tense:present, *u*case:nom, *u*num:, *u*pers:] pronoun [num:pl, pers:1, *u*case:] →
T1[tense:present, *u*case:nom, *u*num:pl, *u*pers:1]pronoun [num:pl, pers:1, *u*case:nom]
Result: Nosotros bailamos
We.NOM dance.PRESENT.1.PL
- (4) T2 [tense:present, *u*case:nom].... pronoun [num:pl, pers:1, *u*case:] →
T2 [tense:present, *u*case:nom]pronoun [num:pl, pers:1, *u*case:nom]
Result: Nosotros baila
We.NOM dance.PRESENT.3.SG

The syntactic/semantic interface constraints held responsible for the slow acquisition of subject-verb agreement also apply to the mastery of gender and number features within the nominal domain. In fact, a variety of studies have reported the systematic presence of masculine/singular default values across the L2 Spanish DP (White *et al* 2004; Sagarra & Herschensohn 2008, 2011). Recent research in Creolistics has suggested a clear hierarchy of gender/number agreement acquisition where the development of uninterpretable features begins on determiners (in particular, on definite articles) and then, eventually, on other DP elements (cf. Sessarego & Gutiérrez-Rexach 2011, 2012; Delicado-Cantero & Sessarego 2011; Sessarego forthcoming b). This is in line with previous findings in SLA in Romance. In fact, Hawkins (1998) showed that English students speaking French as a second language presented more agreement on definite articles than on indefinite ones, and also more agreement on determiners than on adjectives. Similar findings have also been reported for English speakers of Spanish by Bruhn de Garavito & White (2000), and more recently by Franceschina (2005) who tested advanced speakers of Spanish coming from a variety of backgrounds (Italian, Portuguese, English, Arabic, German and French). Moreover, it must be said that the Afro-Hispanic dialects reported here do not lack gender/number features. Rather, the main distinction between them and standard Spanish concerns the DP elements

specified for *Agree*. In fact, while in standard Spanish, adjectives, articles, demonstratives and quantifiers all agree in gender and number with the noun, the operation *Agree* in these Afro-Hispanic dialects is restricted to a sub-group of DP elements, depending on the language. Most importantly, the limitation of nominal gender agreement to certain elements inherently indicates the presence of the feature ‘gender’ in these dialects. In this respect, these vernaculars diverge quite significantly from the majority of the Romance-based creoles, which are generally supposed to lack gender features. This fact further suggests that this aspect of the Afro-Hispanic dialects of Latin America should be seen as an *advanced* interlanguage phenomenon. It must be said that, if corrected through formal instruction, advanced L2 students may present stronger agreement patterns. However, given that the sociohistorical scenarios in which these dialects emerged have never been characterized by formal education, it is not completely surprising to encounter gender, number and person default forms in several Afro-Hispanic languages.

In line with the computations represented in (3-4) for cases of subject-verb agreement, examples (5-6) depict agreement processes involving gender and number features in the DP. In example (5) we can observe the determiner (D1) and the noun (N1) coming from the lexicon with the standard specification for gender and number features, while in (6) some of those specifications are missing from D2 and N2, thus leading to a different surface result characterized by impoverished agreement⁵.

- (5) D1[*u*gen:, *u*num:] Num[num:pl]..... N1 [gen:f, *u*num:] →
 D1[*u*gen:f, *u*num:pl]Num[num:pl]..... N1 [gen:f, *u*num:pl]
 Result: Muchas gatas
 many.F.PL cat.F.PL
- (6) D2[] Num[num:pl]..... N2 [gen:f] →
 D2[]Num[num:pl]..... N2 [gen:f]
 Result: Mucho gata
 many.M.SG cat.F.SG

Also null definite articles have often been mentioned in relation to creole languages. According to Bickerton, prototypical creoles have an article system with “a definite article for presupposed-specific NP; an indefinite article for asserted-specific NP; and zero for nonspecific NP” (1981:56). This description does not capture the features of the Afro-Hispanic article systems, each of which present a different configuration. In Afro-Bolivian Spanish, for example, there are three definite articles (*el, la, lu*), agreeing with the noun in gender and number, and two indefinite ones (*un, unos*), agreeing only in number. Their distribution resembles the one of standard Spanish with

5 Examples (5-6) should be seen as oversimplifications of the actual agreement processes taking place in several Afro-Hispanic languages. A more detailed account of such phenomena can be found in Sessarego & Gutiérrez-Rexach (2011, 2012); Delicado-Cantero & Sessarego (2011); Sessarego (forthcoming b).

the exception that bare nouns can take on either plural/singular, specific/non-specific/generic readings, given the proper pragmatic contexts; see Gutiérrez-Rexach & Sessarego (2011) for a detailed account. Such a distribution parallels, for the most part, the one encountered in Brazilian Portuguese (cf. Munn and Schmitt 2001; Müller 2003). Moreover, it is well known that second language speakers, coming from a first language with a different article system, or with no article system at all, can produce bare nouns and article mismatches even at very advanced levels (Sánchez & Giménez 1998, Leonini 2006).

Several Afro-Hispanic languages, in line with Caribbean Spanish varieties, allow for constructions in which a fronted *wh*-operator (*wh*-op) is followed by preverbal subjects when the *wh*-operator is an argument (7), thus giving rise to both *wh*-*S*-*V* and *wh*-*V*-*S* questions.

(7) Afro-Hispanic/ Caribbean varieties

- a. ¿Qué tú comes?
What you eat
'What do you eat?'
- b. ¿Qué comes (tú)?
What eat you
'What do you eat?'

Conversely, *wh*-*S*-*V* constructions are not generally grammatical in Mainland Spanish dialects, so that only the *wh*-*V*-*S* pattern is allowed (8).

(8) Mainland Spanish

- a. *¿Qué tú comes?
What you eat
'What do you eat?'
- b. ¿Qué comes (tú)?
What eat you
'What do you eat?'

Within the generative SLA tradition, several studies have been carried out to understand how *wh*-movement and subject-verb inversion are acquired and to test whether UG is available during the L2 development. The conclusions on the accessibility of UG during L2 acquisition have been variable but results have suggested that the mastery of such structures may be difficult to obtain, especially if the learner's L1 does not present such constructions (e.g., in Chinese, Korean, and Japanese) (cf. Birdsong 1992; Johnson & Newport 1989; Martohardjono & Gair 1993; White 1992; White & Juffs 1998; etc.).

Since the co-occurrence of fronted *wh*-operators and preverbal subjects is a common feature of Spanish creoles (cf. Holm & Patrick 2007), a potential creole ori-

gin for the Spanish dialects showing this characteristic has often been suggested (e.g., Perl 1998). There are at least two facts that seem to weaken such a hypothesis. First, SLA studies have shown that non-inverted questions appear cross linguistically also in very advanced stages of SLA (Pienemann 1998, 2005), thus indicating that they are not necessarily indicative of creoles. Secondly, it should be pointed out that while Afro-Hispanic and Caribbean varieties show *wh-S-V* constructions (cf. 7b), the *wh-V-S* order is also commonly used and quantitative studies indicate that it is actually the most frequent one (cf. Gutiérrez-Bravo 2008:227) for Dominican Spanish. Nevertheless, traditionally, the analysis of Caribbean *wh-S-V* interrogative constructions has been contrasted with the *wh-V-S* structures found in Mainland Spanish. A recent account by Gutiérrez-Bravo (2005, 2007, 2008) stresses the importance of keeping in mind that (7a) and (8b) shouldn't be analyzed as equivalent constructions in two different dialects; indeed, he shows that both of them co-exist in Caribbean Spanish and are based on different structures used in diverse pragmatic contexts. Conversely, in Mainland Spanish (8a) is not a grammatical option. Its equivalent is (9), where the subject is a sentence topic displaced to the left-peripheral position.

- (9) Tú ¿qué comes?
you what eat.2PS
'What do you want?'

After formulating the Interrogative Clause Condition (cf. also Gutiérrez-Bravo 2005)⁶ the author claims that in (7), TP is the highest projection, *wh-op* lands in [Spec, T], and T° acquires a [Q] feature from Spec-Head agreement with the *wh-op* (10). The presence of *wh-op* in [Spec, T] satisfies the EPP requirement instantiated by such a position, so that the subject remains in its VP internal position. On the other hand, in (8), the *wh-operator* lands in [Spec, C] so that C° acquires its [Q] feature. Since [Spec, T] is empty, a topicalized subject will be able to land there and satisfy the EPP requirement.

- (10) [_{TP} Qué_i comes [_{VP} tú t_j t_i]]?
wh T°
[Q] → [Q]
- (11) [_{CP} Qué_i Ø [_{TP} tú_j comes_k [_{VP} t_j t_k t_i]]]?
wh C°
[Q] → [Q]

The presence of two diverse constructions to express two different types of questions may appear as an additional complexity incorporated by some Afro-Hispanic dialects. At first glance, this fact may seem counterintuitive from a second language ac-

⁶ Interrogative Clause Condition (Gutiérrez-Bravo 2008:228): A clausal Extended Projection is interrogative if the head of the highest phrase in the Extended Projection bears the feature [Q].

quisition perspective, since contact linguistic phenomena tend to favor the acquisition of less complex/unmarked structures. This is an issue that deserves more attention; it should be analyzed by considering the sociolinguistic and the diachronic evolution of the *wh-S-V* construction in the dialects which present it. Nevertheless, for the moment, a highly speculative answer could be provided if we assume that, due to processability constraints on L2 production (cf. Pienemann 2005), the PLD of a certain generation may have been quite variable (including both inverted and non-inverted questions). Assuming such a scenario, it is not completely unreasonable to think that two different interpretations might have been assigned to such constructions by the acquiring children, so that in their L1 (7a) came to represent the topicalized subject question that would be normally expressed with (9) in other Spanish dialects.

In summary, the mastery of overt pronouns, nominal and verbal agreement, overt D constructions and inverted questions depend on advanced acquisition strategies which appear to be hampered by processability and language interface constraints (e.g., syntax/pragmatics and syntax/semantics interfaces). In line with minimalist constructionist assumptions (Herschensohn 2000), the acquisition of the lexicon and of its formal features (Borer 1984) is supposed to develop gradually through a UG-driven path. This process generates several possible L2 grammars, with different parametric configurations. The variable second language learners' output resulting from this acquisition process represents the PLD of the following generation, which will nativize the language into a new grammar.

4. Implications for the study of Microparametric Syntax and SLA

The study of Afro-Hispanic contact varieties has much to offer to linguistic theory since these varieties may be used as a microparametric "testing ground" (cf. Kayne 1996; Barbiers *et al* 2002; Sessarego forthcoming b). They also provide a look into possible second language grammars (cf. Herschensohn 2000), since certain aspects of these languages are clearly traceable back to SLA processes.

As for the phenomena mentioned in this paper, the discovery of "new" pro-drop systems may shed light on the extent to which such a parameter makes valid predictions. An important step forward would be to identify and analyze Afro-Hispanic languages with hybrid pro-drop configurations, maybe along the lines of Brazilian Portuguese, a variety which presents characteristics of pro-drop and non-pro-drop languages (Kato & Negrão 2000), probably due to the weakening of its verbal paradigm (Duarte 2003).

In addition, as for verbal and nominal morphology, linguistic theory has often considered the morphological richness of Spanish as a potential explanation for V-to-Infl movement and N-to-Num movement, among other phenomena (e.g., Pollock 1989; Picallo 1991). Nevertheless, Afro-Hispanic varieties, deprived of such morphological characteristics, show exactly the same noun+adjective and verb+adverb order combinations of standard Spanish (cf. Lipski 2005 for a survey). This indicates that

agreement, at least in these clear cases, cannot be the trigger of movement, which may be driven by other mechanisms, such as EPP or categorical features (cf. Carstens 2001; Alexiadou 2001).

It is well known that Romance languages, different from other languages such as Chinese and Japanese, do not accept bare nouns in subject position (cf. Contreras 1986; Longobardi 1994). Within the Principle and Parameter/ Minimalist framework, several attempts have been made to account for this linguistic variation to the point that the existence of a semantic parameter has been postulated: The Nominal Mapping Parameter (Chierchia 1998). Chierchia (1998), in fact, proposed this parameter to account for the distribution of bare nouns and full DPs cross-linguistically. His classification distinguishes three language types with the following differential properties: (A) [+arg, -pred] (e.g. Chinese/Japanese): generalized bare arguments, every (lexical) noun is mass, lack of plural morphology, generalized classifier system; (B) [-arg,+pred] (e.g., Romance Languages): count/mass distinction, lack of bare NPs in argument position, plural morphology; (C) [+arg,+pred] (e.g. Germanic/Slavic Languages): count/mass distinction, bare mass nouns and plurals found in argument position, lack of bare singular count nouns, plural morphology. Chierchia's proposal accounts perfectly for standard Spanish, which is a Romance language and presents the characteristics of group (A). However, as indicated by Gutiérrez-Rexach & Sessarego (2011), if we try to extend Chierchia's generalization to a closely related dialect of Spanish such as Afro-Bolivian Spanish (or Brazilian Portuguese, cf. Schmitt & Munn 2003), we notice immediately that the Nominal Mapping Parameter's universal predictions fail to account for the data. In fact, definite articles, plural morphology and count/mass distinction are present, while bare singular nouns occur in both subject and object positions. The authors indicate that Afro-Bolivian Spanish shows a very flexible system, where the interpretation of covert D-categories is determined by contextual semantic/pragmatic factors. Chierchia's model has also been empirically challenged by Déprez (2001) for Haitian French, Schmitt & Munn (2003) for Brazilian Portuguese, Baptista (2007) for Cape Verdian Portuguese, and Kester & Schmitt (2007) for Papiamentu, among others⁷. The Afro-Bolivian Spanish data, therefore, provide additional evidence showing that nominal reference should be decomposed on the basis of parametric lines which deviate from Chierchia's (1998) original proposal.

Finally, generative studies have long inspected the nature of *wh*-questions cross-dialectally to refine Rizzi's (1996) *Wh*-criterion and the landing sites of subjects and *wh*-operators (e.g., Torrego 1984; Suñer 1994; Toribio 2000; Ordóñez & Olarrea 2006; etc.). An example of such a cross-dialectal research is the study by Gutiérrez-Bravo (2008) –summarized in section 3– which led to the postulation of the Interrogative Clause Condition. More recently, Martínez-Sanz (2011) has also carried out a detailed minimalist investigation on Dominican Spanish non-inverted constructions by com-

⁷ See also Baptista & Guéron (2007) for an overall analysis of Chierchia's proposal in a variety of creole languages.

binning formal theories and sociolinguistic methodologies. Unfortunately, to the best of my knowledge, a detailed analysis of such structures in non-Caribbean Afro-Hispanic contact varieties is still missing.

5. Conclusion

The present article has shown that certain aspects of Afro-Hispanic languages, often reported in relation to their potential creole origin, can be accounted for as the result of conventionalized advanced SLA strategies. The theoretical framework adopted here is the one provided by the Minimalist Constructionism, which assumes that SLA is driven by UG through a path of “possible grammars” (Herschensohn 2000). For this reason, it has been suggested that the study of Afro-Hispanic contact varieties can offer a window into possible L2 instantiations of UG as well as a perfect microparametric “testing ground” (Kayne 1996) for formal hypotheses.

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