

Sessarego, Sandro. *The Afro-Bolivian Spanish Determiner Phrase*. Columbus, OH: The Ohio State University Press, 2014. ISBN 978-0-8142-1265-3.

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Background

Afro-Bolivian or Afro-Yungueño (henceforth AY) Spanish is a remarkable variety of Spanish spoken in a number of towns in *yungas*, high parts of the eastern slopes of the Andes descending towards the Amazon basin, in the Bolivian Department of La Paz. The term Afro-Bolivian Spanish has the virtue of clarity but is slightly confusing since there are several Afro-Bolivian speech communities in the country that speak varieties much closer to regional standard Spanish. AY is thus more precise, but perhaps not as clear to readers outside Bolivia.

AY has several features that make it stand out among Afro-Hispanic varieties in South America. It is potentially quite old; the first Africans brought to Bolivia arrived in the mid-16th century. In addition, it has developed in an environment where not Spanish but several indigenous languages were the dominant ones (see below). The current AY community culturally has close ties with nearby Aymara-speaking communities, for instance. The number of speakers of the more traditional, basilectal, varieties is not very large: rather thousands than tens of thousands, out of an overall number of possibly fifteen thousand Afro-Bolivians.

Four people have done serious work so far on this variety. I will discuss their contributions in chronological order. Native speaker and community member Juan Angola Maconde is an economist by training but has been an activist for the AY language and culture for many years now. His main general contribution is a book from 2000, where he presents data on the communities and their history. In a subsequent 2012 publication Angola Maconde lists about a 1000 words in AY with analyses of their meaning, example sentences of their use and where possible etymologies.

John Lipski carried out fieldwork in the Yungas in four consecutive summers between 2004 and 2007, much helped by Angola Maconde and introduced to the speaker communities. Lipski has published extensively on this variety, notably in a 2005 initial paper, a 2008 book and recently in a Spanish-language article (Lipski 2015).

Sandro Sessarego did fieldwork in three consecutive periods in 2008-2010. He published a book on the variety in Spanish in (2011), a number of research articles, and now the volume being reviewed here.

While she did more ethnographically oriented work in the community earlier, Danae M. Pérez-Inofuentes carried out linguistic fieldwork there on several trips between 2009 and 2013. In addition to her 2010 Zurich M.A. Thesis and a research article, she recently reanalyzed her material for another research paper (in press.).

Most of the data collected by these researchers came from roughly the same communities, in the Coroico area (North Yungas). The following table lists these communities (in bold those mentioned by at least three researchers).

Angola Maconde	Tocaña, Mururata, Lacahuarca, Comunidad Marca, Dorado Chico, Chicaloma
Lipski	Dorado Chico, Coscoma, Khala Khala, Coripata, Arapata, Coroico, Tocaña, Mururata, Chijchipa, Negrillani and Chicaloma
Sessarego	Tocaña, Mururata, Chijchipa
Pérez- Inofuentes	Mururata, Chijchipa, Tocaña

It is also likely that the same speakers were involved in many of these projects, given the small size of the communities and the fact that Angola Maconde's network played an important role in three studies. Sessarego operated separately from Angola Maconde, but the latter mentions one of Sessarego's main informants, Manuel Barra, explicitly as a main source. From the descriptions, it also appears that all four researchers used roughly the same fieldwork techniques: informal sociolinguistic audio-interviews (Sessarego also worked with direct acceptability judgments, see below).

I stress all these correspondences because the four researchers arrive at rather different conclusions from their analysis of the data. Angola Maconde emphasizes the important lexical contributions in his book from Quechua and Aymara. Since the communities are surrounded by Aymara villages, this is not surprising for that language, but the large number of Quechua words is striking. It may be indicative of strong influence of the Potosí mining language, and reveal Potosí roots of AY (Muysken, in prep.).

Lipski has tried to argue that A, albeit tentatively, has its roots in an antecedent general Afro-Hispanic creole, citing the radically different nominal and verbal morphology of its basilectal forms.

Pérez-Inofuentes sides with Lipski on the probable creole origin of AY but proposes that most likely the relevant groups of enslaved Africans entered Bolivia from the River Plate (and ultimately Brazil), and that there are close historical parallels between AY and pockets of Afro-Portuguese creole in Brazil.

Sessarego, in turn, argues that neither the historical nor the linguistic evidence makes a creole origin for AY very likely, and that it is best regarded as the result of incomplete second language acquisition of Bolivian Spanish.

I will not try to evaluate these contrasting claims here. Probably the most productive strategy would be to first bring together all the recordings made by different researchers into a single data base, which would also be a great asset in any case for the Afro-Bolivian community. This single data base would be useful for seeing whether there are subtle lectal differences between the different data sets (basilectal versus mesolectal), which could help explain differences of interpretation. However, the creole field of studies is full of diverging interpretations of the same data, so agreement may be too much to hope for.

The present study

High time to turn to Sessarego's book, the object of this review. Its aim is to contribute to the literature on formal approaches to syntactic dialect variation, with an emphasis on South American Spanish varieties. It consists of three main parts: introductory, theoretical, and results-oriented.

In chapters 1 and 2 the author explains the purpose of the study, presents background information about AY, and discusses Lipski's earlier claims about its possible creole history. There is detailed historical information about the Afro-Bolivian population, and Sessarego argues that the conclusion that AY presents evidence for earlier creolization is unwarranted. The historical section is fairly solid, but the description of the structural features of AY is too sketchy to be fully comprehensible. To some extent the discussion about the origin of AY is tangential to the central theme of the book, while a grammar sketch (possibly with an indication where basilectal varieties differ from mesolectal ones) would have been very helpful.

Chapters 3 and 4 present the theoretical basis for the study: the analysis of linguistic variation within the minimalist program (chapter 3) and the minimalist analysis of the noun phrase (chapter 4). The latter chapter fairly clearly outlines the steps by which the Noun Phrase gained in structural complexity and was reinterpreted as a Determiner Phrase, through the proposals of researchers such as Abney, Szabolcsi and Longobardi (to name but a few). It is not clear to me from chapter 3, which surveys a number of formal approaches to syntactic variation, whether the main model adapted is microparametric or minimalist. They are taken together here, although there are important differences between them as far as I can see.

Chapters 5 to 8, finally, offer a number a case studies of specific features of the noun phrase. Chapter 5 argues against a typological claim made by Chierchia (the Nominal Mapping Parameter), since its predictions do not fit the AY data. It is problematic for me that Sessarego does not give source codes for his data, and does not indicate systematically which ones were spontaneously recorded and which ones reflect grammaticality judgments. I was also confused by examples such as (52) and (53) on p.

75, where we get *yo compró* and *yo va comprar*. Are these AY sentences, and if not, why is the agreement off? However, they are very different from other AY sentences cited. For the next chapter, on the possibilities for ellipsis, it is made clear that all examples are elicited rather than spontaneous; the main point concerns differences in the use of prepositions such as *cum* ‘with’ in AY. Chapter 7 is about gender and number agreement in AY; again it is based on intuitions. It is not clear to me why a substantial corpus would not also contain enough information to back these intuitions up. The crucial point (p. 112) seems to be that there is gender agreement in articles (although this is only for singular nouns; cf. p. 71), but not in quantifiers and adjectives; for number agreement, there is one plural marked per noun phrase.

The most interesting and ambitious chapter in this respect is chapter 8, where a quantitative approach to variation in the Determiner Phrase, with factor weights for agreement in different syntactic environments, is combined with the proposal in Adger and Smith (2005). I hope Sessarego further develops the line explored in this chapter.

It is clear that AY has much to offer for researchers in the domain of grammatical variation, both those with an interest in language genesis and people with more formal concerns. It is to be very interesting if the verb phrase, which is probably much more complex, will receive a similar detailed treatment as the one allotted to the Determiner Phrase in this volume, hopefully with a pooled data set of all the researchers who have worked on this fascinating variety.

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