

# **Afro-Brazilian *Cupópia*: language contact, lexically-driven deliberate change and its grammatical outcomes.**

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# Structure of the presentation

1. Aims
2. **Cupópia's** typological features and use
3. **Cupópia's** socio-historical context
4. Classification of Cupópia as a mixed language based on socio-historical context and typological features
5. Origins of Cupópia: contact settings and linguistic outcomes
6. Final considerations

# Aims

1. Describe Cupópias typological features, use and socio-historical context.
2. Identify *Cupópia* as a mixed language in order to be able to discuss current views on the typologies and social contexts of such languages.
3. Shed light on the processes through which *Cupópia* emerged.

# The *Cupópia* of *Cafundó*

Rural Afro-Brazilian community, 144 km from São Paulo.

1978-1983 linguistic data was gathered among the 80 descendants of 2 slave women who inherited **their owners'** properties. (Vogt & Fry 1996)



# Cupópia's typological features (lexical analysis)

- 103/160 lexical morphemes specific for Cupópia have African origin
- 86/103 African-derived words have Kimbundu origin (most verbs, adjectives and adverbs from Kimb)
- 25 % of the Africanisms belong to the semantic domain of daily/domestic life
- 28 % of the Africanisms are basic vocabulary
- Many semantically bleached verbs and nouns
- Some words may be deformed deliberately

# Cupópia's typological features (morphosyntactic analysis)

- Copula absence
- Possessive constructions with copula
- Variable gender agreement in the NP
- Consistent plural marking 1st element of NP
- Bare nouns in grammatically specific contexts
- Variable subject-verb agreement
- Shares some grammatical particularities with an earlier stage of regional Portuguese (100 years ago)
- Differences *Cupópia* - *Cafundó Portuguese* concentrate in the NP

# Cupópia

- (1) cupópia pro-s tata levar pro ambara  
cupópia PREP.DEF.M-PL man bring PREP.DEM.M vila  
‘cupópia for the men to bring to the village’

- (2) quend-ei com o tata lá d'-ambara  
walk-PST.1SG with DEF.M man there PREP-village  
‘I spoke with the man there from the village’

# ***Cupópia*: Functional characterization**

- Not L1
- Co-existence with Portuguese
- Not main language of communication
- Used as in-group code to express particular social functions/maintain identity (ancestral or new ethnic group?)
- Signals distance with out-groups, may function as secret language
- Conscious and creative use of language resources (elliptical and allusive use of language)



# Cupópia's socio-historical context

**1750:** Africans arrived after 1750.

**Owner's** great grandfather arrived.

**1801:** Sorocaba 1801: 87% Angolla (= from Luanda, kimb)

The receiving slave community may have imposed the Kimbundu-based variety that they probably spoke with newcomers (Slenes, 1996).

**1800-1850:** aprox 50 % of the slaves were Africans.

**~1880:** Antônia and Ifigênia (slaves) inherited the land.

Etymologies match historical and demographical data.

# ***Cupópia*: a (symbiotic) mixed language?**

**Mixed languages:** a diverse category defined by mixing

**Cupópia:** 2 identifiable sources, only lexical material from ancestral (African) language, with a regional (Portuguese) grammar frame, no grammatical mixing, some slightly different grammar rules (not from African source)

**Social history:** Small group (~100), presence of bilingual speakers

**Use:** symbiotic and dependent relationship with dominant language (Portuguese), often secret code

**Parallels:** Angloromani

# When did *Cupópia* emerge?

Linguistic data indicates that *Cupópia* probably emerged in the 19<sup>th</sup> century when:

- there were still Kimbundu (Kimbundu-based lingua franca) speakers (bilinguals?) around when this variety emerged (lexical and historical/demographical data shows that)
- there were enough speakers who were proficient in a common lg – Caipira Portuguese - to employ it as the frame builder of the new variety
- *Caipira* Portuguese described by Amaral (1920) was the frame language (shared grammatical properties)

# On speakers' intentions

- Background: Part of the group was partially bilingual, but not necessarily fluent in Kimbundu/Portuguese.
- One group (older people who knew Kimbundu/lingua franca) may have **helped to perform a deliberate 'undoing' of a shift towards an introduced language (Portuguese) to reclaim an ancestral language.**  
Or was it a new identity rather than an ancestral identity/language?
- Some individuals may have invented a new variety, also used as a secret code and then passed it on to others.

# Processes involved – at a general level

- Gradual grammatical borrowing (from Portuguese) vs reversed language shift (African-Portuguese-African)
- Grammatical restructuring: a result of reductions triggered by the lexicon vs direct transfer from earlier restructured variety of Portuguese

# Final remarks: social contexts and linguistic outcomes

Which are the social factors in this Cafundó setting that lead to a deliberate change with a result like the one we see in Cupópia (symbiotic mixed language)?

- >not higher proportion of African population
- >not higher level of isolation

Hypothesis: important social functions and relatively small group are key factors in the emergence of Cupópia (and other mixed languages?)