

Some Remarks on the Origin of Chota Valley Spanish

Sandro Sessarego
University of Wisconsin-Madison

1. Introduction

Chota Valley Spanish (CVS) is an Afro-Hispanic vernacular spoken in several rural villages scattered across the provinces of Imbabura and Carchi, Ecuador. This dialect is spoken by approximately 12,000 people (INEC 2001), the descendants of the slaves taken to this region to work the Jesuit sugarcane plantations during colonial time. The origin of this language is not completely clear yet. Schwegler (1999) suggests a possible creole source for CVS. In his view, CVS might have been a creole language, which underwent a process of decreolization due to contact with regional Ecuadorian Spanish after the Land Reform of 1964. The Reform, in fact, freed Afro-Choteños from forced labor on haciendas and provided them with the right to vote and receive an education.

Schwegler (1999) adopts a *revisited* version of the Monogenesis Hypothesis of creole formation to explain CVS development. He reformulates the hypothesis suggested by Schuchardt (1889), who originally claimed that all European-based creoles developed from a single Afro-Portuguese pidgin. According to Schwegler, in fact, not all these creoles share the same Afro-Portuguese root; however, for certain Afro-Hispanic contact varieties in the Americas this is definitively the case (cf. also Granda 1978). One of such languages would be CVS. The author suggests that a concomitance of sociohistorical facts made colonial Chota Valley the perfect place for an Afro-Portuguese creole language to develop or to be preserved. In fact, this region would have been characterized by a low white/black ratio, harsh working conditions in labor intensive sugarcane plantations, massive introduction of African-born workers (taken to the Americas by Portuguese slave traders), and minimal contact with the outside Spanish speaking world (Schwegler 1999:240). He also argues that one feature of CVS — *ele* ‘Portuguese-based 3rd person pronoun (genderless)’ — offers “UNEQUIVOCAL evidence in favor of the monogenic pidgin/creole theory” for this Afro-Ecuadorian variety. According to Schwegler, this claim is backed by the fact that the Portuguese never colonized Ecuador so that the presence in CVS of a “deep” Portuguese grammatical feature like a pronoun could not be explained, unless we accept that this dialect indeed derived from an Afro-Portuguese creole.

Schwegler (1999:237) identifies instances of Portuguese *ele* in Palenquero (1) and Chota Valley Spanish (2) and its counterpart *elle* in Cuban and Puerto Rican Bozal Spanish (3).

- (1) Palenquero (Colombia):
 - a. ELE a-ta kume ku ELE. ‘HE/SHE is eating with HIM/HER’.
 - b. ELE tan mini akí. (archaic) ‘They will come here’.

- (2) Chota (highland Ecuador):
 - a. ELE, él ta allí. ‘HE/SHE is there’.
 - b. ¡Yo! con ELE no fuera. ‘I! With HIM/HER I would not go’.
 - c. ELE no les quiero dar. ‘I don’t want to give it to HIM/HER’.

- (3) Bozal Spanish 19th c. (Cuba/Puerto Rico):
 - a. ELLE estaba en un mortorio. ‘They were at a funeral’.
 - b. ELLE solito con su espá... ‘He alone with his sword...’.

Schwegler claims that these examples clearly prove the connection between these Afro-Hispanic dialects and a Portuguese-based creole. In his view, *ele* and *elle* must have been derived from the Portuguese pronoun, since they could not have been developed out from their corresponding Spanish forms. He also tries to provide evidence to show that *ele* should not be seen as the result of a paragogic process of Spanish *él>ele*. This would be supported by the fact that in Palenquero *ele* has also a plural reference and therefore it cannot be analysed by applying a paragoge rule to Spanish *ellos/ellas* ‘they’ (Schwegler 1999:243-5). The author accounts for the Cuban/Puerto Rican Bozal *elle* form by suggesting that it could be analysed as the result of a ‘blend’ between Afro-Portuguese *ele* and Spanish *ella, ellos, and ellas* (1999:250).

Figure 1. The Afro-Hispanic linguistic areas reported by Schwegler (1999) (Adapted from http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/americas/latin_america.gif)



① Palenquero; ② Chota Valley Spanish; ③ Caribbean Bozal Spanish

This article analyzes the available linguistic and sociohistorical data for CVS in order to shed light on the origin of this vernacular. Findings suggests that CVS is probably not a decreolized Afro-Portuguese creole; rather, it appears to be the result of intermediate and advanced second language acquisition processes, which do not necessarily imply a previous creole stage. Section 2 provides a grammatical description of CVS. Section 3 offers a sociohistorical account for black slavery in Ecuador, while section 4 focuses on colonial Chota Valley. Finally, section 5 discusses the findings and concludes.

2. A description of Choteño Spanish

Sessarego (forthcoming: ch.4) revisits the previous literature on CVS and supplies new data to provide an account of the most relevant CVS features for the creole debate. He reports: (4a,b) variable number and gender marking across the DP; (4c) bare singular nouns in object position; (4d) sporadic lack of subject-verb agreement; (4e) non-standard use of preposition; (4f) irregular use of the verbs *ser* and *estar* ‘to be’; (4g) presence of *ele*.

(4)

- a. *Mis hermano joven[es]*. ‘My young brothers’.
- b. *Todo [toda] la cerveza fría*. ‘All the cold beer.’
- c. *Lorenzo come naranja[s]*. ‘Lorenzo eat oranges’.
- d. *Yo vivo lejos [de]las casita[s]*. ‘I live far away from the little houses’.
- e. *¿Vos habla[s] inglés?* ‘Do you speak English?’
- f. *Mi hijo es a [está en] Quito*. ‘My son is in Quito’.
- g. *Ele, ella quiere bailar bomba*. ‘Hey, she wants to dance the bomb’

Even though the examples presented in (4) depart from standard Spanish, their presence in CVS does not automatically imply a creole root for this dialect; rather, they are perfectly in line with the grammatical features found in several other non-standard Spanish dialects and in advanced L2 varieties of Spanish for which a creole hypothesis is not likely (cf. also Sessarego 2011). Indeed, redundant morphological marking (4a,b) is one of the first features to be lost in cases of language contact, and one of the least likely ones to emerge in second language acquisition (Montrul 2004). Variable lack of gender agreement is a well-known phenomenon characterizing the speech of all advanced students learning an L2, especially if their L1 lacks the feature ‘gender’ (Franceschina 2002). The absence of redundant plural marking across the Determiner Phrase of certain Spanish and Portuguese dialects has often been claimed to be an indicator of previous creolization. For example, Guy (1981; 2004) has suggested that this hypothesis may well account for the origin of Popular Brazilian Portuguese (PBP) (cf. Naro & Scherre 2000 for a critique of this proposal). However, cases of variable number agreement are also commonly encountered in advanced Spanish second languages (Bruhn de Garavito & White 2000; White et al 2004), thus indicating that not only creole languages show such a grammatical pattern.

Bare nouns (4c) are commonly found in interlanguage grammars, also at very advanced levels. This is a phenomenon, which typically occurs when the L1 and the target language present significant differences between their determiner systems; in particular, if the L1 does not use overt D categories (Sánchez & Giménez 1998, Leonini 2006). Moreover, the lack of prepositions (4d), especially *a* and *de*, is found in virtually all Spanish second language grammars and in the speech of vestigial speakers (Lipski 1994:114).

Studies on the acquisition of subject-verb agreement have shown that this is an aspect of grammar which is quite peripheral to the syntactic core (Slabakova 2009), and therefore difficult to acquire and master, especially in cases of untutored L2 acquisition. For this reason, invariant verb forms for person and number (4e) 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. Lack of nominal and verbal agreement can also be encountered in the native language of many speakers of contact dialects, for which a creole hypothesis is not suitable but a crystallized second language variety seems more plausible, such as Barlovento Spanish (Díaz Campos & Clements 2005, 2008) and Afro-Bolivian Spanish (Sessarego 2011).

Confusion between the verbs *ser* and *estar* ‘to be’ (4f) is commonly found in advanced Spanish second languages. In fact, several advanced Spanish language manuals try to address this issue (see for example King & Suñer 1999; Lunn & DeCesaris 2007). Finally, serious doubts should be cast on the pronominal status proposed by Schwegler (1999) for *ele*. In fact, none of my CVS informants are aware of its use as a pronoun; moreover, Lipski (2009:112) and Powe (1998:137) describe it as “an emphatic particle”, which appears to be commonly used in all varieties of highland Ecuadorian Spanish. A closer look at Schwegler’s (1999:244) data seems to suggest that the real function of CVS *ele* is the one of a topic/focus marker, rather than a pronoun (5).

(5)

- a. ELE, él ta allí. ‘He, he is there’.
- b. !Yo! !Con ELE no fuera! ‘I! With him, I would not go!’
- c. ELE el guagua se torció el pie. ‘He, the kid twisted his ankle’.
- d. ELE ese ya le canco al puerco. ‘He, this one already killed the pig’.
- e. ELE ellas se van a pasear. They, they are going for a walk’.
- f. ELE no les quiero dar. ‘To them, I do not want to give it to them’.
- g. ELI los pescados se han muerto. ‘They, the fish have died’.

All the constructions reported in (5 a, c, d, e, f, g) represent instances of dislocated topics. In these examples ELE is always located at the left edge of the sentence, where it appears to be separated from the rest of the construction by some kind of 'comma intonation'. The function of this element is to alert the listener that the speaker will make a statement about someone. This person (or group) must be salient in the context, maybe because he/she was mentioned previously. In example (5b), ELE is the focus of the sentence and it introduces new information that can generally be thought of as an answer to a question. In this specific case, the example provided may be seen as the answer to the question: "Who wouldn't you go with?" Answer: *Yo, con ELE no fuera*. This can be paraphrased in English with clefts: "As for me, it is with HIM that I would not go". Note that in (5b), the topic of the sentence is YO and focus is ELE.

Moreover, as far as the origin of this element is concern, it may be of interest to reflect on the fact that *ele* is not only used by Afro-Ecuadorians; rather, it appears to be commonly found across all the Ecuadorian highlands, also among communities that have never been in contact with the black population found in the country (cf. Córdova Álvarez 1995:194). This fact may suggest that the true origin of this element should be sought in the native languages spoken in the region. This is, however, only a potential explanation, which I am not able to fully explore in this article; I leave this issue for future research.

In summary, the linguistic data analysed do not seem to imply a creole origin for CVS. In fact, all the grammatical features which deviate from the standard language can also be encountered in intermediate and advanced second language varieties of Spanish, for which a creole origin is not feasible, while *ele* appears to be a topic/focus marker commonly used in highland Ecuadorian Spanish. Nevertheless, in order to obtain a more complete account of this issue, it is also important to investigate the sociohistorical context in which CVS developed.

3. Black slavery in colonial Ecuador

African slavery persisted in Ecuador from the very beginning of its colonization - in the first decades of the 16th century - to 1854, when General José María Urbina declared slavery illegal. Even after the official abolition of slavery, Afro-Ecuadorians were not completely free; rather, they had to work as *concertados* until the Land Reform of 1964. In Chota Valley, *concertados* were bound to the hacienda land, where they were forced to work for a minimal wage into a system which deprived them from both the right to vote and the right to receive an education.

Black slavery lasted for almost four centuries; however, its dimension never achieved the demographic figures observed in many other Latin American colonies¹. Two main factors have been identified as responsible for this fact: (1) Ecuador is located on the Pacific side of Southern America; importing Africans to this region was expensive and was not an easy task; (2) the presence of a native population, who could be forced to work for a minimal wage. Tardieu (2006:167) exemplifies this situation with the words of the scientist Antonio de Ulloa, who took part in an expedition in 1748 to measure the Ecuadorian meridian:

El vecindario de gente baja o común puede dividirse en cuatro clases, que son españoles o blancos, mestizos, indios o naturales y negros con sus descendientes. Este último no abunda tanto a proporción como en otros parajes de las Indias, casi porque no es tan fácil su conducción como porque en general son los indios los que se emplean en el cultivo de la tierra y demás ejercicios del campo (Lower class people can be divided in four groups, which are Spaniards or Whites, Spanish/Indian mixed race individuals, Indians or Natives and Blacks with their descendants. This last group is not as large as in other areas of the Indies because it is not easy to transport them here and because generally Indians are employed to work the land and in other agricultural tasks).

Andrien (1995:37-44) shows that the Afro-descendant population of Ecuador in colonial time has always been a small minority. It achieved its peak in the 18th century consisting of 12,000 blacks out of a total population of 430,000 (cf. also Bryant 2005:12-13). In fact, historians studying slavery in this part of the world have traditionally differentiated between what they classify a 'slave society' and a

¹ See for example Clements (2009:ch.4) for Cuba and Díaz-Campos & Clements (2008) for Venezuela.

‘society with slaves’ (cf. Berlin 1997; Finely 1980; see also Bryant 2005 for a modified terminological account). To mention a case, Berlin (1997) describes a slave society as a system in which the relation of power between masters and slaves exemplified the base of social relations since the enslaved workforce was the key factor for the economic development of the colony; a scenario commonly found in the British and French Caribbean territories. Conversely, Ecuador and the rest of the mainland Spanish colonies have been traditionally depicted as “societies with slaves”, where “pockets of slaves and masters” (Genovese 1971:63) could be found but the social and economic relations in the territory were not mainly based on the power relation between these two groups.

In the following sections, we will focus our attention on one of such ‘pockets’, colonial Chota Valley, to understand to what extent the sociohistorical conditions would have been in place for the creation and/or preservation of a creole language.

4. A sketch of slavery in Chota Valley

According to Rosario Coronel Feijóo (1991:67), the socioeconomic history of colonial Chota Valley can roughly be divided in three key phases: (1) the indigenous phase (until 1610), (2) the transition phase (1610-1680), and (3) the Jesuit phase (1680-1767). We will proceed with the analysis of Chota Valley slavery by describing such phases in chronological order.

4.1. The indigenous phase (until 1610)

Coronel Feijóo (1991:ch.1) offers a detailed historical account to illustrate the systematic colonization of Chota Valley by the Spaniards during the 16th century. This process implied a gradual reduction of the Indigenous population and a limited introduction of a black workforce oftentimes used for agricultural work. The author reports that by this time there were six Spanish haciendas, which employed a reduced number of black slaves.

4.2. The transition phase (1610-1680)

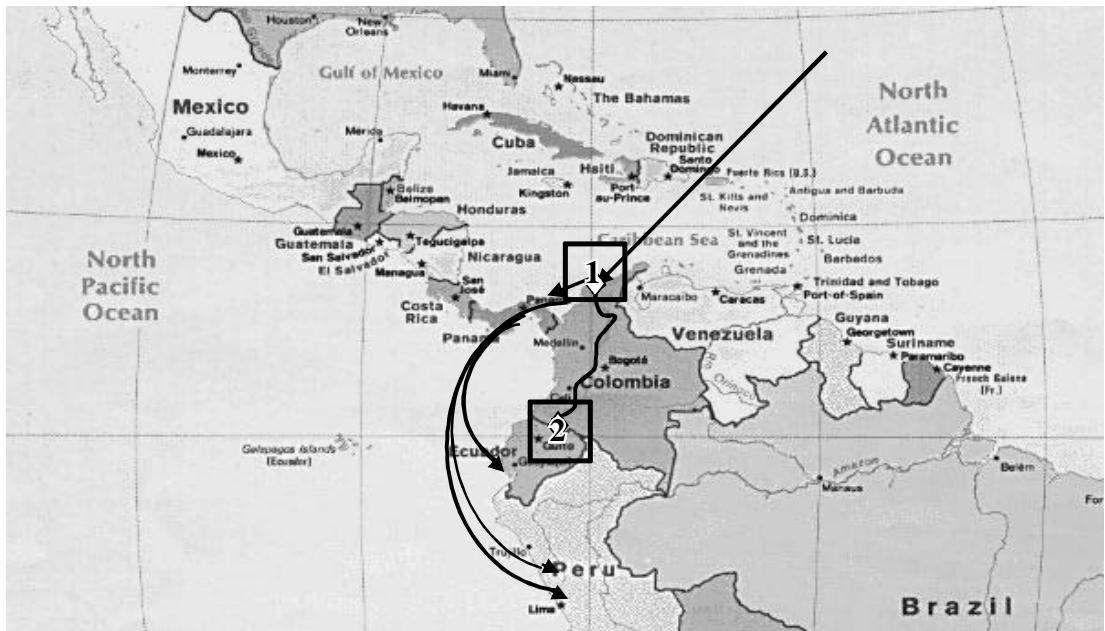
During the transition phase, the valley was characterized by a systematic acquisition of properties by the Jesuits, and by a gradual change in the labor force used to work the plantations: from Indians to blacks. In this phase, Chota Valley experienced a quick escalation in the number of violent conflicts between Indians and Spaniards, often related to the allocation of water resources.

Several observers of the time indicated that black slaves took part in many of these fights. Coronel Feijóo (1991:69) reports historical documents stating that “mayordomos, esclavos negros y propietarios a punta de piedras, látigo, rejo y palo, comienzan a imponer nuevas normas de distribución del agua sobre las antiguas reglas indígenas [...] andan con palos, rejonos, perros, rodando y aguardando el agua” [Supervisors, black slaves, and owners impose new water distribution rules on old Indian norms; they use stones, whips, spikes, and sticks [...] they walk around with sticks, big spikes, and dogs to control water resources]. Historical information of this kind appears to indicate that blacks in colonial Chota Valley occupied an intermediate position between Spaniards and Indians (much like in other parts of Latin America, cf. Sessarego 2011c:ch.2 for Bolivia), thus indicating that slaves probably had relatively good access to the language spoken by their masters.

The constant tensions between the local population and the colonizers resulted in the progressive migration of the former. As a result, much of the native workforce moved away and had to be replaced. At first, the Jesuits introduced a native labor force proceeding from the surrounding highland areas. However, the introduction of Indians from colder highlands to the warm lands often caused their death; for this reason, the Jesuits had to rely on black slaves, considered more suitable for the tropical climate. Nevertheless, it must be highlighted that the introduction of a black workforce was gradual. Coronel Feijóo (1991:81) states that “hablar de importación masiva de negros, para la época, parece sobredimensionado; difícil resulta atribuir a los estancieros de la zona un negocio de tal magnitud” [talking about massive black importation, by that time, seems to be overstated; it is difficult to ascribe such a big business to local settlers].

Differently from what Schwegler (1999:240) indicated, black *bozales* in colonial Ecuador were a small minority². This was due to the difficulties related to the transportation of African-born slaves to the colony. The transatlantic journey to Ecuador was, indeed, a very long and difficult one. Slaves had to be shipped from Africa and from Spain to Cartagena, Colombia. Subsequently, they had to be sent to Panama, where they were forced to cross the isthmus. After having reached the Pacific side of Panama, they were boarded one more time and sent to the harbor of Guayaquil, Ecuador, or Callao, Peru. Once arrived to the destination, Africans were resold and distributed across the country. Another way to import black captives into Ecuador was to send them from Cartagena to Popayán. This was achieved by shipping them through the Magdalena River and by having them walk over inland roads across the jungle. In Popayán slaves were sold to masters who typically used them for domestic tasks or in mines and haciendas scattered across the Pacific coast and the highland region (Colmenares 1997; Bryant 2005).

Figure 2. Slave trade routes to Ecuador (Adapted http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/americas/latin_america.gif)



① Cartagena ② Popayán

Cases of shipwrecks and mutinies were common during these trips. The most legendary case happened in 1553, in the proximity of the Esmeralda coast (Ecuador). From this accident a group of blacks escaped and organized themselves into independent communities, which managed to resist Spanish oppression for more than three centuries (cf. Tardieu 2006: ch.2). Pickard (2010:31-32) indicates that inland routes from Cartagena to Popayán were even more dangerous. In any case, these journeys were extremely strenuous and many casualties tended to occur amongst the slave population. These transportation impediments inevitably resulted in a higher price of the captives sold in the Ecuadorian market. For this reason, purchasing black slaves was highly expensive. Colmenares (1997:42-48) shows that in the 17th century a captive bought in Cartagena for 200-240 pesos could be sold in Popayán for 450-500.

4.3. The Jesuit phase (1680-1767)

During this phase, the Company of Jesus kept expanding, to the point that it almost gained complete control over the valley. The territorial enlargement is paralleled by a greater need for enslaved labor

² Moreover, it has to be kept in mind that also the locally-born black population never represented a big sector of the Ecuador population, as pointed out by Lucena Salmoral (1994), Andrien (1995), and Bryant (2005).

force to be used in sugarcane plantations. Coronel Feijóo (1991:93) and Peñaherrera de Costales and Costales Samaniego (1959:215) believe that the black workforce used on the Jesuit haciendas was for the most part locally born. This scenario might be further supported by the data provided by Colmenares (1997) on the slave trade between Colombia and Ecuador. In fact, Colmenares indicates that the supply of *bozales* in Popayán from Cartagena was not constant due to the frequent interruption of the *asientos* (1715-1720, 1740-1745 and 1753-1759) and the Spanish Sucession War (1705-1710). He also claims that even when the slave trade reached its peak (around the 1730's), almost 60% of slaves exchanged in Popayán were still *criollos*. Another interesting point made by Colmenares has to do with the European trading companies which supplied Spanish America with slaves during this period. Colmenares shows that from the 17th century, Spanish slave *asientos* were in the hands of French, English and Dutch traders; this suggests that the possibility of an Afro-Portuguese based creole being introduced or created in Chota Valley is reduced (against Schwegler's hypothesis).

Several authors have provided different estimations of the number of slaves owned by the Jesuits in their plantations: Tumbabiro, Carpuela, Santiago, Chalguyacu, Chamanal, Concepción, Caldera and Cuajara (Peñaherrera de Costales & Costales Samaniego 1959; Cushner 1982; Coronel Feijóo 1991; Jurado Noboa 1992; Bouisson 1997; etc.). A comparative analysis of the data presented by these scholars appear to indicate that right after the Jesuit expulsion from the Spanish colonies in 1767, the total number of black slaves in the Jesuit haciendas was around 1,300 (see Sessarego forthcoming: ch.2 for a full account of the issue). For example, Nicholas Cushner (1982:136) states that:

At the time of the Jesuit expulsion from Ecuador in 1767, the Jesuits owned a total of 1,364 black slaves, most of whom were sold at public auction. After medical examination, the council in charge of Jesuit property determined that 508 slaves were capable of heavy work, 181 were fit only to haul sugarcane, 94 were old and crippled, and 488 were minors under ten years of age. Moreover, 93 were listed as troublemakers.

Cushner's data are also in line with Lucena Salmoral's (1994:39-40) report for the Kingdom of Quito population around 1784. Lucena Salmoral mentions a total of 1,073 slaves in the Ibarra region and 263 in Otavalo out of a total population of 16,226 and 34,720 respectively. In both regions, the Indian population was the majority (50%-75%), followed by the white-mestizo group (24%-43%), and the black-mulatto one (1%-7%). It must be remembered that Lucena Salmoral's account is a general overview and that in certain Chota Valley villages the black population might have outnumbered the white/mestizo one; nevertheless, these data can at least provide an overall picture of the demographic proportions between ethnic groups in the region.

Bouisson (1997:48-49) shows how the Jesuits tried to favor local slave reproduction and self-maintenance. Men and women were generally in equal numbers in each hacienda (see table 1); each couple had a house with a piece of land to grow their own food. This strategy had two goals: 1) provide the captives with a minimum level of comfort to support themselves, thus limiting the hacienda's costs; 2) develop a feeling of connection between the slaves, the land, and their families to prevent uprisings.

Table 1. Enslaved population in the Jesuit haciendas (1782-1783) (Adapted from Bouisson 1997:48).

Haciendas	Men	%	Women	%	Total
Caldera	54	56.8	41	43.2	95
Carpuela	49	51.6	46	48.4	95
Chalguyacu	43	53.7	37	46.2	80
Chamanal	79	54.5	66	45.5	145
Concepción	180	52.2	165	47.8	345
Total	405	53.3	355	46.7	760

Table 2 provides a picture of the families with at least two children in some of the Jesuit haciendas shortly after their expulsion. As can be seen, several families had more than five children.

Table 2. Enslaved families with two or more children in the Jesuit haciendas (1782-1783)
(Adapted from Bouisson 1997:49).

Haciendas	Families with 2 children or more	With 2 children	With 3 children	With 4 children	With 5 children or more
Caldera	11	4	2	4	1
Carpuela	10	5	2	—	3
Chalguayacu	8	1	1	3	3
Chamanal	22	5	8	6	3
Concepción	47	13	10	8	16

Coronel Feijóo (1991:111) and Bouisson (1997:51) indicate that blacks could work during their free time on these fields. They did not own those lands, but they could keep the crops to feed their families or to sell it on the local market in order to save money and eventually purchase their freedom. Moreover, Coronel Feijóo (1991:110) reports documents indicating that, soon after the Jesuit expulsion, some blacks rented their land parcels to white people. These data may suggest that some social flexibility and relatively high interracial contact was present in this region.

The Jesuits were expelled from Spain and its colonies in 1767. At that point, these *haciendas* and their enslaved workers were assigned to the Temporalidades council, the organ in charge of selling Jesuit former properties. Black families oftentimes were separated by this council and their members sold individually as *piezas* ‘tokens’ to private landlords. In 1854, more than three decades after the independence of Ecuador from Spain, black slavery was abolished; nevertheless, black Ecuadorians had to live as *concertados* until 1964, year of the Land Reform, which assigned to each Chota Valley family a piece of the land on which they used to work as peons for the *hacienda*.

5. Discussion and conclusion

The previous sections have cast some doubts on the analysis that suggested an Afro-Portuguese creole origin for CVS (cf. Schwegler 1999). Such an account, in fact, claimed that colonial Chota Valley would have been characterized by a low white/black ratio, harsh working conditions in labor intensive sugarcane plantations, massive introduction of African-born workers, and minimal contact with the outside Spanish speaking world (cf. Schwegler 1999:240). However, as we saw, African-born slaves have never been a majority group in any of the three phases analyzed. Additionally, it is true that harsh working practices regulated the work of blacks in this region; nevertheless, we encountered cues indicating that during the Indigenous phase (until 1610) and the transitional phase (1610-1680), blacks were most likely in an intermediate position between white and natives since they helped the Spaniards fight against the Indians (Coronel Feijóo 1991). In addition, sociohistorical reports from the Jesuit phase (1680-1767) highlight a certain degree of social flexibility: the formation of nuclear families was favored, slave reproduction was high, each family was given a piece of land, and slaves could purchase their manumission (Bouisson 1997). Also, the claim that *bozales* were used massively to work these plantations is a bit problematic, since a concomitance of logistic and financial constraints strongly limited the introduction of Africans in the colony. Furthermore, even when *bozal* importations increased in Popayán (around the 1730’s), we saw that the 60% of slaves sold in this market were locally born (Colmenares 1997). Contact with the outside world may not have been intense, however, Coronel Feijóo (1991) indicates that blacks could rent small land parcels to white people and sell agricultural goods in local markets. Finally, the Portuguese hypothesis appears to be contradicted by the fact that when the Jesuits started importing African workers to work in Chota Valley, Spanish colonies were no longer receiving slaves from the Portuguese; rather, they were acquiring them from French, Dutch and English traders (Colmenares 1997).

From a linguistic perspective, the morphosyntactic features encountered in CVS do not imply a previous creole stage either; rather, they appear to be in line with those encountered in substandard or second language varieties of Spanish, for which a creole origin would be difficult to claim. As far as *ele*

is concerned, data suggest that it is not a Portuguese-derived pronoun; on the contrary, it should be described as a topic/focus marker, also common to other highland Ecuadorian Spanish varieties.

All these data contradict the assumption that colonial Chota Valley would have been the perfect place for the development and/or preservation of an Afro-Portuguese creole language. In fact, both the linguistic and the socio-demographic data appear to indicate that Afro-Choteño slaves probably had good access to the language spoken by their masters, so that CVS was never radically different from Spanish. Additionally, since Afro-Choteños were bound to the land and forced to work as *concertados* until 1964, it is difficult to believe that a full-fledged Afro-Portuguese creole could have decreolized so completely in less than fifty years.

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