

# The Spanish Language of Equatorial Guinea

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## Introduction

The Spanish of Equatorial Guinea is one of the best-kept secrets among world languages, and when mentioned, immediately evokes curiosity and wonder. Many people have never even heard of Equatorial Guinea, and few know that Spanish is the official language of a sub-Saharan African nation. Even fewer have ever heard Equatorial Guinean Spanish or have any information about its characteristics. Given that Spanish is in contact with several African languages of the Bantu family, some might suppose that Guinean Spanish would have the characteristics attributed to “Afro-Hispanic” language in previous centuries (e.g. in Golden Age Spain, then in various South American nations, and finally in the Spanish Caribbean), or that it would bear some resemblance to the various Afro-Hispanic and Afro-Portuguese creole languages found in West Africa and the Caribbean (Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau, São Tomé and Príncipe, Annobón, Afro-Colombian Palenquero, Papiamentu, etc.). Alternatively, given the minimal usage and proficiency in ex-colonial official languages among many other West African nations, it might be supposed that Spanish has no real presence in Equatorial Guinean life, but is rather a political symbol used actively only by a privileged elite. In fact, Spanish of Equatorial Guinea has none of the characteristics just enumerated, although it shares enough internal coherence to be considered a legitimate sub-dialect of world Spanish. As a result, a detailed description of the status of Spanish in Equatorial Guinea transcends the limits of this

tiny nation and reflects a potential impact on more general areas of study.

Equatorial Guinea consists of the island of Bioko (formerly named Fernando Poo), which contains the capital, Malabo (formerly Santa Isabel), and the continental enclave of Rio Muni (with capital Bata), between Gabon and Cameroon, as well as tiny Annobón Island, located to the south of São Tomé. In 1964 Spanish Guinea (as the colony was known) achieved status as an autonomous region, and the nation became independent in 1968 when Spain yielded to international pressure. Despite the lack of colonial independence wars, Equatorial Guinea lurched violently into the post-colonial era with a nightmarish eleven-year regime, headed by Francisco Macías Nguema, which nearly destroyed the country's infrastructure, expelled all foreigners and exiled, jailed or murdered nearly half of the Equatorial Guinean population.

Following the overthrow of Macías in 1979, Equatorial Guinea continues to struggle under the crushing weight of post-colonial destruction and, while highly dependent on Spanish technical aid, has moved gradually into the French sphere of influence in Africa, underlined by the entry of Equatorial Guinea into the CFA monetary zone in the late 1980s.

Like most other African nations, Equatorial Guinea contains a variety of ethnic groups, each speaking its own language. The indigenous group on Bioko is the Bubi. Also found in Malabo and its environs are numerous *Fernandinos*, descendents of pidgin English-speaking freed slaves from Sierra Leone and Liberia, who arrived in Fernando Poo in the nineteenth century, as well as a handful of natives of São Tomé and Príncipe, Cape Verde and other African nations. During the colonial period, nearly half of the island's population consisted of



Town of Luba facing the sea.

Nigerian contract laborers (largely Ibos and Calabars), who worked on the cacao plantations. Although nearly all Nigerians were expelled by the Macías government (and few have returned), this group reinforced the English spoken by the Fernandinos, with the result that nearly all residents of Fernando Poo speak pidgin English. This pidgin language, known as *pichi*, *pichinglis* or *broken-inglis*, constitutes the true lingua franca of Fernando Poo/Bioko (Lipski “Pidgin English”).

The principal ethnic group in Rio Muni is the Fang, also found in Gabon and Cameroon, who have dominated the remaining groups and have formed the strongest nuclei in the national government; the Fang have also emigrated in large numbers to Fernando Poo, although not originally native to that island. The *playero* groups (Ndowé/Combe, Bujeba, Benga, Bapuko, etc.) are found along the coast of Rio Muni, and most of their languages are at least partially intelligible mutually. There are few remaining pygmies in Rio Muni, and those that are found live in scattered areas of the interior and do not constitute a linguistically or culturally influential group.

Pidgin English is not widely used in Rio Muni, except in Bata, due to the influx of residents of Fernando Poo and of natives of Cameroon, Nigeria and other English-speaking areas. Most *playero* speakers and a large number of Bubis also speak Fang, due to the impact of the latter group in the national government, and the forced learning of Fang during the Macías government, although the Fang rarely speak other indigenous languages. In Rio Muni, the principal lingua franca for inter-ethnic communication is, in theory, Spanish, although Fang vies with Spanish, given the political and social hegemony of this group. On

Fernando Poo, pidgin English has generally been preferred, despite fierce campaigns by Spanish missionaries and educators and complaints by many Equatorial Guineans, who scold their children for speaking *pichi*. Spanish is also widely used for inter-ethnic communication, and occasionally French surfaces, due to the presence of numerous natives of Cameroon, and the fact that thousands of Guineans took refuge in Cameroon and Gabon during the Macías regime, and learned at least the rudiments of French.

## Spanish in Equatorial Guinea

In comparison with most other West and Central African nations, Equatorial Guinea contains a high proportion of proficient speakers of the metropolitan language, in this case Spanish, which is largely attributable to the efforts of the Spanish educational system (Negrín Fajardo). Colonial education was predominantly in the hands of missionary groups, particularly the Claret order, but Spanish government schools also played a significant role in implanting Spanish as an effective language of communication. On Fernando Poo, nearly all natives of the island speak Spanish with considerable fluency, although there are a few elderly residents who had little or no contact with Spaniards during the colonial period and who consequently have limited abilities in this language. On Annobón Island, despite its nearly total isolation from the remainder of the country (and indeed, from the remainder of the world), nearly all residents speak Spanish quite well, although this language is rarely used spontaneously in daily communication, since Annobón Islanders speak *fa d'ambú*, a Portuguese-derived creole similar to the dialects of São Tomé and Príncipe. In Rio Muni, nearly

all *playeros* speak Spanish, except for those who have remained in isolated areas distant from schools and government centers, and the same is true for Fang living in the principal cities and towns. In the interior, it is still possible to find many Fang in more remote areas who speak little or no Spanish, despite its status as the national language, and official announcements, masses and speeches are often delivered in Fang to ensure communication. This diversity of language ability is largely due to the historical facts of colonization, for although Fernando Poo, Annobón and Rio Muni were ceded to Spain in 1778 by Portugal, effective colonization of Fernando Poo by the Spanish only began after 1850, and Annobón contained no Spanish presence until 1885. Rio Muni was not colonized until after 1900, when territorial disputes with French African territories were finally settled, and Spanish colonization of the interior of Rio Muni did not become effective until after 1930.

From the beginning, the Spanish government insisted on exclusive use of Spanish as the colonial language, although missionaries and other functionaries had to learn pidgin English and the native languages in order to function effectively, and Equatorial Guinea had and has one of Africa's highest functional literacy rates. This has occurred despite the fact that during the last seven or eight years of the Macías regime, use of Spanish in public functions and even in private life was prohibited, and a largely unsuccessful attempt was made to implement Fang as the sole national language. At the same time, the post-colonial educational system largely ceased to function. The result of this hiatus is a generation of young Guineans whose active competence in the Spanish language is significantly below that

of older and younger compatriots, although it is not likely that this relatively short time period of separation from active use of Spanish will have any major long-range linguistic consequences for Equatorial Guinea.

It is impossible to calculate exactly the proportion of Equatorial Guineans who are reasonably fluent in Spanish, given the lack of official data, but on Fernando Poo and the urban areas of Rio Muni this percentage is almost certainly around 90%, and even in the interior of Rio Muni a figure of around 60%-70% would probably not be unrealistic; this in effect places Equatorial Guinea at the forefront of African nations which have successfully implanted the former metropolitan language as an effective vehicle of national communication. At the same time, it is safe to affirm that few Equatorial Guineans are true native speakers of Spanish, in the sense of Spanish being spoken naturally in the first years of the home environment, and no legitimate Equatorial Guinean raised in that nation is a monolingual speaker of Spanish. Many Guineans speak Spanish spontaneously (and even exclusively) in their homes, often encouraging their children to speak Spanish in preference to indigenous languages or pidgin English, but according to my extensive observations, which include considerable personal contact with Equatorial Guinean households, the reality is somewhat different, with Spanish being freely mixed with the native languages of the respective speakers. Objectively, it is frequently impossible to assign a conversation to a single language category. And in this fashion many Equatorial Guineans are certain that they are speaking "only" Spanish, Fang, Bubi, etc., when in reality their linguistic production is marked by a high degree of code switching and introduction of words from other

languages. There is a small population of virtual monolingual pidgin English speakers, the “street children” in Malabo, of Bubi parents but raised as homeless orphans, who speak no Bubi, almost no Spanish, and whose linguistic interactions are carried out entirely in *pichinglis*, in direct reflection of the only linguistic common denominator in the Malabo streets and marketplaces.

Despite the high percentage of Guineans who possess a considerable active competence in Spanish, this language is not used extensively in daily interaction, at least not in pure form; in Equatorial Guinean homes, the vernacular languages continue to hold sway, mixed with pidgin English on Fernando Poo. In those cases of mixed-ethnic marriages, originally rare but recently somewhat more frequent, use of Spanish or pidgin English is more common, although given the wide knowledge of Fang, if one of the partners is Fang this language is also used. Officially, all government activities are carried out in Spanish, and yet a visit to any government dependency reveals that whenever Guineans sharing a common native language—including pidgin English—come together, these languages predominate in all but the most formal ritualized communications. Even the socially stigmatized *pichinglis* continues to play an important role in day-to-day activities of the government, although not the slightest mention is made of this language in any government document. This is in striking contrast to the native Equatorial Guinean languages, which are given official recognition in publications, and which are used for a few hours each day in radio broadcasting over the two (government-operated) radio stations; the languages used are Fang (the greatest proportion), Bubi, Combe/Ndowe, Bisio/Bujeba, and Annobonese. Pidgin English

is conspicuous by its absence, despite the fact that it probably has more active speakers than Bubi, and surely more than Combe, Bujeba and Annobonese. In fact, the only consistent reference to the existence of pidgin English comes in the works of Spanish educators and missionaries, who generally have deplored this “degenerate” language and have sought to devise strategies for its elimination, although in recent years a more tolerant attitude has developed. Thus the first-time visitor to Fernando Poo is surprised at the unexpectedly widespread use of *pichinglis*, and is struck by the utter futility of campaigns to exterminate it. In terms of the official versus real language standards, Equatorial Guinea thus falls in line with many former European colonies in Africa and Asia, and yet despite its limited use as a medium of natural daily communication, Spanish continues to enjoy a vigorous existence in Equatorial Guinea, a fact which sets this nation apart from many others which have traversed a similar colonial and post-colonial linguistic evolution. The reasons for this phenomenon are many and difficult to trace, but one important factor is the poignant search for national identity, the fact of being the only Spanish-speaking nation in the midst of French-, English- and Portuguese-speaking neighbors, and of being a tiny unknown nation struggling to throw off the devastating effects of postcolonial destruction. Equatorial Guineans abroad often prefer use of Spanish even when they share a common vernacular language, reinforcing their identity as Equatorial Guineans and adopting the Spanish language as an unmistakable badge of national origin. Even more so than in other African colonies, which depended on European nations that were more diversified and that had a greater impact on the

rest of the world, Equatorial Guineans were molded into a mentality which found it difficult to conceive of international cultural contacts separate from Spain, and which regarded Spanish national phenomena as properly Guinean concerns. Unlike other African nations whose linguistic diversity is so immense that the former colonial language is the only viable medium of national communication, Equatorial Guinea could conceivably have implemented Fang as a national language, given the hegemony of the Fang over the other ethnic groups and the fact that many of the latter have already learned Fang out of necessity. Even pidgin English could be suggested as a means of rejecting the inevitable colonial stigma of the European languages, since pidgin English, while of European origin, has a distinctly African character, and has quasi-official status in neighboring Nigeria and Cameroon. The choice of Spanish as a national language is both a reflection of close cultural ties with the metropolis, and of the realistically high level of proficiency in Spanish which characterized Equatorial Guinea when it was poised for independence.

### Linguistic Features of Equatorial Guinean Spanish: Phonetics

A number of early studies commented briefly on the Spanish of Equatorial Guinea, usually focusing on the speech of expatriate Spaniards but occasionally describing the second-language approximations of native Guineans. My books *The Spanish of Equatorial Guinea* and *El español de malabo* offer the first comprehensive descriptions of Guinean Spanish, focusing on phonetic details but also giving information about grammatical structures. Quilis and Quilis and Casado-Fresnillo offer numerous ac-

counts of Guinean Spanish, including attitudes of speakers within Equatorial Guinea. *La lengua española en Guinea Ecuatorial* by Quilis and Casado-Fresnillo is a comprehensive treatise on Equatorial Guinean Spanish complete with a compact disc of recorded samples. Granda offers many individual observations on Equatorial Guinean Spanish, including theories of the influence of individual indigenous languages on particular aspects of Guinean Spanish.

Since Spanish is not the first language of most Guineans, their Spanish is characterized by considerable individual variation, but some common traits emerge which are found at least some of the time in the speech of nearly all Equatorial Guineans. They include:

(1) Syllable- and word-final /s/ is strongly pronounced, as in northern Spain. In particular there is no aspiration to [h] as found in Andalusia, the Canary Islands, and much of Latin America. Although most instances of final /s/ remain as [s], the sound occasionally disappears altogether without having passed through the stage of a weakened variant first, as occurs in most other Spanish dialects. This is particularly true in the first person plural verbal ending *-mos*, in which the /s/ carries no grammatical function, and in which /s/ was routinely lost in literary imitations of Africans' Spanish from earlier centuries.

(2) Spanish intervocalic /d/ is uniformly pronounced as a stop [d] or even a tap [r], and almost never as a fricative, as is found in monolingual Spanish of other nations. This trait is shared by most second-language learners of Spanish around the world, since the stop-fricative alternation of /b/, /d/ and /g/ is not common in other languages. Earlier literary representations of Africans routinely represent /d/

as *r* reflecting this pronunciation (Lipski “Literary ‘Africanized’”).

(3) Syllable- and word-final /l/ and /r/ are routinely distinguished, despite the fact that Bantu languages do not distinguish these sounds, and most have no [r] sound at all. This stands in contrast to the many literary imitations of Africans, in which the tendency to pronounce /r/ as [l] in all positions is characteristic (Lipski “Literary ‘Africanized’”). Very occasionally word-final /r/ or /l/ disappear in Guinean Spanish.

(4) Most Equatorial Guineans do not distinguish between Spanish single /r/ and trill /rr/; at times the trill is pronounced instead of the single sound, although the opposite change is more frequent. This trait is rarely mentioned, but is immediately apparent to outside observers. A rare literary attestation—one of the few cases in which a native Guinean author introduces local features of Spanish—is Donato Ndongo-Bidyogo’s novel *Las tinieblas de tu memoria negra*, in which one character’s non-native overuse of the trill /rr/, *seseo*, and occasional grammatical lapses in Spanish are portrayed mockingly:

“osiosidad es madrre todos visios” (eso lo decía así, eu castellano) [...] el que no “trrabaja” no come (en su castellano) [...]. (71)

“a Dios rrogando y con el maso dado” (en su castellano). (72)

“el trrabajo dignificarr al hombrre” (en su castellano) ya lo dijo nuestro Señor “comerrás el pan con el sudorr de tu enffrente” (en su castellano). (73)

alabado sea Dios Padrre Dios me envía los hios parra que los guíe porr el camino rrecto y El sabe porr qué seguirá siempre su santa voluntá [...]. (74)

[...] perro padrre no ve usted que hase unos años también nos parresió que querria serr sacerrdote y luego se le olvidó hasta rresarr,

puede serr una ilusión pasajerra más, además su comporrntamiento [...]. (139)

(5) Word-final /n/ is rarely velarized to [K], although this sound is frequent in word-final position in most native Guinean languages, and the velarization of final /n/ in the Spanish Caribbean has sometimes been mistakenly attributed to African influence.

(6) One common strategy observed among most Equatorial Guineans when speaking Spanish is the more or less systematic assignment of a different tone to each syllable, often at odds with the simple equation tonic stress = high tone and atonic syllables = low tone. This is because in the indigenous languages of the country (with the exception of Annobonese creole), every vowel carries a lexically-determined tone, either high or low. When speaking Spanish, the tones rarely are used consistently, so that a given polysyllabic word as pronounced by a single speaker may emerge with different tonal melodies on each occasion. What results is a more or less undulating melody of high and low tones, at times punctuated by mid tones and rising/falling contour tones. Such a pronunciation is radically different from the more usual intonational patterns in native varieties of Spanish, where the pitch register varies smoothly and gradually across large expanses of syllables, and where a syllable-by-syllable tonal change rarely or never occurs. To the European ear, a syllable-based tonal alternation as produced by an African learner of Spanish causes a sing-song cadence, and may blur the intonational differences between statements and questions. In the absence of a perceptible stress accent, syllable-level tonal shifts may obliterate such minimal pairs as *trabajol/trabajó*. Some recorded examples follow (“= high tone,” =

low tone, no accent mark = a mid-range tone):

Fang woman in Malabo, has also lived in Spain:

el que tiéne dinero nó habla [...]
 yo pensába qu'está arríba [...]
 víno el amígo de su marído
 nó hablà cònmígo
 comò estóy ahí me pòngo mì pijáma ì
 andándo]

Tiéne còlor à asi.
 Mientràs él està aquí èn casa, que nó
 mèta esòs líos aquí.]

Bubi man in early 20s, from Barrio B, near Malabo:

Háy algunos que, cuandó están èn casa,
 comò són bubi, habláran el bubi sólàmèntè.
 Cuandó uno yá està en là ensañánzà
 media cogè là idiomà que quierè.]
 Me faltà un sólò publò que no hé ido.
 Los que están en el bósque sònn sàlvájes.
 en esà parte ès peligrósò bàñarsè.

Bubi man, late 20s, from Baney:

Puéde durràr sùs sesèntà años.
 el árbol nó tienè mànera de desàrròllarse.
 Tènian tòdà clasè de àbónos.
 Si, háy compradóres.

Young Bubi man from Bapuku:

Buscàn ùnòs cuántos que puèdàn ir à
 así destájò.]
 Dèspués de ùn año, do año, nótas que
 se pròdújo bàstánte.]
 Nó tengò tiémpo.

Combe man from Bata:

Pláyero somòs todos nósotròs.
 Si háy dòs fáng que èntiendèn còmbe
 se puéde hablàr el còmbe, ¿no?
 aquí hay múcho pláyeros.

Bubi woman from Barrio B, in Malabo:

en este país lo vénden así.
 Se séca en ùn secàdèro

Lò vénden pára tènér dinéro.
 Háy de múcha cláse.
 Se vóta.

Older Combe man, works in Bata:

Còn escòpètà.
 Con trámpas.
 Yó pàgue cincò mil pèsétas.
 Ló que úno dèsea.
 Hablámos en la èscuèla.

## Linguistic Features of Equatorial Guinean Spanish: Grammar

Equatorial Guinean Spanish has few consistent grammatical traits, since speakers' abilities range from essentially native-level fluency to only a partial command of Spanish. Average speakers (e.g. those who have not lived in a Spanish-speaking country or who have no other special contact with Spanish) typically exhibit some or all of the following traits:

(1) It is frequent to hear the subject pronoun *usted* combined with verbal endings corresponding to *tú*, e.g. *usted sabes*, *usted dices*, etc. This may stem from the fact that during the colonial period Spaniards almost always addressed Guineans of all ages as *tú* (most frequently through the verb endings, with reduced use of overt subject pronouns), while it was expected that Guineans address Spaniards as *usted*.

(2) There are some fluctuations in subject-verb agreement, with use of the third-person singular form as default a common option, as occurs in many creole languages and vestigial dialects of Spanish (as well as in vernacular non-standard Brazilian Portuguese): *yo tiene*, *nosotros trabaja*, etc. A typical example is *Desde los cinco años [yo] lleva en España [...]*. Occasionally the copula *son* is used as invariant verb, much as occurred in Afro-Cuban speech (Lipski



1999): *Nosotros son lo mimo, pero el combe y el ndowé no son iguales [...] porque no llama todos combes [...]*.

(3) Errors and omission of common prepositions such as *de*, *a*, and *en* are frequent; *en* is often used with verbs of motion, as in *Voy en Bata* 'I'm going to Bata.'

(4) Equally sporadic are noun-adjective agreement lapses, both in gender and number: *Cada vez que llegamo, la casa esta está cerao*.

### Reasons for the Non-creole Status of Equatorial Guinean Spanish

The linguistic features of Equatorial Guinean Spanish bear little resemblance to Afro-European creole languages, nor does one find most of the features typically ascribed to African speakers in Spanish literature, from the fifteenth century to the twentieth. The reasons for these discrepancies are many, and highlight the importance of Guinean Spanish in the disentangling of earlier Afro-Hispanic language and the possible permanent African imprint on Latin American Spanish. On the surface, Equatorial Guinea might appear to be a typical example of Spanish-African interfacing, paralleling the developments in the Spanish-speaking areas of the Americas, and leading, in the latter areas, to the formation of various forms of pidgin and creole Spanish, and to a series of linguistic deformations whose precise origin remains puzzling up to the present. The native languages of Equatorial Guinea belong to the macro-Bantu families, and are similar in general structure to many of the languages brought to the Caribbean region by Portuguese slave traders, coming from the Congo/Angola/

Guinea region. It is likely that a certain percentage of the slaves came from the very territories that are now part of Equatorial Guinea, particularly the island of Fernando Poo, which was at times used as a slaving station. Phonetically, morphologically and syntactically, the Bantu languages share a number of important similarities, although of course the differences are equally significant. Few employ word-final consonants with any regularity, and none employs consonantal desinences for such operations as verbal and nominal inflection, using systems of prefixation instead. Most of the Bantu languages use a phonemic system of tonal contours in addition to segmental contrasts, a number of them do not differentiate /l/ and /r/ phonologically, and a great number have word-initial prenasalized consonants, generally written *mb-*, *nd-*, *ng-*, etc. Few have the equivalent of a second person vs. third person pronominal distinction, corresponding to the *tú-usted* distinction in Spanish. Many of these same characteristics are also shared by the languages of the Sudanese groups of West Africa (the region of Senegal, Cape Verde, the Gold Coast, etc.), whence came many slaves destined for Latin America, although major linguistic differences separate the two language families.

At any given time, the proportion of Spaniards to Guineans was quite small, rising to a maximum of about 5% in the capital city of Santa Isabel, but dropping to a fraction of a percent in rural regions of Rio Muni. Those Guineans in most constant contact with the Spaniards generally came to be employed in plantation labor, particularly on Fernando Poo, and while no system of slavery ever existed in Spanish Guinea, the working conditions and socio-cultural setting of large-scale farming on

Fernando Poo was not radically different from that found in such areas as Cuba, coastal Mexico and Brazil. Black laborers worked under a system of overseers, with the transition from black to white in supervisory capacities being effected toward the top of the administrative hierarchy. The lack of a significant creolization of Spanish in Equatorial Guinea, and the lack of distinctly "Caribbean" Spanish structures which have largely been attributed to African influence in the latter region, have to be sought in the fundamental differences that characterize Spanish colonization in Africa and in the Caribbean.

Although the time factor of colonial presence might seem significant (50-100 years in Equatorial Guinea versus several centuries in the Caribbean), it is of little real importance, as evidenced by two facts. The first is that pidgins and creoles can easily develop after only one or two generations, as exemplified by such areas as Hawaii, Cape Verde, the Netherlands Antilles, Surinam, the Virgin Islands, and Annobón. Moreover, despite the presence of black slaves in Spanish America from the middle of the sixteenth century, the large plantation societies which gave rise to the conditions propitious for creolization did not come to prominence until well into the nineteenth century, when the proportion of black slaves and freedmen became significantly larger than the white population in many areas. Thus, for all intents and purposes, the time interval under consideration for both areas is comparable.

The differences are as significant as the similarities, and account for the unique profile of Equatorial Guinean Spanish. The sociocultural profile of the Spanish who resided in Equatorial Guinea was in general considerably different from that of the colonizers of the New World. The latter came

in large measure from the poorest and most remote areas of Spain; the first conquistadores were largely small farmers or artisans who exchanged the risk of hardship and death in the new world for the possibility of acquiring wealth and a noble title that were completely beyond their reach in Spain. Later settlers were largely soldiers of fortune, followed by small farmers who had exhausted their opportunities in Spain. Even at the end of the Spanish empire in the Americas, represented by Cuba and Puerto Rico at the end of the nineteenth century, most recently arrived Spaniards came from the parched areas of the Canary Islands, and from the most backward regions of Galicia and Extremadura. The majority of these settlers were only partially literate, and few could be considered well-educated professionals, although many subsequently acquired a significant educational and professional level in their new homelands. Spanish Guinea, on the other hand, was from the beginning settled by a combination of functionaries and civil servants, missionaries, and small entrepreneurs, both in agriculture and in commerce. A group of prosperous plantations was set up by Castilian and above all Catalan landowners, whose cultural level was considerably above that of the Spaniards that continued to emigrate to America, and since Guinea was never an attractive place for massive immigration, those Spaniards that chose to live in Guinea generally made this choice in view of superior salaries or perquisites, available only for the middle and professional classes. Indirect evidence of the cultural and educational level of the Spanish colonizers in Guinea is found in the particulars of Equatorial Guinean Spanish, which while containing a number of significant differences from peninsular Spanish, contains virtually no elements typical of uneducated Spanish usage, such

as abound in Latin American Spanish. The only consistent phonetic deformations are those characteristic of middle-class Spaniards from central Spain, for example reduction of *-ado* to *-ao* and of *para* to *pa*.

Of perhaps even greater importance is the fact that, unlike in the Americas, Spaniards in Equatorial Guinea did not generally immigrate with the intent of permanently establishing themselves, but rather of working for a given time period, and nearly always returned to Spain. The result was a reduced sense of permanency, and a greater bilateral contact between Spain and expatriate Spaniards in Guinea. Even though a number of Spaniards were born in Guinea, few considered themselves as anything other than Spaniards, similar to their countrymen in the Canary Islands or Ifni, and there were few families that had lived continuously in Spanish Guinea for more than a single generation. The amount of miscegenation was also considerably less in Guinea than in the Americas, as Spanish settlers brought a higher proportion of Spanish women, a fact visibly evident in the small number of mulatto Guineans, as opposed to the Caribbean region of Latin America.

Arguably the single most important factor in determining the non-creole status of Equatorial Guinean Spanish is that in the African territories there never occurred the massive linguistic and ethnic fragmentation that resulted from the Atlantic slave trade, which placed in daily contact Africans who spoke a myriad of different native languages and who shared no common language. These circumstances forced the colonial languages (or the incipient pidgin Portuguese learned on shipboard or in the slaving stations) into the role of lingua franca, and the rapid push to convert a rudimentary and partially understood lan-

guage into an effective vehicle for daily communication resulted in the fixation of non-standard forms which, left to drift in the absence of normative influences, eventually gave rise to creolized variants, a few of which continue to exist. Equatorial Guinean laborers rarely embodied the juxtaposition of more than two ethnic groups (Fang and occasionally Bubi), and when in the present century the indigenous labor force was virtually replaced by nearly 50,000 Nigerians, the latter's lingua franca, pidgin English, rapidly became the most useful vehicle of communication on Fernando Poo, continuing even past the exodus of the Nigerians. So effective was the transference of pidgin English to Fernando Poo (spoken originally by the Fernandinos and other descendants of settlers from Sierra Leone and Liberia), that it was adopted for daily communication by native Guineans, even those sharing the same native language. This is in striking contrast to the use of Spanish in Equatorial Guinea, where except for more highly educated citizens, or in the case of official public functions, communication among members of the same ethnic group is conducted primarily in that group's language. This preference may be explained by the more cosmopolitan nature of Fernando Poo, particularly its capital, in comparison with Rio Muni. In the latter territory, despite its land frontiers with the rest of continental Africa, little contact with neighboring nations has taken place, due to poor communications and political difficulties, both in colonial times and more recently. During the Macías government, thousands of Guineans took refuge in Gabon and Cameroon, and those that have subsequently returned have brought a somewhat expanded perspective, but few residents of neighboring countries ever moved to or even

visited Rio Muni. Fernando Poo, on the other hand, has been a way-station in west Africa for several centuries, changing hands nearly half a dozen times, and because of its insular nature, straddling the Gulf of Guinea, it is a cultural crossroads. From the earliest days of Spanish colonization, Santa Isabel contained numerous Europeans of various nations, as well as Kru, Mende, Ibo, Calabar, Hausa, Angolans, and Sao Tomenses, and even a small contingent of Asians. Even in post-colonial times, the constant influx of merchants and temporary residents from other parts of Africa, such as Cameroon, Nigeria and Ghana, has reinforced the Babel-like atmosphere of Malabo, and particularly in the marketplaces, where a sizeable portion of the market vendors are not native Guineans, the need for more effective trans-lingual communication is strongly felt. Most non-Guineans resident in Malabo come to learn some Spanish, and some speak it quite well, on a par with native Guineans, but conversations with Africans of unknown ethnic origin usually use pidgin English as an opening gambit, and rarely Spanish. When the unknown interlocutor is dressed in traditional Moslem fashion, Hausa may also be attempted. The total result is a lack of pressure on the Spanish language to fulfill all needs of daily communication, being acquired only in the measure necessary to fulfill school or professional functions. It is noteworthy that hardly any Equatorial Guineans use Spanish to curse or insult, and indeed most do not even possess the requisite vocabulary items. Those in daily contact with Spaniards have picked up the ubiquitous *coño*, and occasional *joder* and the accompanying euphemistic variants, but these words are not used in the same fashion as by native Spanish speakers. At the

other extreme of the emotional dimension, Spanish is rarely used to express high degrees of affection, love, passion or endearment. When speaking to a child belonging to another ethnic group, most Guineans will either use their own native language, whether or not it is understood by the child, or in appropriate cases will use pidgin English, at times with some Spanish words mixed in. Guineans involved in professional situations are well acquainted with the Spanish vocabulary appropriate to their profession, but may not be comfortable with words dealing with home life or small farming, which they would rarely have occasion to use in Spanish. This is particularly true in the case of the names of many fruits, vegetables, plants and small animals and birds, whose Spanish names may be known to Guineans, but which are rarely used spontaneously.

As well as never serving as the sole vehicle for inter-ethnic communication, the Spanish language was never removed from the national environment of Spanish Guinea for a long enough time to result in the loss of awareness of its structure, nor were cultural and linguistic contacts with Spain interrupted for a significant period. One of the factors that most facilitates the formation of creoles is an initial contact with the colonial language, followed by a rapid cut-off of contact with native speakers of that language, a process in which the colonial language suffers no constraints and receives no infusions from the continued presence of native speakers of the colonial language. In this linguistic vacuum, influence of the native languages of the soon-to-be creole speakers is free to grow, and the end result is frequently a new language containing large proportions of both the original language and the supraordinate language. Such

has occurred, for example, in Haiti, Cape Verde and Guinea-Bissau, Annobón, Seychelles, Trinidad, the Philippines, and most probably with Afrikaans in South Africa. In Spanish Guinea, contact with Spain was never broken off, except for the last years of the Macías government, an insufficient time for any significant linguistic changes to take place. From the arrival of the first permanent Spanish settlers, the Spanish language was a living force in Equatorial Guinea, and those Equatorial Guineans who had any contact at all with the Spanish language were at the same time in contact with Spanish nationals who traveled freely to Spain, and who insured the presence of Spanish linguistic usage as current in Spain.

The confluence of the above-mentioned factors guaranteed that Spanish was never to become creolized in Equatorial Guinea, and indeed the historical profile seems more propitious to the gradual death of Spanish in this area, caused by its inadequate implantation as a colonial language. When one compares English language proficiency in many parts of Nigeria, Ghana, Sierra Leone, Uganda, etc., or Portuguese in Angola, Mozambique or Guinea-Bissau, the unusual tenacity of the Spanish language in Equatorial Guinea becomes more evident. Despite the clearly nationalistic trends of the previous government, and its frustrated attempts to implant Fang as the sole official language, and despite the existence of grammars and written conventions for Fang and the presence of radio broadcasts in this language, Spanish continues to be the language of officialdom, but surprisingly a large number of Guineans who have no contacts with the government are insisting that their children learn and use Spanish, not only in schools but also in private life, a situation not typical of many other African nations. With the overthrow of Macías,

a number of Spaniards have returned to Equatorial Guinea, heading cooperative missions and serving as advisors to government agencies. In addition, the majority of priests and lay brothers are Spaniards, since most Guinean priests were expelled or executed during the previous government, and the current group of seminarians will not be ordained for several more years. The impact of a small group of religious figures is not to be underestimated, particularly on Fernando Poo, for in the majority of the small towns, mass is said once or twice a week by a visiting priest, and attendance at these masses is impressively high. The masses are held entirely in Spanish (except in the case of a few Guinean priests), and church members often present spontaneous prayers and offerings in the congregation. The sacristans and other attendants are residents of the respective towns, and their active participation in the mass adds to the contact with the Spanish language in areas where few if any resident Spaniards are to be found. In many areas the religious personnel also provided the only consistently available medical services, which increased their contact with all members of the population. Currently, the Spanish government's cooperative mission has established a network of doctors and paramedics throughout Equatorial Guinea, which has the secondary effect of insuring constant contact with the received Spanish language for large segments of the Guinean population.

Clearly, the data from Equatorial Guinea are insufficient in themselves to sustain or reject any theory of creolization and second language development, but they are suggestive in that they provide a relevant test case for the diversification and spread of a colonial language across a wide range of mutually unintelligible ethnic languages. In addition, Equatorial Guinea continues

to constitute a unique sociolinguistic configuration within western and central Africa, and an anomaly within the Spanish-speaking world, due both to the peculiar nature of the Spanish spoken in that nation, and the remarkable vigor which Spanish has demonstrated from the earliest colonial periods to the present.

## Summary and Conclusions

The Spanish of Equatorial Guinea presents both challenges to accepted models of language contact, and test cases for theories of the influence of African languages on Spanish in other continents. The Guinean data permit the separation of key linguistic, demographic, and social variables which have become inextricably jumbled together in other parts of the world, including regional dialects of Spanish providing the input to Guinean Spanish learners, the widespread retention of native African languages and the relatively reduced need to communicate intra- and interethnically in second-language Spanish, the socioeconomic profile of Spaniards in colonial Spanish Guinea, and the specific facts of colonial and postcolonial history as applied to Equatorial Guinea. The Guinean data show that mere contact between Spanish and West African languages is not sufficient to produce stereotypically "Africanized" Spanish, and that much—perhaps most—of the "Afro-Hispanic" language described for other continents and time periods is more reflective of the Andalusian/Canary Island dialects spoken by native Spanish speakers than of any specifically African contributions. Moreover, the fact that indigenous languages were never removed as the primary vehicles of communication among Equatorial Guineans, coupled with the ef-

fective educational system and relatively small population account for the non-creolization of Spanish in Equatorial Guinea. Although recent descriptive studies have put the Spanish of Equatorial Guinea on the map of world Spanish, considerable research remains to be done on this small but unique multilingual and multiethnic speech community, whose full potential is only beginning to be realized.

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