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The Afro-Brazilian Speech of Calunga: Historical, Sociolinguistic, and Linguistic Considerations

by

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Abstract

Calunga is an Afro-Brazilian speech spoken primarily in and around Patrocínio, Minas Gerais, a rural town located in the western region of the state known as the Triângulo Mineiro. In the early 21st century, this Afro-Brazilian speech exists in a moribund state. The present article is an attempt to provide a basic overview regarding some of the historical, sociolinguistic, and linguistic considerations of this Afro-Brazilian speech community, and how it fits into the larger picture of the African legacy in Brazil in terms of language and culture.

Introduction

João Dornas Filho, a Brazilian historian and sociologist, argues the following about the state of Afro-Brazilian cultural and language studies in 1943:

Studies about the Black Brazilian have suffered from the lack of an exact understanding of the language that the imported [Africans] of the traffic spoke, perhaps because today, when interest in these subjects has increased according to their importance, there are almost no more Africans or near descendants of Africans who know the language of their ancestors.

And the understanding of this subject is fundamental for a complete analysis [of Afro-Brazilian culture], because language – in its characteristics, by its nature, in its diverse forms – is the key to many problems of folklore, sociology, ethnography and other prisms related to the subject. (Dornas Filho 1943:71, my translation)

Indeed, starting in the mid-16th century to the end of the 19th century, millions of Africans were forcibly transported to Brazil. Even though exact numbers are unknown, estimates of 4 to 4.5 million Africans have been suggested by scholars (Bueno 2003:120; Klein 2002:93; Olsen 2003:57). But, given that many were shipped clandestinely to Brazil, the actual numbers could be higher – possibly in the range of 5 to 8 million (Castro 2001:62). Estimates aside, researchers agree that Brazil received more Africans than any other country, accounting for approximately 40% of the entire transatlantic trade (Dodson 2001:119). Such a large influx of persons typically has a lasting influence on the culture; and, in fact, Brazilian music, dance, religion, folklore, art, and cuisine all have African roots or notable African influence. However, as Dornas Filho correctly notes, our understanding of the Africa-Brazil connection in regard to language is rudimentary at best.

Studies on Afro-Brazilian language, which span over a century, have mostly attempted to establish the African contribution to Brazilian Portuguese. Bonvini and Petter (1998:79) note that these studies tend to focus on two features: the lexical component of Brazilian Portuguese and the phonological and morphosyntactic characteristics of Brazilian Portuguese vernacular (BPV) through possible creolization, semi-creolization, or decreolization. But African languages and subsequent varieties that have persisted in Brazil have not been the focus of much research. As Bonvini and Petter (1998:74) rightly question: What do we really know about the languages spoken by the Africans in Brazil? According to Castro (2001:71), the answer is close to nothing. And, as Bonvini (2008a:21) asserts, the lack of data regarding African languages in Brazil is rather surprising given that varieties of these languages have survived in various forms, such as liturgical languages (e.g. Candomblé) and cryptolects (e.g. Cupópia of the Cafundó community) into the 21st century.

With this in mind, the present article is an attempt to provide a basic overview regarding some of the historical, sociolinguistic, and linguistic considerations of the contemporary Afro-Brazilian speech community of Calunga, and how this particular speech community fits into the larger picture of the African legacy in Brazil in terms of language and culture.¹

What is Calunga?

Calunga is an Afro-Brazilian speech spoken primarily in and around Patrocínio, Minas Gerais – a rural town of 81,589 inhabitants located near the Serra da Canastra in the Triângulo Mineiro.² Although the speech has been reported elsewhere in the region and in the nearby state of Goiás, the speakers – known as *calungadores* – are generally older Afro-Brazilian men numbering perhaps in the hundreds. In the early 21st century, this Afro-Brazilian speech exists in a moribund state.

The history and origins of Calunga are largely unknown, but some scholarly attempts have been made to document this speech community. In the 1990s, for example, there were two studies that offered some lexical and anthropological observations: Batinga's (1994) book, *Aspectos de presença do negro no triângulo mineiro/alto paranaíba: Kalunga*, which provides a sketchy anthropological and lexical overview of Calunga; and Vogt and Fry (1996) dedicate a part of their book, *Cafundó: a África no Brasil*, to comparing Calunga to the Afro-Brazilian Cupópia speech spoken in the state of São Paulo. Most recently, Byrd (2006, 2007, 2010a, 2010b, 2012) and Byrd and Bassani Moraes (2007) have published a series of linguistic and sociolinguistic studies on Calunga.

Using the terminology of Castro (2001), Calunga may be best categorized in Portuguese as a *falar africano*, which is perhaps best translated in English as an *Afro-Brazilian speech*. This Afro-Brazilian speech is primarily a lexical phenomenon with some peculiar grammatical aspects. Clearly, while some of Calunga's lexicon has terms of African origin – mostly from Kimbundu, Umbundu, and Kikongo (the latter probably to a lesser extent) –, its phonetics/phonology and morphosyntax are on par with the rural, regional Brazilian Portuguese vernacular known as *português caipira* ('Caipira Portuguese'). Indeed, the primary language of all Calunga speakers is the regional Caipira Portuguese; Calunga is instead reserved for contexts in which they wish to communicate "in secrecy" or in solidarity.

The contemporary secrecy of Calunga reflects Brazil's history of slavery and its aftermath. That is, the speech was utilized by Africans and Afro-descendants so that they would not be understood by people with authority over them – a common theme especially articulated by older Calunga speakers who are more familiar with the era of slavery in Brazil. In this respect, Calunga represents an ethnolinguistic speech community that has maintained its Afro-Brazilian speech as a form of intragroup cryptolect. However, today Calunga is no longer a race-specific or ethnic language, as European descendants have also acquired it, though the latter speakers constitute a small minority of documented *calungadores*. Also, there is an intriguing mystery as to why there are not more female speakers of Calunga, which was not completely uncovered from this author's field research.

The following excerpted dialog with a linear English translation was recorded June 27, 2004 in Patrocínio, Minas Gerais. It offers some insight into the context within which Calunga has been traditionally spoken.

Participants:

JL: Joaquim Luís: Calunga speaker, born 1928

DB: Daniela Bassani Moraes, researcher

<i>Calunga</i>	<i>English</i>
<p>JL: Os camanu maior, os maior, punha os imbundu pá curimá, né? Intão aqueis ibuninhu qui os camanu pegava e levava pá omenha pá aprumá saravo na custela dus imbuninhu. Os camanu mucafo ficava de cá aprumanu a calunga de jambi (oi!) aprumanu aquela calunga de ambi pá aquela omenha estraviá... pá... aquei saravu de omenha do embunim, pegá só a omenha. Tá, há, o saravo num pegava nu imbunim. Aí, eis calungava de cá, ficava caluganu, aí os camanu maior vinha com os camanu, tirava, pucurava, os camanu macafu oiava os camanim e sarava pá, pá, pá uranu, sá? Cê sá que é uranu?</p> <p>DB: Não.</p> <p>JL: Vai, uranu é pá, pu céu, pra Deus, pra ajudá a num acontecê nada, sá? É p'que quem ia apanhá era os camanim, né? Ia pu injó da água, a água tocava, pegava na correia e pegava nu imbunim, vap, vap, vap, vap.</p> <p>DB: Batia nu coru.</p> <p>JL: É. Aí, os camanu, os imbundu-cá, ficava nu</p>	<p>JL: The powerful men, the powerful men ('owners, bosses') used to make the Black men work, right? So the little Black kids that the powerful men used to grab and take to the water to beat the backs of the little kids. The Black men stayed on one side praying (oi!) praying so that the water would go another way... so that water would whip only the water [not the kids]. So the whip would not beat the kids. There, they [the Blacks] were on one side, would pray, there the powerful men would come with the Black men, would take down [the Black kids], would look for [the wounds on the Black kids], the Blacks would look at the boys and would thank "urano" ('God'), you know? Do you know what "urano" is?</p> <p>DB: No.</p> <p>JL: Well, "urano" is for, for heaven, for God, to help that nothing happens, you know? It is because the kids were going to be whipped, right? They were going to the water house ('mill'), the water would run, it would impulse the whip and it would beat the Black kids, vap, vap, vap, vap.</p> <p>DB: It would beat their skin.</p>

<p>jambi, rezanu, sabe? Rezanu pa aquilu pegá nus, nus camanim.</p>	<p>JL: Yes. Then, the men, we Black men, would stay with a saint, praying, you know? Praying that that would not beat the Black kids.</p>
<p>DB: Nus imbunim.</p>	<p>DB: [Beat] the Black kids.</p>
<p>JL: É. Aí dava, vencia o horário lá assim, os camanua tirava o camanim saia mesma coisa.</p>	<p>JL: Yes. Then the time would come, the men would take down the kids, the Black kids would come out the same way (would come out alright).</p>

The history of this Afro-Brazilian speech begins with the Portuguese trade on the western central African coast, in what is today the region of Congo and Angola. Millions of Bantu-speaking Africans were sent to the Brazilian colony from this region for agricultural and mining work. From the etymologies of Calunga's Bantu words it is evident that these Africans were speakers of Kimbundu, Umbundu, and Kikongo – Bantu languages commonly spoken today in Congo and Angola. During Brazil's colonial period, Africans and Afro-Brazilians were the majority of the Brazilian population, especially in Minas Gerais, as well as in some other regions. Because of the millions of Africans and Afro-Brazilians, varieties of African languages, pidginized/creolized Portuguese, and/or intertwined languages were spoken throughout colonial plantations and mining communities, within urban areas, and in maroon villages known as *quilombos*. Thus, Calunga is likely the remnant of the linguistic complexity spoken among Brazil's former Afro-descendant population of the Triângulo Mineiro.

However, it must be underscored that the history of Calunga's evolution into its current form is essentially unknown. But it is this author's position that Calunga evolved as a type of Bantu-Portuguese hybrid language from the linguistic complexity found in the colonial estates of Minas Gerais, which could have been some type of pidgin, creole, or intertwined variety. Moreover, this author concurs with the research of Brazilian linguist Yeda Pessoa de Castro, whose studies on *falares africanos* and the African influence on Brazilian Portuguese indicate that there was as an "Africanization of Portuguese" and a "'Portuguesement' of Africanisms" (Castro 1997:57, 2001:125), which need to be taken into account for Calunga as well as for the Caipira Portuguese that influenced it.

Afro-Brazilian speech communities such as Calunga are valuable in presenting a more comprehensive picture of what might be referred to as a “Brazilian linguistic puzzle.” It is a “puzzle” in the sense that the picture is incomplete with respect to the African language contribution to Brazil, unlike other areas of Brazilian culture where the African contribution is better understood. That is, research of Afro-Brazilian speech communities like Calunga can provide a more comprehensive picture of the Brazilian linguistic landscape, including a better understanding of the African contribution to Brazilian Portuguese. In this sense, Calunga should be viewed as a type of “microdialect” (Lipski 2004) – i.e. “puzzle piece” – that may aid scholars to better comprehend and evaluate the African language contribution to Brazilian culture and Brazilian Portuguese.

Historical Considerations

Beginning in the 15th century, the Portuguese voyages, expansion, and subsequent slaving practices shaped Lusophone varieties throughout the world: on Atlantic islands (Madeira, Azores), in Africa (Guinea-Bissau, Angola, Mozambique) and nearby islands (Cape Verde, São Tomé and Príncipe), in South America (Brazil), in India (Diu, Daman, Goa), in China (Macao), in Indonesia (e.g. East Timor), and in Malaysia (e.g. Malacca) (Holm 1989:259-263). Moreover, Portuguese creole was spoken as a lingua franca into the early 19th century in parts of Asia (Reinecke 1975:75). In addition, Portuguese linguistic traces can be found on virtually every continent, ranging from place names and lexical items to dialects and a spectrum of creoles. The Portuguese word *crioulo* (‘creole’), for instance, originally was used to categorize an African born in Brazil, but later included Europeans born in the New World in a number of languages (Holm 1988:9).

The early Portuguese explorers came into contact with a large diversity of languages along the African coast. These Portuguese explorers relied on Arabic translators to communicate with African peoples. However, as the explorers advanced farther south, African languages became unintelligible to the translators. To solve this problem, Henry the Navigator ordered that captured Africans be shipped to Portugal for Portuguese language instruction in order to serve as future translators (Holm 1989:268). This policy, along with the transatlantic trade, resulted in many Africans living in Portugal, including the use of a Portuguese pidgin.

The first varieties of pidgin Portuguese developed in or near *feitorias* (‘trading forts’) along the West African coasts in the latter half of the 15th century and thereafter (Holm 1989:270). In these settings, Portuguese came into contact with different African languages. In particular, languages from the Kwa sub-family (spoken in Ghana, Togo, Benin, Nigeria) and Bantu languages (spoken in Gabon, Congo, Angola) had prolonged contact with Portuguese (Castro 2001:46). In some areas Portuguese pidgins evolved into creoles; in other areas the pidgin persisted for some time but later disappeared, leaving its mark on the local vernacular or being co-opted by other European-based creoles (Holm 1989:268).

For instance, West African varieties of French and English have a number of Portuguese-derived words (Holm 1989:271).

Portuguese colonizers known as *lançados* ('outcasts') were important middlemen between African languages and Portuguese, and may have been an important catalyst for the evolution of Portuguese pidgins and creoles (Couto 1992; Holm 1989:270-271). Such middlemen were a vital part of the Portuguese trade along the African coasts, both in goods and people, into the 17th century and beyond (Holm 1989:271). Megenney (1984:179), for example, writes that the Portuguese *lançados* "were instrumental in promoting easier access to Black Africans in many sectors," and "taught their African friends and neighbors how to speak the Portuguese-based reconnaissance language." Further, many *lançados* took African wives, effectively creating biracial, bilingual, and bicultural communities.

The first colonizers of Brazil, arriving in the 1530s – largely uneducated men or *lançados* who spoke differing regional varieties of European Portuguese –, came into contact with indigenous Brazilians who spoke varieties of Tupi-Guarani. Acculturation took place between the native Brazilians and the Portuguese colonizers, including intermarriage with indigenous women and the adoption of indigenous foods and customs (Mello 1997:60-62). A language labeled *Língua Geral* ('general language') emerged as a koiné version of Tupi-Guarani as a result of migratory movements of indigenous Brazilians after the arrival of the Portuguese (Mello 1997:59). Reinecke (1975:119) argues that *Língua Geral* spread widely throughout Brazil because of the explorations of the *bandeirantes* (i.e. on-land Portuguese explorers) from the mid-16th to the mid-18th century, and due to Jesuit missionaries. Moreover, Rodrigues (1996:10) notes that there were two varieties of *Língua Geral* spoken along the coasts where the Portuguese had established sugarcane plantations: the Tupi variety spoken along the Paulista coast and the Tupinambá variety spoken from Rio de Janeiro to the Amazon River.

On the first sugarcane plantations of the Brazilian Northeast, Portuguese was probably the dominant language, though there was an initial state of linguistic complexity (Mello 1997:59). Mello explains:

In the agricultural areas [...] the linguistic scene was complex [...]: African languages [...], pidgin-like contact languages, creoles, in addition to a restructured Portuguese spoken as a first language by [Africans] born in Brazil. Such complexity is associated with the ethnic and linguistic diversity [...] brought from Africa. Many of them, besides speaking their mother tongues, probably also had more or less advanced knowledge of a type of pidgin or creole of Portuguese base. (Mello 1998:74, my translation)

The first waves of Africans in Brazil worked alongside indigenous captives, and therefore may have learned *Língua Geral* (Mello 1997:72). But some studies suggest that Portuguese Jesuits, not the general population, actually spoke *Língua Geral* (Holm 2004:52). Or, as Megenney (2002:589) argues, *Língua Geral* was likely spoken most amongst indigenous Brazilians. With the increased arrival of Africans to Brazil, however, *Língua Geral* was pushed to the margins of the Brazilian territory, such as the Amazon region (Mello 1997:76).³

Many Africans today are multilingual (Dimmendaal 2011:225). Hence, when Africans arrived in Brazil during the transatlantic trade, they too were likely multilingual. That is, they likely spoke their native African languages and possibly a type of pidgin or creole that was acquired in the Portuguese *feitorias* on the West African shores or on the Portuguese Atlantic islands (i.e. São Tomé and Príncipe, Cape Verde). Lipski (2005:62), for instance, notes that “Africans taken to Brazil [...] spoke a Portuguese pidgin during the first stages of their language acquisition, and many of the features of the pidgin documented for Portugal probably arose in Brazil as well.” In particular, *Sãotomense* was likely spoken in Brazil:

It seems reasonable to assume that, whatever the West African pidgin and creole input in the Brazilian linguistic situation, *Sãotomense* was likely to have been a representative part of it. Coincidentally, the *Sãotomense* substrate is composed of the language groups that would have played this role in any Brazilian Portuguese, i.e. Kwa languages from the Bight of Benin and Bantu languages from the Kongo. (Mello 1997:231-232)

However, a wide-spread creole was probably not maintained in Brazil (Holm 2004:47; McWhorter 2000:28; Megenney 2002), though early creoles or semi-creoles were possibly spoken for a few generations in certain regions of Brazil.⁴ Reinecke (1975:111) nonetheless argues that the question over whether creoles were spoken in Brazil “cannot be regarded as closed,” listing three theoretical scenarios for pidginization/creolization in colonial Brazil: 1.) Creolization of Portuguese, Tupi, or both where *Língua Geral* was most spoken; 2.) Pidginization of Portuguese along the border settlements of Portuguese colonization and indigenous Brazilian areas; 3.) Creolization of Portuguese in dense African settlements, later followed by decreolization.

Mello (1997:260-262) hypothesizes that, by the end of the 17th century, a partially restructured Brazilian Portuguese vernacular had developed, which was likely the native language of the first Afro-Brazilians, as well as the target language of newly-arrived Africans. Furthermore, Holm (2004:47) adds that “certain features of the nonstandard variety [of Brazilian Portuguese] indicate the influence of Amerindian, African, and creole languages.”

Language contact in Brazil with African and indigenous languages persisted into the 19th century, introducing several lexical items and possibly some grammatical influences into Brazilian Portuguese. For example, recent scholarship has estimated that there are as many as 4000 words derived from African languages in Brazilian Portuguese (Bonvini 2008a:54, 2008b:101).

That said, this estimate is less than the number of words derived from Tupi-Guarani (Bonvini: idem). According to Bonvini (2008b:117), such Africanisms entered Brazilian Portuguese by means of code-switching speakers of various African languages and Portuguese.

Despite the many varieties of African languages that the Portuguese (and other European) traders encountered, Castro (1967:27) points out that there were three major African regions that provided significant numbers of Africans to Brazil: Ghana to Nigeria, central Angola, and northern Mozambique. Among these regions it was the Bantu languages – particularly Kimbundu, Umbundu, and Kikongo (which were labeled as “congo-angola” by the Portuguese) – that exerted the greatest influence in Brazil (Castro 2002:198). Typologically homogenous, Kikongo was spoken by the Bakongo people of the former Congo Kingdom; Kimbundu by the Mbundu (or Ambundu) people of Central Angola; and Umbundu by the Ovimbundu people near the port of Benguela (Bonvini and Petter 1998:73; Castro 2001:34-37).⁵

During the 17th and 18th centuries, Angola was the primary provider of African peoples to Brazil, mostly from the Ndongo Kingdom (Kimbundu speakers) in the north and the Benguela Kingdom (Umbundu speakers) in the south. Understanding this past Angola-Brazil nexus is essential not only in regard to the African languages spoken in Brazil, but also in regard to the possible African influence in Brazilian Portuguese beyond lexical items (Lipski 2008). Castro (2002:39-43) argues that the predominate presence of speakers of Kimbundu, Umbundu, and Kikongo in colonial Brazil was due to the extended period of exportation – some four centuries – , the demographic density where these languages were spoken in Africa, and their extensive geographic distribution in Brazil. For instance, Castro’s (1981) study of Bahian Portuguese – excluding the liturgical language of Candomblés – indicates that 77.3% of African lexical items of that dialect originate from Bantu languages (Castro 1981:4). Bahia, of course, received many Africans from West Africa – speaking languages such as Yoruba, Ewe-Fon, and Akan – in addition to Bantu speakers.

Nevertheless, as reviewed, a great number of languages were likely spoken during Brazil’s colonial period: indigenous languages, African languages, (restructured) Portuguese, pidgins and/or creoles, and intertwined varieties. Such a multilinguistic situation raises an important question: Exactly *what* was spoken – and to and by *whom* – in colonial Brazil? The answer to this question is likely hidden in the depths of time, but there must have been linguistic diversity, bilingualism and/or multilingualism.

Needless to say, very little is actually known of the varieties of African languages spoken during the colonial period of Brazil. In fact, there are only two primary sources. The first, *Arte da língua de Angola*, is a text of 48 pages, which was written by the Jesuit priest Pedro Dias and published in Lisbon in 1697 (Bonvini 2008a:33-39).⁶ Interestingly, Pedro Dias had served as a priest in Angola where he learned Kimbundu, later moving to Brazil after the Dutch invasions of Angola. The objective of this publication was to provide the Jesuits with a resource to learn Kimbundu in order to communicate with Africans in both Angola and Brazil.

Bonvini (2008a:36) argues that this publication provides evidence that Kimbundu was used by the Jesuits in Brazil, and possibly as a common language between the Jesuits and Africans, or possibly even as a language policy by the Catholic Church in Brazil.

A second text comes from Ouro Preto, Minas Gerais in the 18th century: *Obra nova de Lingoa g.al de mina* by Antônio da Costa Peixoto (1731/1945). This text documents the Mina-Jeje language, or more specifically languages of the Kwa family – such as Yoruba, Ewe-Fon, and Akan – as spoken by Africans in and around the mining city of Ouro Preto. Essentially this text is a vocabulary manual of 831 African terms that was designed to help the Portuguese communicate with Africans, which Castro (2002) has studied in detail. According to Castro's (2002:68-69) analysis, 82% of the words collected by Peixoto originate from Fon, a language of contemporary Benin.

Of further interest are the reports of the language of the Palmares *quilombo* that existed from 1605 to 1695 in the contemporary Brazilian state of Alagoas. Reports from the Portuguese authorities of this “African Troy” claim that some type of Bantu language was spoken there, possibly even the one described by Pedro Dias (Boadi-Siaw 2007:168; Bonvini and Petter 1998:75; Moura 1987:46-47). Francisco de Brito Freire, a 17th century governor of Pernambuco, noted that within the Palmares *quilombo* a “new language” was spoken there that seemed like a language descended from Guinea or Angola at times, and like Portuguese and Tupi at other times (Moura 1987:46-47). Bickerton notes the following of this “new language”: “What did they speak? Nobody knows, but the Portuguese had to use interpreters in their negotiations. Was it an African language, or a koine [...] of several African languages, or a Creole too deep to be mutually intelligible with Portuguese?” His answer: “We may never know” (Bickerton 2008:136).

In the 19th century, African languages were still spoken in Brazil, albeit in decline. Languages such as Kimbundu and Yoruba coexisted with Portuguese in Brazil within some Afro-Brazilian speech communities. Following the abolition of slavery in 1888, however, there was a geographical redistribution of African-born Brazilians and Afro-Brazilians from rural areas to major cities, which resulted in an almost immediate decline in the speaking of African languages in Brazil (Bonvini 2008a:50).

Today, varieties of African languages have been maintained in certain social groups under the auspices of Afro-Brazilian religions (e.g. Candomblé) and as cryptolects (e.g. Calunga, Cupópia, Língua do Negro da Costa). Afro-Brazilian liturgical languages, according to Bonvini (2008a:51), are pidginized forms derived from various African languages: *nagô-queto* (= Yoruba), *jeje* (= Ewe-Fon), *angola* (= Kimbundu-Kikongo). Cryptolects such as Calunga and Língua do Negro da Costa (see Queiroz 1998), also analyzed as pidginized forms by Bonvini (idem) and by Queiroz (1998), are found in isolated areas of former Afro-Brazilian communities and are possibly the linguistic results of former *quilombos* – though the *quilombo* hypothesis is a purely speculative one.

Sociolinguistic Considerations

During the 18th and 19th centuries, Minas Gerais became heavily populated with peoples of African descent (both African- and Brazilian-born), constituting up to 80% of the state's total population during those centuries (Barbosa 1970:315-316). As a result of this influx of Africans into Minas Gerais, African languages, pidgins and/or creoles, (restructured) Portuguese, and intertwined varieties were likely spoken within colonial plantations, mining communities, urban areas, and *quilombos*.

In attempting to piece together the historical and linguistic puzzle that is Calunga, it must be underscored that many pieces are missing. On the one hand, it is evident that Calunga's linguistic roots stem from colonial Minas Gerais and its ties to the transatlantic trade, particularly persons from the region of Congo and Angola. On the other hand, *how* Calunga evolved is not presently known. Calunga informants trace its origins simply to "*a língua dos escravo*" ('the slave language') or "*a língua dos preto (velho)*" ('the (old) Black language'). From Calunga's Bantu lexicon (see Byrd 2010a, 2010b, 2012), it is evident that these Africans were speakers of Kimbundu, Umbundu, and Kikongo. However, Calunga's phonology and morphosyntax are on par with contemporary rural Brazilian Portuguese vernacular (i.e. Caipira Portuguese). Hence, traveling historically and linguistically "from there to here" is not a straightforward endeavor.

It is not currently known how many Calunga speakers there are in and around the Triângulo Mineiro. Based on interviews conducted by Daniela Bassani Moraes and this author from 2003 to 2005, a possible estimate is in the hundreds. But this figure is not verifiable. This is due in large part because members of the Calunga speech community are evasive: that is, many people who actually know Calunga deny knowledge of it. It is therefore difficult to provide a comprehensive sociolinguistic profile of this speech community. Nevertheless, interviewees tended to agree on a general profile of the *calungadores* in Patrocínio and thereabouts.

Calunga informants were from all backgrounds – though typically cowboys, farmers, and miners – who worked around the city of Patrocínio; other informants were urban construction workers who spoke Calunga on the job in Patrocínio. Many Calunga speakers were former *tropeiros* ('cowboys') who ran cattle to the states of São Paulo and Goiás. In fact, many White Calunga speakers claimed to have learned Calunga from fellow Afro-Brazilian *tropeiros* while driving cattle. The most fluent *calungadores* of the community were Afro-Brazilian men over forty years of age; the very best speakers were typically over seventy years of age.

In particular, the elder *calungadores* were regarded within Patrocínio as the most knowledgeable of Calunga. Indeed, these speakers understood Calunga's sociohistorical and sociolinguistic links to Africa and the past regime of slavery in Brazil. For example, Joaquim Luis linked Calunga to slavery in the Triângulo Mineiro and explained that it was spoken primarily as a "secret language." He also recited "fantastic" stories in Calunga that spoke of the struggle and perseverance of Afro-Brazilians in the region (see transcribed dialog in Section 2).

Another elder Calunga speaker, Inácio de Souza, reiterated similar stories to those of Joaquim Luis. Here he explains how he learned Calunga, along with its social function:

I learned this language as a child, working with my parents. I used to go to the plantation, my dad there rolling out the [Calunga] language with a friend, and we there listening. Once in a while Dad used to send us to do something, and he would tell us in Calunga. And so we learned. Even today I remember a day that he sent me to get some sugarcane. There were two sugarcane fields. There was one that was of a rich guy and one of a poor guy. The sugarcane field of the poorer one was better; the sugarcane was better. So, he told me [in Calunga]: “Go there and look for some *viango* (‘sugarcane’) so that we take to the *mucota* (‘mouth’). Go there to that *camano* (‘man’) more *ôa* (‘poor’) which is better. You go to that *camano* (‘man’) more *ôa* (‘poor’) [poorer man] and not to that more *aprumado* (‘rich [man]’).” So I knew that it meant to go look for sugarcane of the poorer man. The sugarcane was better. That is how I learned, right?
[...]

In Calunga, we can insult all you and you don’t know that we are insulting [you]. In their language, the Blacks of long ago, they could say what they wanted to, could be saying “good morning,” “good afternoon,” could be insulting and no one would understand anything. That was the language of those Blacks of long ago. (cited in Vogt and Fry 1996:246, 248-249, italics theirs, my translation)

What Inácio refers to as “the language of those Blacks of long ago” was traditionally a speech that Afro-descendants utilized to communicate in secrecy so that they would not be understood by people of authority – a common theme articulated by other interviewed *calungadores*.

Here Senhor Cabrera reflects on his speaking of Calunga in Patrocínio. Observe how he links the speaking of Calunga to slavery:

We learned [Calunga] with our parents because at that time, in our time, slavery was still much closer. So, our parents, our grandparents, spoke Calunga a lot. They would always be speaking. So we learned, but now we don’t speak [Calunga] as much. So, the children didn’t even learn from us. That they do not learn in school. We learn conversing. (cited in Vogt and Fry 1996:253, my translation)

Contemporary Calunga conversations usually take place among Afro-Brazilian men in certain social situations, such as on the job, or especially at Galera’s Bar in Patrocínio, where *calungadores* often meet to drink *cachaça* (‘white rum’) and speak Calunga. In this present social context, Calunga is a symbol of friendship and working class solidarity among men. In the past, however, its purpose as a cryptolect was more prominent, as expressed by the two *calungadores* above. Interestingly, today many working-class White speakers sometimes use Calunga in order to hide potentially damning information from worksite authorities.

But White Calunga speakers are clearly not as fluent, and furthermore recognize that Afro-Brazilians are the primary source: “*Os preto calunga mais*” (‘Blacks speak Calunga more/better [than Whites]’), emphasized *calungador* Tadeu de Barros in a personal interview, when asked about the difference between White and Black *calungadores*.

Another aspect of the Calunga speech community is that it appears to be more gender-specific (i.e. more male than female speakers) rather than race-specific. Belarmindo (personal interview, 2003), for example, when asked if there were women *calungadoras*, answered the question partially in Calunga: “*Tem, tem ocaio que calunga tamém. Tem sim, mai num é muitas não*” (‘There are, there are women that speak Calunga too. Yes, there are, but there are not many’). When asked why there were not more women who spoke Calunga, José de Barros (personal interview, 2003) said: “Because they didn’t travel, right? In those days women didn’t travel...” (my translation). In other words, women were not present during trips to transport cattle, which kept them from learning Calunga.

The fact that there are not many female speakers of Calunga is somewhat of a mystery. Although no one in Patrocínio could truly identify why this is, perhaps the answer can be found within contemporary Brazilian society. That is, speaking Calunga is no longer a societal necessity in a world with education and mass communications available to most Brazilians. As such, Calunga has become instead a sort of masculine slang related to work, drink, sex and obscenities, which might explain why women do not want to be associated with this speech community. Another potential reason is that relatively few African women were sent to the Americas generally, or to Minas Gerais specifically. Hence, there was perhaps simply a predominance of male speakers of African languages, and later of Calunga.

Although there are some fluent female speakers who learned Calunga from their parents, just as other *calungadores*, women who speak – or even know of Calunga – are few and far between in and around Patrocínio. Most women who have any knowledge of Calunga can recognize no more than a handful of lexical items and demonstrate little interest in speaking it. Moreover, many women rumored to speak Calunga would often deny knowledge of it, only acknowledging its existence within the community.

Even though more women among our interviewees were rumored to speak Calunga, the three women who spoke Calunga openly in personal interviews were Denga Cabrera, Glauce de Souza, and Ângela Ferreira. All three recall speaking Calunga as children, including with their mothers. Of the three women, only Ângela was able to hold a fluent conversation in Calunga and was willing to affirm that she truly was a *calungadora*. Ângela also discussed Calunga as linked to African cultures and languages, a fact that changed the way she views its historical importance. However, Ângela, too, referred to Calunga as a “masculine language” reserved for men to speak in certain social situations, especially those requiring group secrecy. Her husband, Marlenísio Ferreira, a speaker and researcher of Calunga, believes this gender-specific trait of Calunga may stem from an African custom where only men were granted access to certain “secret information.”⁷

Denga do Cabrera, daughter of Senhor Cabrera quoted above, mentioned in two interviews that her father and mother spoke fluent Calunga with each other and with their eldest daughter, particularly in situations when they did not want to be understood by others outside of the family. After the death of her father and sister, however, Calunga was no longer spoken much in the house. Even though Denga admits to understanding Calunga, she has difficulty producing fluent sentences, restricting her usage to isolated lexical lists. But she vividly recalled one incident when a White friend came to their house and desired to put together money to drink beer with her father. Senhor Cabrera asked his wife in Calunga in front of the guest: “*O camano mavelo tem os zipaque?*” (‘Does the White man have any money?’). Glauce de Souza, granddaughter of Inácio de Souza quoted above, also mentioned that she understands most Calunga, but not all. She emphasized that she has little or no interest in speaking it, believing it is for men to speak.

Other women interviewees in Patrocínio, who elected anonymity, had similar answers: “I understand but I don’t speak it”; “I used to speak with my father but I don’t speak it anymore”; “I always heard Calunga at home but I never spoke it”; or even more emphatically, “Calunga is not for women to speak.” This denial does not reflect necessarily a lack of knowledge of Calunga, but a general lack of acceptance by women.

Generally speaking, many people of Patrocínio are not familiar with the history of the *calungadores*. That is, it seems that the society of Patrocínio does not view Calunga as a language with a history and culture worthy of study and preservation. In fact, in the 1980s, Senhor Cabrera believed that Calunga was going to die out because the youngest generations and their parents were not speaking it, nor were they very interested in learning it (Vogt and Fry 1996:253). This reality, indeed, puts Calunga in a very precarious situation for the future. But some *calungadores*, such as Marlenísio Ferreira, who has created *O injó da calunga* (‘The house of Calunga’), are currently active in preserving and teaching about this unique Afro-Brazilian speech within the community.

Even though predictions cannot be made with absolute certainty, the fact that there are so few speakers – with efforts to salvage it seeming small – suggests a grim future for Calunga. At the very least, perhaps some of the lexical Africanisms will remain within the local dialect of Brazilian Portuguese. But a full-scale revival of Calunga seems unlikely at the present.

Lexical Considerations

While many Africanisms are present in the Calunga lexicon, there is also a significant influence from Portuguese, a few that are derived from Tupi (or from Língua Geral), and perhaps even a tiny bit of Yoruba. However, it must be underscored that tracking the source languages of Calunga words is not a clear-cut task, which makes a detailed analysis of the lexicon problematic (see Byrd 2010a, 2010b, 2012).

That is, as native African languages were uprooted and transplanted to a new environment, these words underwent varying degrees of phonetic, phonological, morphosyntactic, and semantic changes. Hence, any type of lexical analysis of Calunga will present shortcomings and raise further questions regarding the nature of the terms.

With analytic problems noted, one way to classify Calunga terms can be according to etymological categories. There are arguably five:

- 1.) Direct Africanisms. These terms are typically derived from Bantu languages – Kimbundu, Umbundu, Kikongo – and have basically an equivalent meaning in both the African language(s) in question and Calunga:

Curima ‘work, job’ (from Kimbundu *kudima*, *kurima* ‘to work’ (Vogt and Fry 1996:301); Kikongo *kutima* ‘to work’, Kimbundu *kudima* ‘to work’, Umbundu *okulima* ‘to work’ (Castro 2001:215)).

Embuá/Imbuá ‘dog’ (from Kimbundu or Kikongo *imbua*, *mbua* ‘dog’ (Maia 1994:97); Kikongo *mbwa* ‘dog’ (Bentley 1887 /1967:62); Umbundu *mbwa* ‘dog’ (Alves 1951:706); Kikongo or Kimbundu *mbwa* ‘dog’, or Umbundu *ombwa* ‘dog’ (Castro 2001:252)).

Ingomo/Ingombe ‘ox, cattle’ (from Kimbundu *ngombe* ‘ox, cow’ (Johnston 1919:370; Vogt and Fry 1996:309); Umbundu *ngombe* ‘ox, cow’ (Alves 1951:948); Kikongo, Kimbundu, Umbundu (*o*)*ngombe* ‘ox, cattle’ (Castro 2001:254)).

- 2.) Metaphoric Africanisms. These are generally terms that represent similar but not exact concepts in the African language(s) in question and Calunga:

Indaro ‘fire, yellow, red’ (from Kikongo *ndalu* ‘fire’ (Castro 2001:347); Kimbundu *ndalu* ‘fire’ or Umbundu *ondalu* ‘fire’ (Vogt and Fry 1996:287); Umbundu *ndalu* ‘fire, inferno’ (Alves 1951:813-814)).

Marafa/Marafa ‘*cachaça*, alcoholic drink’ (from Kimbundu or Kikongo *malavu*, *malufu* ‘wine’ (Bentley 1887 /1967:336; Maia 1994:650; Vogt and Fry 1996:316); Kikongo or Kimbundu *malafu*, *maravu* ‘alcoholic drink’ (Castro 2001:272)).

Mavero ‘milk, breast, white’ (from Umbundu *omavele* or Kimbundu *mavele*, both plural forms of *avele* ‘milk’ (Maia 1994:387); Kimbundu *mele* ‘breasts, milk’ is the plural form of *diele* and *avele* (Vogt and Fry 1996:318); Umbundu *vele* ‘breast, teat, milk’ (Alves 1951:1651)).

3.) Portuguese. These terms are derived from Portuguese, often archaic:

Atuá ‘day’ (possibly from Portuguese *atual* ‘what exists in the present’ (Cunha 2001:83; Nascentes 1988:73)).

Aprumado ‘rich, better’ (from past participle of *aprumá(r)*; Brazilian Portuguese ‘better health, luck or finances; well dressed’ (Nascentes 1988:57)).

Escutante ‘ear’ (from Portuguese *escutar* ‘to hear, listen’).

4.) Hybrid Portuguese-Africanisms. These periphrastic terms are typically comprised of an African language and Portuguese, often with a metaphoric meaning:

Amparo de curiá(r) ‘fork’ (from Portuguese *amparar* ‘to protect, defend, support’ (Cunha 2001:41; Nascentes 1988:40). And Kimbundu *kudia*, *kuria* ‘to eat, food’ (Maia 1994:127; Vogt and Fry 1996:301); Kikongo or Kimbundu *kudiá* ‘to eat’ (Castro 2001:215); Umbundu *kulya* ‘to eat, food’ (Alves 1951:396)).

Aprumá(r) banzo ‘to have sex’ (from *aprumá(r)* ‘to do, make, happen’, Portuguese *prumo* ‘iron instrument used to check verticality, prudence’ (Cunha 2001:643); Brazilian Portuguese ‘to make a better life’ (Vogt and Fry 1996:287); Brazilian Portuguese ‘to improve one’s health or luck, dress well’ (Nascentes 1988:57). And Kimbundu *mbanze* ‘love amulet’ (Vogt and Fry 1996:289); Umbundu *mbasi*, *mbaysi* ‘lover, concubine’ (Alves 1951:667)).

Camano maior ‘man of respect, boss’ (*camano* from Kimbundu *muana*, *mona* ‘son, daughter’ or *kamona* ‘of the son’ (Vogt and Fry 1996:292). And Portuguese *maior* ‘greater, boss, owner’).

5.) Tupi-derived (or Língua Geral) terms. This lesser category presents lexical items in Calunga derived either directly from Tupi or Língua Geral (or possibly indirectly from the local dialect of Brazilian Portuguese that acquired them from Tupi or Língua Geral):

Guaxaúna ‘squash’ (from Tupi, see Cunha 2001:399 for related flora and fauna Tupi morphemes with *guax-*).

Ingazeiro ‘penis’ (of undetermined origin, but possibly related to Tupi *ingá* ‘common name for legume-type plants’ (Cunha 2001:436; Nascentes 1988:348)).

Finally, as with many Calunga words, the term *Calunga* itself is of an uncertain etymology. That said, there are several ideas regarding its origin. Even though it appears clearly African on the surface, according to some *calungadores*, the term is derived from Portuguese *(a)cá + língua* ‘language here’ (José Dinamérico, personal interview, 2003). However, Lopes (2003:57-58) argues for a multilinguistic Bantu term: *kalunga* ‘God’ from the verb *oku-lunga* ‘to be intelligent, clever’.

In the Ambos and surrounding African peoples it is found with this usage. Or perhaps the word originates from Kimbundu *kalunga* ‘sea, dead’, which is a type of secondary god in the Bantu cults (Cunha 2001:142). According to Micha Lindemans (www.pantheon.org), *calunga* (or *kalunga*) is the father of patron god(dess) Musisi – the ancestral god, or supreme being, of creation and death – for the Lunda people of Angola, Zaire, and Zambia. Castro (2001:192-193) presents six options for the origin and meaning of the term; the sixth option argues that *calunga* originated from either Kikongo, Kimbundu, or Umbundu, *kalongela* > *kalonga*, with the meaning ‘helper or carrier of the carriage’ in Brazil. Interestingly, the *Enciclopédia luso-brasileira de cultura* (1963, Vol.4:551, my translation) provides one definition of *calunga* as “auxiliary boy on the wagons and automobiles of cargo transportation.” The *Grande enciclopédia portuguesa e brasileira* (1936-1960, Vol.5:536, my translation) defines *calunga* as “the transcendent, the unknown or the supernatural, in the mysticism of Angolans.” Also of interest is the Kimbundu word *kilunga*, which means ‘cattle’ (Maia 1994:319). Another definition of *kalunga* in Umbundu is ‘to shout, speak!’, or a type of special greeting in order to engage in conversation, from the verb *kaluka* (Alves 1951:258, 1355). A final interesting definition of *kalunga* is ‘proper name’ or ‘clan’ (Laman 1964:207).

Grammatical Considerations

In terms of a few salient grammatical peculiarities to highlight, Calunga pronominal forms of subject and object pronouns are rather peculiar when compared with their Brazilian Portuguese vernacular (BPV) counterpart: that is, Calunga pronoun patterns cannot be traced to BPV. Note, for example, 1st-person singular pronouns in Calunga: *camano-cá* ‘I, me’, *camano-(o)fú* or *umbundu-cá* ‘I, me’ (lit: ‘Black man-here’, if a male, Black speaker wishes to emphasize his ethnicity). BPV instead has all its pronominal forms based on Portuguese. Observe Table 1:

Table 1: Subject pronoun comparison

Calunga		BPV	
(o) <i>camano-cá</i> 'I' (default, masc)	<i>os camano-cá</i> 'we' (masc) <i>as/os ocai(a/o)</i> 'we' (fem)	<i>eu</i> 'I'	<i>nós (nóis)</i> 'we'
(o) <i>camano-(o)fú</i> 'I' (Black masc)			
(o) <i>umbundo-cá</i> 'I' (Black masc)			
(a/o) <i>ocai(a/o)</i> 'I' (fem)			
(o) <i>camano-aí</i> 'you' (masc)	<i>os camano-aí</i> 'you' (pl) masc)	<i>você</i> <i>ocê</i> 'you'	<i>vocês</i> <i>ocês</i> 'you (pl)'
(a/o) <i>ocai(a/o)</i> 'you' (fem)	<i>as/os ocai(a/o)</i> 'you' (pl) fem)	<i>cê</i>	<i>cês</i>
(o) <i>camano</i> 'he'	<i>os camano</i> 'they' (masc)	<i>ele (ei)</i> 'he'	<i>eles (eis)</i> 'they' (masc)
(a/o) <i>ocai(a/o)</i> 'she'	<i>as/os ocai(a/o)</i> 'they' (fem)	<i>ela</i> 'she' <i>a gente</i> 'we'	<i>elas (esa)</i> 'they' (fem)

Observing Table 1, BPV, or the Portuguese nominal system for that matter, does not have a notion of ethnicity or gender as Calunga does with 1st-person and 2nd-person forms. In addition, a White speaker of Calunga cannot say *camano-(o)fú* or *umbundo-cá*, while a Black speaker can employ *camano-cá*. Another peculiarity is that a female speaker cannot express her ethnicity in Calunga, as masculine forms do. Also of interest is that *eu* is the only subject pronoun that tends to be dropped in BPV morphosyntactic constructions since it maintains specific verbal inflections in some verbal forms (i.e. present and preterite). Calunga, for its part, does not typically permit pronoun dropping, though it may occur sporadically in the 1st-person singular, on par with BPV morphosyntax.

In terms of verbal morphology, Calunga is largely on par with the local BPV. However, one striking characteristic of Calunga is that verbal paradigms are all regular, 1st-conjugation *-ar* verbs with 3rd-person conjugations realized solely in the indicative mood, unless a Portuguese verb (which may be irregular) is employed. Such reduced, systematized patterns are typical in pidgin and creole languages, including varieties of Atlantic creoles (Holm 2004:81), which possibly may correlate to the utilization of 3rd-person forms in Calunga. Observe Table 2:

Table 2: Calunga and BPV present indicative verbal forms⁸

Calunga <i>quinhamá(r)</i> 'to go, walk'		BPV <i>andar</i> 'to go, walk'	
<i>(o) camano-cá</i> <i>quinhama</i> 'I walk'	<i>os camano-cá quinhama</i> 'we walk'	<i>(eu) ando</i> 'I walk'	<i>nós anda / andamo(s)</i> 'we walk'
<i>(o) camano-aí</i> <i>quinhama</i> 'you walk'	<i>os camano-aí quinhama</i> 'you (pl) walk'	<i>(vo)cê anda</i> 'you walk'	<i>(vo)cês anda</i> 'you (pl) walk'
<i>(o) camano quinhama</i> 'he walks'	<i>os camano</i> <i>quinhama</i> 'they walk'	<i>ele anda</i> 'he walks'	<i>eles anda</i> 'they walk'

Concluding Thoughts

In documenting and analyzing Afro-Brazilian speech communities such as Calunga, there are a couple of relevant points that are worthy of consideration for the history and influence of African languages in Brazil.

First, African lexical items from Calunga and other Afro-Brazilian speech communities provide valuable data of the varieties of African languages that were formerly spoken, and still somewhat maintained, throughout Brazil. Such Africanisms are important "linguistic fossils" that can aid linguists in their attempt to "unearth" the African linguistic past of Brazil. These "fossils" demonstrate that Bantu languages such as Kimbundu, Umbundu, and Kikongo were present in Brazil in some form or another and have been somewhat preserved in various Afro-Brazilian speech communities. Further, the lexical items of these speech communities also demonstrate possible avenues through which Africanisms entered Brazilian Portuguese.

Secondly, even though the odds are bleak that some unprecedented evidence will be uncovered regarding the history of African languages in Brazil, it is nonetheless a worthwhile endeavor to continue to seek and document linguistic data in order to address Bonvini and Petter's question: What do we really know about the languages spoken by the Africans in Brazil? Documentation of Afro-Brazilian languages such as Calunga and others aids linguists in adding pieces to the "Brazilian linguistic puzzle," as well as aids in better understanding the African contribution to Brazilian culture and Brazilian Portuguese.

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Notes

¹ For more comprehensive description and analyses of Calunga, see Byrd (2012).

² This figure is from the 2007 census. See patrocínio.mg.gov.br for official government statistics and other information relating to the municipality of Patrocínio, Minas Gerais.

³ Mello (1997:211-212) notes that Língua Geral is still spoken along the Rio Negro in the Amazon region.

⁴ It is worth noting that evidence of Portuguese is found in various creole languages of the Caribbean: Papiamentu, Saramaccan, and the French-based creole of Guyana. This evidence suggests that Portuguese may have been spoken on the early coastal plantations of Brazil and then moved north into the Caribbean region in some unclear manner.

⁵ According to Azevedo (2005:196), contemporary Angola possesses some 40 languages, mostly Bantu. “Fluency in Portuguese is limited,” notes Azevedo, “and most speakers speak a variety of European Portuguese influenced by native languages.” Umbundu is the most spoken language in the country (at 29.8% of the population), more so than Portuguese (26.3%). As for Kimbundu (15.4%), he states that it “seems to be in a process of replacement by Angolan Popular Portuguese.” Although Azevedo provides no comparative statistical data, he notes that approximately 1.5 million people speak Kikongo in Angola.

⁶ This text is similar in nature to an earlier publication: José de Anchieta’s *Arte de grammatica da lingua mais usada na costa do Brasil*, published in 1595, which was written for Portuguese Jesuits to learn Língua Geral (Leite and Callou 2002:64).

⁷ Interestingly, the Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset (1957:231) cites examples of masculine and feminine languages used in ancient and modern history. One contemporary example he cites is Swahili, which possesses a “feminine idiom that no man can understand and that is the only language employed in the strictly female mysteries.”

⁸ Only *camano* subject pronoun forms are utilized throughout the table for Calunga. See Table 1 for other possible Calunga subject pronouns.