

Cultural identity and the linguistic structure of a mixed language: the case of Barranquenho

Barranquenho is an Iberian contact language currently spoken at the Spanish/Portuguese border, in the southeast of Portugal. It emerged in a situation of community bilingualism within a longstanding historical dispute over the border territories. The people from Barrancos have created a separate cultural identity and maintain three linguistic varieties (Vasconcelos 1955:30): Barranquenho, their local variety, Spanish, the variety that historically they have ties with, and Portuguese, the language of the nation in which they live. Crucially, this variety is not used by Portuguese and Spanish speakers as a lingua franca. It has instead become a marker of a distinct cultural identity and is perceived by its native speakers as a language on its own.

In this paper, we examine the pronominal clitic system of Barranquenho and argue that there is a grammar/lexicon split between the source languages, as is typical of some mixed languages (Matras and Bakker 2003). Drawing on a recently collected corpus, we show that Barranquenho speakers display proclisis (preverbal placement) where in Portuguese enclisis (postverbal placement) would be found. However, while clitic placement is of Spanish origin, all lexical items, including the clitic pronoun *u*, are of Portuguese origin, as in (1):

- (1) ela u deu para que eu tirassi ...
 she 3SG.MASC gave.3SG for that I take.SUBJ.1SG
 ‘she gave him/it so that I could take ...’

A similarly mixed structure is found in (2). Barranquenho speakers commonly double indirect objects with full noun phrases. This structure is common in Spanish but absent in Portuguese. However, as before, the phonological form of the clitic is Portuguese.

- (2) i eu lhe disse à rapariga
 and I IO.3SG said-3SG to the girl
 ‘and I said to the girl . . .’

Also, in (3), the sequence *sa* comprises two clitic pronouns: a reflexive pronoun followed by a direct object pronoun. While all lexical items, including the vowel initial direct object clitic, are Portuguese, the syntax is Spanish:

- (3) o gato s-a comeu
 the cat REF.3S-DO.3PFEM eat-3s
 ‘The cat ate them all.’

The pronominal clitic system is but one reflection of the complex mixing processes that resulted in the structure of Barranquenho.

Despite the grammar/lexicon split, Barranquenho differs from the more typical cases of mixed languages (e.g., Michif (Bakker 1997)) in two ways: a) it emerged from the contact between two genetically related languages and b) its creation was driven by a long-term political conflict between neighboring countries, rather than being the outcome of ethnically mixed households. As a largely unknown contact variety, Barranquenho clearly constitutes an interesting challenge to contact linguistics and to the mixed language debate.

References

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