

Cuban-Congo Language in Equatorial Guinea

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In 1861 nearly 200 emancipated black Cubans settled in the ‘Barrio Congo’ of Fernando Poo to work in public construction. Five years later, 176 political activists were deported from Cuba to Fernando Poo where they were kept in confinement by Spanish authorities because of their potential influence on the Cuban revolution. These latter “white Cubans” were mostly professionals and political revolutionaries. This rather unique situation begs the question as to whether this gave rise to two distinct contact languages. Cuban influence in Equatorial Guinea is of tremendous interest to linguists. In order to understand the theories of creolization and the linguistic diversification of Spanish and Portuguese throughout the World, one must consider this language contact realm. Texts regarding the influence of the Cuban population in the gulf of Biafra are sparse.

In this paper I will consider the diary of John Holt, Spanish travel narratives, and the memoir published in 1899 by Francisco Balmaseda, a political Cuban deportee. I will situate these texts in the social and political realm where the linguistic contact occurred. In doing so, I will contribute to scholarship sustained principally by J. Lipski, G. de Granda and I. K. Sundiata about the trans-Atlantic influence in the linguistic repertoire of Equatorial Guinea.