

The role of Niger-Congo languages in the genesis of Brazilian Portuguese

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Over the course of almost 3 centuries, millions of Africans were taken to Brazil by the slave trade. By an overwhelming majority, these people were speakers of Niger-Congo languages, and many of them were from the Bantu area. Over the centuries, they not only learned Portuguese as a second language and transmitted it as a first and a second language, but they also played a crucial role in disseminating it throughout the country. The comparison between Brazilian Portuguese (henceforth *BP*) and, on the one hand, several varieties of Portuguese spoken in African countries and, on the other, Bantu languages, evidences the role of Niger-Congo languages in the emergence of BP. In my talk, I shall present and discuss some of the phenomena that strongly distinguish this language from its European source. Then I shall address the question of whether the transfer of constructions (i.e pieces of E-language) due to language shift in contact situations can be formulated, in the generative framework, in terms of a transfer of parametric values, that is, in terms of I-language transfer. I shall consider two parameters proposed in the literature to contrast Niger-Congo or, more specifically, Bantu languages with Indo-European languages: the “Agreement Parameter” of Baker (2008) and the “Case Parameter” of Diercks (2012). Recent work (e.g. van der Wal 2015) shows that both proposals face empirical problems. Based on joint work with Juanito Avelar, I shall argue that Portuguese in Brazil underwent a parametric change that affected the EPP-features of Tense. I shall suggest that this “Tense Parameter” is a crucial part of what was transferred from the languages spoken by the enslaved Africans in Brazil to the language of the colonizers.

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- Diercks, M. 2012. Parameterizing Case: Evidence from Bantu. *Syntax* 15: 253-286.
- van der Wal, J. 2015. Evidence for abstract case in Bantu. *Lingua* 165: 109-132.