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Fa d'Ambô: from past to present

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Abstract: This article addresses the historical and sociolinguistic evolution of Fa d'Ambô, a Portuguese-related creole language spoken originally on the small island of Annobón in Equatorial Guinea. It will be shown that Fa d'Ambô and the three creole languages spoken on the islands of São Tomé and Príncipe (Santome, Angolar and Principense) descend from a single contact language that arose on the island of São Tomé and branched in the sixteenth century. After its permanent settlement in the second half of the sixteenth century, Annobón became strongly isolated until the twentieth century. Due to intense migration from Annobón to Equatorial Guinea's multilingual capital Malabo over the last decades, Fa d'Ambô's speech community has not only become divided but also more exposed to other languages, in particular to English-based creole Pichi, the capital's lingua franca. Given the small size of the Fa d'Ambô speech community (approx. 5,000 speakers), it will be argued that these factors, in addition to the lack of government support for the country's minority languages, pose an increasing threat to the survival of the language.

Keywords: Fa d'Ambô, Gulf of Guinea creoles, Equatorial Guinea, multilingualism, language endangerment

1 Introduction

Fa d'Ambô (lit. "Speech of Annobón") is a Portuguese-related creole language spoken originally by a small community on the remote island of Annobón in the southern Gulf of Guinea (West Africa). Currently, the language is spoken on the islands of Annobón and Bioko, as well as in the diaspora. From its discovery by the Portuguese in the fifteenth century until the late eighteenth century, the island was a Portuguese possession and settled by a population that originated from the neighboring island São Tomé. In 1778, Annobón became part of the Spanish crown, and since 1968 the island integrates the Republic of Equatorial Guinea. The island has remained strongly isolated from the world during most of its history.

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This article aims to address the development and consolidation of Fa d'Ambô within the wider panorama of the Gulf of Guinea and to assess its current sociolinguistic status. The article is structured as follows. Section 2 discusses the peopling of the Gulf of Guinea islands and, in particular, the importance of the island of São Tomé for the settling of Annobón. In Section 3 we address the emergence of the proto-creole of the Gulf of Guinea on São Tomé and its subsequent branching into four different varieties, among which Fa d'Ambô, as the result of creole-speaking population movements. Section 4 focuses on the current sociolinguistic status of Fa d'Ambô as a minority language within multilingual Equatorial Guinea.

2 Peopling of the Gulf of Guinea islands

The history of Annobón is strongly intertwined with the history of the other Gulf of Guinea islands. The three originally uninhabited Gulf of Guinea islands São Tomé, Príncipe, and Annobón were discovered by the Portuguese in the second half of the fifteenth century.¹ Figure 1 shows the islands in the Gulf of Guinea.

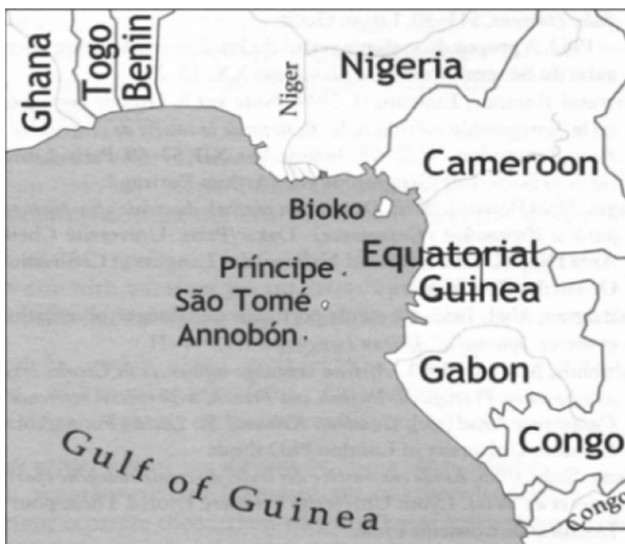


Figure 1: Map of the Gulf of Guinea.

Source: Map drawn from Michaelis et al. (2013a: 50).

¹ The Portuguese also “discovered” the island of Bioko (former Fernando Po), which was already inhabited by the Bubi, a Bantu population that migrated from the African continent (e. g. Mateu et al. 1997).

The predominant hypothesis is that São Tomé and Príncipe were discovered in the early 1470s, whereas the discovery of Annobón (Ano Bom in Portuguese) occurred at a slightly later stage, possibly between 1483 and 1501 (Caldeira 2010, forthcoming), due to its small size (17 km²), its geographical position further to the south, and the system of winds and currents. Given the Portuguese tradition to name newly found geographical locations according to the calendar, it is plausible that Annobón (Ptg. *Ano Bom*) was discovered on a new year's day.

Following the discovery of the Gulf of Guinea islands, São Tomé quickly started emerging as its center of gravity with sugar production being the driving force. A first attempt to settle São Tomé occurred in 1485 but successful large-scale settlement was to happen only a few years later, in 1493. It took a relatively short time-span for São Tomé to shift from a homestead society to a plantation society. The first sugar mills on the island are attested in the 1510s (Garfield 1992) and mark the start of a sugar cycle that would last throughout the sixteenth century, reaching its peak in the 1560s. There are no precise numbers on the early demographics of the island. The manuscript by Valentim Fernandes, a German printer who based his information on second-hand information, states that in 1506 it was inhabited by 1,000 settlers,² 2,000 slaves, and that another 5,000 to 6,000 slaves were temporarily on the island, showing that the island also functioned as a slave *entrepôt* (Fernandes 1951). Due to the labour-intensive process of sugar production, the African slaves must have increasingly outnumbered the Portuguese on São Tomé as the sixteenth century advanced.

The early slave trade to São Tomé targeted the Niger Delta and in particular the old kingdom of Benin (Nigeria), where the Portuguese had established diplomatic relations in the late fifteenth century (e. g. Ryder 1969; Vogt 1973). Royal chronicler and eyewitness Duarte Pacheco Pereira, who visited the Gulf of Guinea several times and is considered a reliable historical source, observed in ca. 1506 that most slaves were taken from Benin and only a few from Bantu areas (Caldeira 2008). The will of the first Captain-major of São Tomé, Álvaro de Caminha, which dates back to 1499 (cf. Albuquerque 1989) also mentions the presence of Bini slaves, i. e. slaves originating from the kingdom of Benin. However, the slave trade from the Niger Delta lasted for a relatively short period and ended in the mid-sixteenth century. The number of Bantu slaves from the Congo and Angola that were taken to São Tomé began to increase significantly

² The majority of the European settlers were Portuguese, but the manuscript by Valentim Fernandes, written in Portuguese between 1506 and 1510, also mentions that in 1493 the first settlers took 2,000 Jewish children from Seville with them to São Tomé in order to settle the island. Due to the harsh conditions in the tropics, only 600 of these children were claimed to still be alive in 1506. These numbers, however, have been questioned (e. g. Seibert 2007).

at the beginning of the plantation society phase (1510s) and had a long-lasting impact. Genetic studies that were carried out on São Tomé and Príncipe show the admixture of the populations that became the inhabitants of the islands over the centuries. While the European genotype represents only some 10 percent of the São Tomé genotype, the African genotype makes up for the other 90 percent and can be further refined into two predominant components, a West-African and a Bantu type, which confirms what is known from the records of the slave trade to the islands (Coelho et al. 2008; Tomás et al. 2002).

Annobón, the southernmost island of the volcanic chain, was donated by royal decree in 1503 to its first captain-donnee, Jorge de Melo, who held widespread administrative, judiciary, and fiscal powers. However, he and his successors did not inhabit the island and delegated their powers to the local clergy or to a local (slave) trader (Caldeira 2010). Valentim Fernandes, informed by eyewitness Gonçalo Pires, who visited Annobón in 1506, writes that there were nine *moradores* (people of European descent, possibly all Portuguese) on Annobón. At least until 1518, the island functioned as a slave *entrepôt* and the documents show that there was some seafaring traffic to the island in this early period, until it became abandoned in the 1530s (Caldeira, forthcoming). Settlement on a permanent basis must have occurred between 1543, when the donee claimed the island was deserted, and 1565, when the documents mention that the island was inhabited by a white man and some slaves who planted cotton (Caldeira, forthcoming). According to Caldeira, the inhabitants of Annobón were slaves from São Tomé, and possibly also from Príncipe, or arrived directly from the African mainland, in particular the Congo and Angola. They did not constitute a traditional plantation system, but part of the cotton production had to be delivered to the colonial power (Caldeira 2010). Apart from the unstable presence of Europeans, either traders or clergymen, contact with the outside world was limited to passing vessels in search of fresh water and supplies.

An entirely new chapter of the history of Annobón began as a consequence of the Treaty of El Pardo, celebrated in 1778, when Portugal ceded Annobón, as well as the larger island of Fernando Po and a strip of continental Africa, Rio Muni, to Spain. Annobón's connection with São Tomé became a feature of the past³ and its destiny would now be decided from Santa Isabel (Malabo), the capital of Fernando Po (Bioko). However, this new connection was only activated at the end of the nineteenth century, through the arrival of the Claretian mission on the island.

³ However, the connection with São Tomé, and indirectly even with Portugal, can still be found in the oral tradition such as folk stories.

3 Fa d'Ambô

Perhaps the most visible result of the peopling of the island of São Tomé concerns the emergence of a Portuguese-based contact language that was created among the slave population in order to facilitate communication with the Portuguese settlers and arguably also among slaves with different linguistic backgrounds. Over time, children born in the colony began to nativize this pidgin, which thereby evolved into a fully-fledged natural language, the proto-creole of the Gulf of Guinea. This proto-language branched into four different varieties in the sixteenth century. The diachronic and geographic descendant of the proto-creole is known as Santome (also, Creole of São Tomé, São-Tomense, Forro, Lungwa Santome); Angolar (also, Lunga Ngola or Ngola) is generally assumed to be the language of the descendants of maroon slaves who fled from São Tomé's initial settlement and from the sugar plantations; Principense (also Lung'le) emerged as the form of the proto-creole that was taken to the island of Príncipe; and, Fa d'Ambô became the language of the inhabitants of the island of Annobón, which was also settled from São Tomé.

Although the four contemporary Gulf of Guinea creoles largely lack mutual intelligibility, they share a great deal of lexical and grammatical features that were inherited from the proto-language. It is estimated from the available sources that the Portuguese lexicon in these creoles represents somewhere between 85 to 95 percent of the total lexicon. According to Ferraz (1979: 9), Fa d'Ambô shares 82 percent of its core lexicon with Santome. The much smaller portion of African lexicon in these two languages, estimated at less than 10 percent of the overall lexicon, is primarily derived from Edo, the language of the old kingdom of Benin in Nigeria, and Kikongo, a western Bantu language cluster spoken in the Congo and northern Angola (Ferraz 1979: 90–97; Granda 1985: Ch. XI). Table 1 contains a

Table 1: Core lexical items in the Gulf of Guinea creoles.

Fa d'Ambô	Santome	Angolar	Principense	Etymology	Translation
<i>beega</i>	<i>bega</i>	<i>bega</i>	<i>bwega</i>	Ptg. <i>barriga</i>	belly
<i>toomentu</i>	<i>tlomentu</i>	<i>tomentu</i>	<i>tomentu</i>	Ptg. <i>tormento</i>	confusion
<i>ligi</i>	<i>ligi</i>	<i>rigi</i>	<i>rêgê</i>	Ptg. <i>erguer</i>	to lift up, raise
<i>laanta</i>	<i>lanta</i>	<i>lata</i>	<i>lata</i>	Ptg. <i>levantar</i>	to get up
<i>a</i>	<i>a</i>	<i>a</i>	<i>a</i>	Edo <i>à</i>	impersonal pronoun
<i>idu</i>	<i>idu</i>	<i>iru</i>	<i>idu</i>	Edo <i>ìrù</i>	louse
<i>makuku</i>	<i>makuku</i>	<i>makuku</i>	<i>kyêwu</i>	Kik. <i>makuku</i> Edo <i>ìkêwú</i>	traditional fireplace

Note: The following data sources were used: for Santome, Araújo and Hagemeyer (2013); for Angolar, Maurer (1995), for Principense, Maurer (2009). Armando Zamora, native speaker and co-author of this article, provided the lexical and grammatical data for Fa d'Ambô.

sample of lexical items and their etymology, which is either Portuguese (Ptg.) or Edo, showing the similarity between the lexicons of the four creoles.

The syntactic similarities between Fa d'Ambô and the other Gulf of Guinea creoles are also straightforward, as may be seen in the following sample sentences in Fa d'Ambô and Santome:

- (1) a. *Non na kha bê zugwan kha f.* (Fa d'Ambô)
 b. *Non na ka bê nê ùa kwa fa.* (Santome)
 2SG NEG ASP see not one thing NEG
 'We don't see anything.'
- (2) a. *Se ê khôlê ba khadji.* (Fa d'Ambô)
 b. *So ê kôlê ba ke.* (Santome)
 then 3SG run go house
 'Then he ran home.'
- (3) a. *Nan ngê dôsu nen-se* (Fa d'Ambô)
 PL person two PL-DEM
 b. *Inen dôsu ngê se* (Santome)
 PL two person DEM
 'These two persons'
- (4) a. *Ê mat'ôgê dêl.* (Fa d'Ambô)
 b. *Ê mat'ubwê dê.* (Santome)
 3SG kill-body POSS.3SG
 'S/he committed suicide.'

Sentence (1) shows a discontinuous sentence negation pattern (Fa d'Ambô *na... f*; Santome *na... fa*), which is typologically less common and not found in Portuguese-related creoles outside the Gulf of Guinea. Example (2) illustrates a directional serial verb construction (*khôlê ba* and *kôlê ba*), a concatenation of two verbs expressing a single event. These structures are widespread in the Gulf of Guinea creoles (e. g. Hagemeyer 2011; Post 1992) and display a close parallel with similar structures that occur in West-African languages. In (3), we present an example of a NP. While there are some differences between the NPs in the four Gulf of Guinea creoles, they all contain a prenominal plural marker (here *nan* and *inen*) and a postnominal demonstrative (*se*), which is overtly pluralized in Fa d'Ambô (*nen-se*) but not in its sister-languages. Example (4) illustrates a body-reflexive, which is a commonly found strategy in West-

African languages. The word for body (*ôgê*, *ubwê*) is arguably derived from Edo *ègbé* ‘body’.⁴

The linguistic features of these creoles reveal the strong imprint of African continental languages (e. g. Ferraz 1976, 1979; Hagemeyer 2011), again with an important role for Edo (or, more generally, Nigerian typology) and Kikongo. Lexical and grammatical features that are shared by the Gulf of Guinea creoles are predominantly related to Nigerian typology (Hagemeyer 2011). This leads to the interpretation that the new contact language that arose on the island of São Tomé resulted mainly from the contact between Portuguese and languages from this area of the African continent. In this scenario, the proto-creole that arose on São Tomé started crystallizing during the homestead period, when Nigerian slaves were predominant, and then started branching into four different languages. The important secondary imprint left by Western Bantu languages is not surprising due to the predominant slave imports from Bantu-speaking areas during the subsequent plantation stage.

Although Fa d'Ambô became isolated in the sixteenth century, the oldest known reference to the language stems from a letter written on 3 November 1770 by the captain-major of São Tomé and Príncipe, who accompanied two black canons from the cathedral of São Tomé, António Luís Monteiro and Gregório Martins das Neves, on a trip to Annobón. In this letter, he mentions that he asked the island's inhabitants a few questions using their local language, which he and the canons understood very well.⁵ The linguistic connection is reinforced by Matos (1842: 107), who wrote that “[...] o dialecto da Ilha de Anno Bom é o mesmo que o de S. Thomé, mas com uma pronunção gutural semelhante á dos Árabes” [(...) the dialect of the island of Annobón is the same as the one from São Tomé, but with a guttural pronunciation similar to that of the Arabs].⁶ Zamora Lobo (1962: 22), who had some contact with Santome speakers, also states that “[...] los de aquí como los que viven en São Tomé se entienden perfectamente cuando hablan” [those over here and those who live in São Tomé understand each other perfectly well when they speak]. These claims unequivocally show that the slave population that arrived at Annobón in the sixteenth and seventeenth century already spoke the creole as its native or dominant language, which reinforced the idea that they were raised and

⁴ In Principense, the word for ‘body’, *igbê*, retains the typologically rare labial-velar /gb/ found in Edo.

⁵ AHU, Conselho Ultramarino, Caixa 12, doc. 25. I am grateful to Arlindo Caldeira for bringing this information to my attention.

⁶ The reference to the guttural pronunciation makes sense because one of the salient features of Fa d'Ambô compared to the other Gulf of Guinea creoles is the use of fricative velar /x/ instead of unvoiced velar /k/ in certain contexts.

possibly also born in São Tomé. Note, however, that the mutual intelligibility between contemporary Fa d'Ambô and Santome is limited.⁷

The oldest references to Fa d'Ambô mentioned above do not include any language samples. As in the case of many creole languages, and especially Portuguese-related creoles, the first studies and language data only came to light in the late nineteenth century. The oldest known study of Fa d'Ambô is an article written by Schuchardt (1888), the father of modern creole studies, who obtained his data from correspondence with father Isidro Vila, a Claretian missionary stationed on Annobón between 1885 and 1893 (Granda 1985: Ch. VII; Zamora Lobocho 1962) and the author of a short grammar of Fa d'Ambô (Vila 1891). Schuchardt (1888) draws a comparison between linguistic features of Santome and Fa d'Ambô and arrives at the conclusion that the latter must have originated from São Tomé.⁸ Another important early source for the study of Fa d'Ambô is Barrena's (1957) posthumously published descriptive grammar. Between 1892 and his death in 1925, Barrena, also a Claretian missionary, lived most of his time on the island. Since the second half of the nineteenth century, Fa d'Ambô has been the object of several specialized (socio)linguistic studies, such as those by Valkhoff (1966), Granda (1985, 1986), Ferraz (1976), Post (1992, 1994, 1995, 1997, 1998, 2013),⁹ Zamora (2009, 2010), and Silveira et al. (2013).¹⁰

In addition to Fa d'Ambô, a liturgical speech variety which is based on (archaic) Portuguese has survived in Annobón. Schuchardt (1888: 194) was the first person to mention the existence of what he called a true creole (Fa d'Ambô) and a form of creolized Portuguese, providing samples of both in his paper.¹¹ The inhabitants of Annobón sometimes refer to this ritual language as "Portuguese", but close inspection of the available data readily shows that it comprises lexical and grammatical elements of Portuguese, Fa d'Ambô, and arguably also a few Latin expressions (Silveira et al. 2013). The survival of this speech variety would appear to have resulted from the strong catholic tradition introduced from São

⁷ The distinct development of Fa d'Ambô and Santome after they split from a common ancestor in the sixteenth century is most prominent in the lexicon and the phonology. Mutual intelligibility between other pairs of Gulf of Guinea creoles is also limited. These claims are based on our experience with native speakers.

⁸ His knowledge of Santome traces back to Schuchardt (1882), an extensive article on Santome (see also Hagemeyer and Holm 2008).

⁹ Fa d'Ambô is included in the online version of the *Atlas of pidgin and creole language structures* (Michaelis et al. 2013b).

¹⁰ Fa d'Ambô has also been addressed in a couple of comparative studies such as those by Ferraz (1987) and Hagemeyer (2011).

¹¹ See Zamora Lobocho (1962) and Zamora (2010) for a few additional texts in creolized Portuguese.

Tomé and was further stimulated by the role of clergymen. Their intermittent presence, however, must have led to the development of a self-sufficient cult,¹² transmitted by local priests who functioned in parallel to the church, in order to satisfy the spiritual needs of the population (Silveira et al. 2013: 27). Those who have active knowledge of this ceremonial speech are the *sangiitan* ‘sacristans’ (from Ptg. *sacristão*), headed by the *sangiitan-ngaandji* ‘sacristan-major’, the *men-viva* ‘widows’, and the *mesti-skola*, the person who passes on the ritual knowledge. Table 2 shows a sample of a ritual text in the original transcription and a Portuguese version that displays similarities to that transcription.

Table 2: Text in creolized Portuguese of Annobón in Zamora Loboch (1962: 35).

Creolized Portuguese	Similar Portuguese version	Translation
<i>Avi Malia – xia da galasuon xiola es quem vosbenyita frutu yi vosbenyita frutu yi mielesa blêntele Yizú. Yizú Santa Maliamāi yi dezu – a lugápol o os pecadoluna olá, na olá nos o mochi. Amê.</i>	<i>Ave Maria, cheia de graça, o Senhor é convosco. bendita sois vós entre as mulheres, e bendito é o fruto do vosso ventre, Jesus. Santa Maria, Mãe de Deus, rogai por nós, pecadores, agora e na hora da nossa morte. Amém.</i>	Hail, Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now, and in the hour of our death. Amen.

In this liturgical text, several features indicate a significant degree of creolization, such as the replacement of etymological /r/ by /l/ (e.g. *Malia* ‘Mary’, *blêntele* ‘womb’, *pecadolu* ‘sinner’), palatalization before front vowels (*yi* ‘of’, *Yizú* ‘Jesus’, *mochi* ‘death’ – [dʒi], [dʒizu], [mɔ(t)ʃi]),¹³ the use of an African-derived impersonal pronoun *a* (*a lugá* ‘pray’) and copula verb *sa* ‘to be’ (from Ptg. *estar* ‘to be’). Most of these features are specific to the Gulf of Guinea creoles. However, some of the features are untypical of Fa d'Ambô or its sister languages. For instance, the use of middle Portuguese pronoun *vos* ‘you’, which evolved into *bô/bo* ‘you’ (sg.) in these languages. The /s/ in coda in *vos* ‘you’, *galas* ‘grace’, and *os* ‘the’ (pl., masc.) is atypical due to the strong tendency toward open syllables. Moreover, the retention of the etymological /r/ in *frutu* ‘fruit’ possibly hints at an older stage as well. Finally, the use of preposition *na* ‘in’ (from Ptg. *na* ‘in the’) and possessive form *nos o* ‘our’ (Ptg. *nosso* ‘our’) also show the somewhat in-between status of this text.

¹² Granda (1985: 148–149) claims that the knowledge is obtained orally, using memorization and Portuguese religious books.

¹³ It follows from the texts in Zamora Loboch (1962) that grapheme <y> stands for affricate [dʒ].

4 The sociolinguistic status of Fa d'Ambô

The estimates of the number of Fa d'Ambô speakers do not vary much. The *Ethnologue* (Lewis 2009) refers to 5,000 speakers in Equatorial Guinea, a number that increases to 5,600 when speakers in the diaspora, especially in Spain, are included. The numbers of speakers on the island of Annobón itself vary between 2,000 (*Ethnologue*) and 2,500–3,000 (Zamora 2009).¹⁴ Two decades earlier, according to an official UN census carried out in 1990, there were 3,863 Annobonese living in Equatorial Guinea, half of these on Annobón and the other half on Bioko (Post 1998). On Bioko, the large majority lives in a few neighborhoods of the country's capital Malabo, such as Ela Nguema, Barrio de Sumco and Barrio Alcaide, but there are also small pockets of Annobonese in coastal villages of Bioko and in the continental city of Bata. Post estimates a total number of speakers between 4,000 and 4,500. Although there are no official reports, it can safely be assumed that the number of L2 Fa d'Ambô speakers is very low. The language is not used as a lingua franca by other speech communities in Equatorial Guinea and there is a tendency for Annobonese to marry within their own speech community. In addition to the official language Spanish, Fa d'Ambô speakers, especially those who live in Malabo, are usually Pichi speakers as well.¹⁵ Both these languages have left imprints on the creole, which are mostly restricted to the lexical domain (Granda 1985: Ch. X; Zamora 2009: 103–106). Whether there is any systematic code-switching between these three languages has not been investigated. Borrowing from other national languages such as Fang and Bubi appears to be rare (Zamora 2009: 106).

Despite being one of the smallest speech communities of Equatorial Guinea, spoken in two different places, there is relative consensus that there are currently no reasons to believe that the vitality of Fa d'Ambô is at immediate risk (cf. Granda 1985: Ch. VII; Post 1998; Zamora 2009). The language is transmitted across generations and enjoys social prestige among its speakers.¹⁶ A history of isolation must have contributed decisively to mold the cultural and linguistic

¹⁴ This number appears to be quite stable, since Fr. Isidro Vila estimated that there were approximately 2,000 inhabitants on Annobón in the late nineteenth century (cited after Schuchardt 1888: 220). Since there was no Annobonese speech community on Fernando Po in those days, it can be concluded that the number of speakers has at least doubled in a century.

¹⁵ Pichi is the variety of Krio, an English-based creole, that was brought from Sierra Leone to Bioko (Fernando Po) by the so-called “Fernandinos” during the first half of the nineteenth century (e. g. Granda 1985: 146–7; Sundiata 1996; Yakpo 2009: 3–7).

¹⁶ This stands in sharp contrast to what is happening to its three sister-creoles spoken on the islands of São Tomé and Príncipe, which are endangered to different extents, even though Santome and Angolar have currently more native speakers than does Fa d'Ambô.

identity of the Annobonese and has manifested itself in the form of resistance to outside influences, such as the Dutch attempts to land on the island in the late sixteenth and seventeenth century and the hostile reception of missionaries in later periods (e. g. Wulf 2014). According to Caldeira (2010), these events contributed to a strong spirit of solidarity and self-identity. But also the fact that the Annobonese are nowadays a minority group in a country run by a dominant ethnic group, the Fang, with whom relations have not always been easy, should be considered a factor that promotes group identity and language maintenance.

The peripheral location of Annobón has prevented contact with the outside world until fairly recently. Granda (1985: Ch. VII) mentions that until 1968, when Equatorial Guinea became independent, the Annobonese on the island had little exposure to the official language: Spanish was only used by missionaries, a few elementary school teachers since 1933, and a handful of officials. He observed during his field work on Annobón in the early 1980s that knowledge of Spanish was most widespread among adult men, whereas monolingualism in Fa d'Ambô was widespread among young children and women. Granda further pointed out that young and middle-aged Annobonese men who spent time working on Bioko used Pichi as a peer group language on Annobón.

Post (1998), who also carried out field work on Annobón in the early 1990s, noted that Fa d'Ambô was the native language of the Annobonese and that the large majority of the population valued and spoke Spanish as well. However, Post described a different situation for the Fa d'Ambô community living on Bioko. Many young and middle-aged men, but also a considerably number of women of the same age group, have left Annobón to study or work on Bioko.¹⁷ Many of these adults only return at an older age. Therefore, Annobón is primarily a place for children and the elderly. In addition to their native language, Spanish is the exclusive language used in primary and secondary education.¹⁸ Post also mentioned that in the early 1990s Annobón remained isolated from the world: the island received supplies only sporadically, there were no radios, televisions, or books. She further noted that in the capital Malabo, on the other hand, Fa d'Ambô speakers were exposed to other languages, in particular to Spanish and to the lingua franca Pichi, spoken by many. Despite the coexistence of these languages, Post claimed that there was no significant variation between Fa d'Ambô spoken on Annobón and in Malabo due to ongoing migration between both spaces. She did, however, detect age-related variation. Given

17 Note that in the late 1970s many Annobonese were taken to Bioko by the military of the Macías regime because of the supposed threat they posed to the regime. The plan was to put them to work on the plantations but they were left to abandonment.

18 Post (1998) noted that the use of Fa d'Ambô at school was severely punished.

the more isolated and aged community on Annobón, the more conservative variety is expected to be found there.

Twenty years later, the situation described by Post has evolved further. At the level of infrastructure, Annobón inaugurated a harbor and an airport in 2010 and can now be reached by plane on a regular basis. Radio, television and telecommunications are currently also available on the island. While Fa d'Ambô is not included on the UNESCO list of endangered languages, the signs that there are weak spots in the generational transmission of Fa d'Ambô should not be dismissed. In his prologue in Zamora (2010: 11–12), Daniel Zamora Salas draws attention to the fact that, nowadays, there are Annobonese children who do not speak Fa d'Ambô and he notes that the language is losing fluidity. We also found that young Annobonese in Malabo often use Pichi for communication among each other. This shift to Pichi, which is more prominent among the younger generations and probably represents the evolution of the age-related variation described by Post, should be identified as the main threat to Fa d'Ambô. Compared to Spanish, the formal lingua franca, Pichi thrives as the informal lingua franca, the language of the streets, commerce, and markets, affecting the stable diglossia that characterizes the relation between Fa d'Ambô (L) and Spanish (H). Pichi is Fa d'Ambô's direct competitor in the informal sphere on Bioko.¹⁹ We also draw attention to the increasing social mobility, exposure to other languages through education and the media, as well as easier access to the facilities of the global world. Altogether, these factors may well turn out to pose a serious threat to Fa d'Ambô in the short term.

The level of endangerment is further increased by the fact that Equatorial Guinea has not adopted any effective policies to promote and maintain its autochthonous languages, even though Article 4 of the Constitution of Equatorial Guinea acknowledges them as constituting part of the national culture. The same article establishes Spanish as the official language and French (since 1998) and Portuguese (since 2010) as co-official languages. The fact that Fa d'Ambô is a Portuguese-related creole has been used as one of the arguments that led to the integration of Equatorial Guinea into the Community of Portuguese Speaking Countries (CPLP) in July 2014 during the CPLP meeting held in Dili (East Timor).²⁰ However, it is very difficult to

¹⁹ Silveira et al. (2013) also identify Fang as a possible threat to Fa d'Ambô and other minority languages due to the dominant role of this ethnic group in society. However, Fang currently enjoys the same, non-official status as Fa d'Ambô. The fact that Fang is intrinsically connected to the political regime may actually well be one of the factors that contribute to the vitality of Fa d'Ambô.
²⁰ The integration was also on the table during two previous CPLP meetings (2010, 2012), but faced resistance from Portugal in particular, whereas Angola and Brazil were receptive to Equatorial Guinea's inclusion. The other countries that currently comprise the CPLP are Angola, Brazil, Cape Verde, East Timor, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique and São Tomé and Príncipe.

envisage how Portuguese will become an effective language of the country in the presence of two other official languages that are major world languages, Spanish and French, and in the presence of English as a global foreign language. After Equatorial Guinea joined the CPLP, its official government webpage published that the president “[...] H. E. Obiang Nguema Mbasogo also stated that the door is open to request entry into the Commonwealth of Nations, since Equatorial Guinea also has common historical roots with English-speaking countries”.²¹ Where Fa d'Ambô was the linguistic argument for Portuguese, Pichi could fulfill the same role for English, with the additional advantage that this English-based creole originated from Commonwealth member Sierra Leone. One is therefore forced to conclude that Equatorial Guinea's desire to become a member of international languages-oriented organizations is primarily an attempt to broaden its regional and international sphere of influence, an ambition that the country has been quite successful in satisfying.

Fa d'Ambô remains an almost exclusively spoken language lacking any official or stable writing system. There is no tradition of publishing in Fa d'Ambô. Lêdjam's (2008a, 2008b) work, in particular his *Cancionero oral annobonés*, a collection of poems from the oral tradition, with Spanish translations, is the most notable exception to this rule. A few fragments of the language can also be found in several of the studies mentioned in Section 3. It is thus fair to say that more has been written about the language than in the language itself.²²

While the marginalization of the Annobonese in the country may function as a protective shield for the language, their generally low social status may work against improving the status of the language beyond the speech community itself. Most Annobonese are employed in manual occupations. Men are usually fishermen,²³ carpenters, or painters, whereas women run small-scale informal businesses, such as selling fish. Although there are Annobonese employed as civil servants, especially on Annobón, where they occupy positions in the local administration and in education, they are generally excluded from decision-making positions.

²¹ <http://guineaequatorialpress.com/noticia.php?id=5455&lang=en>, accessed 2 September 2014.

²² A searchable electronic corpus of adapted written and transcribed spoken Fa d'Ambô texts, including traditional stories, of approximately 50,000 tokens is available at the Center of Linguistics of the University of Lisbon for linguistic research, at: <http://alflclul.clul.ul.pt/CQPweb/>. The Gulf of Guinea creole corpora are described in Hagemeijer et al. (2014).

²³ On Annobón, whaling from canoes was a common activity (e. g. Wulf 2014; Zamora Lobocho 1962).

5 Conclusion

Fa d'Ambô is a good example of how a language of a small, isolated community stands the test of time. After the language left its cradle, the neighboring island of São Tomé, the Annobonese quickly became self-sufficient and lost contact with the outer world, but their language, a Portuguese-related creole, lives to tell of the early connection. While Fa d'Ambô is still the hallmark of Annobonese identity, we have identified a number of factors that pose an increasing threat to the maintenance of the language: a small speech community that has become more scattered due to (e)migration; growing exposure to lingua franca Pichi; and the lack of any type of government support for language maintenance. Considering these factors, there is currently little hope that the situation of Fa d'Ambô will stabilize or change for the better. The island of Annobón used to be a safe haven for language maintenance, but the ongoing (e)migration and exposure to Pichi and Spanish in the Low and High domains respectively means that renewal of the population with Annobonese who have been heavily exposed to other languages in Malabo will reduce the share of native, competent Fa d'Ambô speakers and may ultimately lead to the reshaping of Fa d'Ambô, for instance through partial relexification, structural convergence, or in a worst-case scenario, to language shift.

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