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The Author

General Editor's Foreword

We can read in the Bible that "the whole earth was of one language, and of one speech" (Genesis, 1,11). It was like that until God, due to men's far too ambitious project on building the Tower of Babel, decided to punish them and said: "Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech." (Genesis, 7,11).

Languages began to flourish from then onwards, becoming as many as 12,000, but as the time passed the majority of them died out and, in the best of cases, developed into other tongues, the very expression of new cultures such as those still using neo-Latin languages. Although it is true that languages have always come and gone with the societies where they were used, though it must be said that, especially in modern times, owing to the founding of the nation-state, colonization, industrialization, the spread of compulsory education, and so on, a lot of so called minor languages began to disappear at an unprecedented speed.

It is quite legitimate then to wonder how many tongues are currently spoken in the world. Ethnologue, a database run by the Summer Institute of Linguistics in Dallas (Texas), has registered about 6,800 besides a much higher number of dialects. But where are they commonly used? According to

the same authoritative source: about 200 in Europe, 1,000 on the American continent, 2,440 in Africa, and 3,200 in Asia and the Pacific, out of which 800 are spoken in Papua New Guinea only. All in all the situation seems alright, yet there is a big problem: more than 400 languages, out of the total 6,800 mentioned above, are slowly but inexorably heading towards an extinction (e.g. Wadjigu in Australia lost its last few speakers in the past few years, whereas Chiapaneco in Mexico has only just 100 left). Unfortunately, the prospects are far from good, over 3,000 tongues run the risk of vanishing in the near future. They are mostly concentrated in the hot, isolated areas of the planet where in countries like Nigeria, together with ten national languages, including Yoruba, Hausa, Igbo and English, 511 minor languages are currently spoken. Though it seems there is no problem, actually, there is, because the number of people speaking them is too low to assure their survival.

Therefore, on drawing a conclusion we can say that—if isolation has allowed many endangered tongues to survive—globalization, fast and ready available transportation and communication, television and the Internet have had an increasingly devastating effect on minor languages. While, as we know, it is this overall situation that has helped dominant languages such as English, Spanish, Portuguese and French to take over.

Given this worrying scenario, we have decided to launch a new series, *Studies in Contact Languages, Cultures and Communication*, within a project called *From Africa to Africa*. Our work finds its driving thrust in the cooperation between the University for Foreigners of Perugia and the Institute for Peace Studies and Security of the University of Addis Ababa. In doing this project, we will adopt an interdisciplinary ap-

proach, involving linguistics and sociology as well as studies on peace and conflict prevention. Our final aim is to set up a Second Level Master in "Internationalisation of the Productive System of Sub-Saharan Companies" and launch cooperation projects with our existing unit on "Water, Research, and Resource Management". It is evident that our project is not only editorial. In fact, we hope to extend it into other cooperation schemes with some other African, Caribbean, American and British universities across various disciplines, and develop a larger project which will include also a cycle of international symposiums and round tables.

It goes without saying the scope of our research will focus on different cultures, languages and sub-languages, namely varieties of English in international and local relations which are used in the rich constellation of hybridity and diasporic communities in the Caribbean where a different variety of English is spoken on each island. Of course, will be looking also into the set of varieties of AAVE (African American Vernacular English), Black British English, and the many other varieties spoken in some African countries such as Ethiopia, Kenya, Nigeria, or South Africa.

But being our plan ambitious, we cannot possibly ignore another vital part of a national heritage: music. Indeed, we intend to produce some song books with parallel texts translated and a critical commentary, which will come with a CD or a DVD depending on whether music only or dancing too is involved. The preservation, through the transcription and translation of traditional chants and songs, is something which can offer a unique contribution to the conservation of such rich cultures while bridging the gap between the North and the South, the West and the East. On the other hand, there is already an enormous output of songs in Afro-Caribbean English, going from the Caribbean to the States and Great

Britain, finally stretching all the way back to Africa. It must be underlined that this long round trip, this repatriation movement back to Africa, incidentally, clarifies why our project is called *From Africa to Africa* which proves to be appropriate also from a purely linguistic point of view. By way of example, a word that seems English in the Caribbean which, due to the traditional censorial attitude towards vernacular and pidgin terms, can hardly ever be found in a standard dictionary though it is commonly used in African varieties of English. Actually, once you have gone back to Africa, you will find out that new many such varieties have sprang up there too, as is the case with the Kenyan and Nigerian ones. These are stratified upon different layers, going from, a really outstanding level, as proved by the works of such great world authors as the Nigerian poet and novelist Chinua Achebe and the Kenyan writer Nagugi wa Thiong, to a new jargon, a mixture between Swahili and English, which is spoken mainly by young people in the cities. A very interesting socio-linguistic phenomenon worth being analysed.

No wonder then if we intend to give our contribution to rescuing such an invaluable heritage of endangered cultures, languages, oral traditions, and music, which are at risk of dying out.

So in the next few years, among other things, we intend to concentrate on the recovery of old and modern stories, poems, prayers, chants, and accounts of war refugees, which can be done through their translation as well as their recording, aiming to preserve the unique sounds of certain varieties of English which otherwise are bound to get lost…

This is why our final goal is to try to put together and record all the bits and bobs where the local jargon succeeds in consolidating itself in a universal language as music and oral traditions.

Likewise, on looking into oral tradition, we should also consider the new spiritual and cultural movements, and the new forms of expressions like music, which the Rastafarian movement traditionally uses to expand from a localized source to an increasing internationalization and globalization.

For the time being, we are starting with this first volume on plants and songs, belonging to written and oral repertoires, varying from ethno-science (e.g. medical plants) to traditional songs.

We believe that this book can help put together a puzzle concerning the story of slave trade by bringing to light a story which is still hidden. A terrible story, started in Africa, continuing in the Caribbean and leading back to Africa, thanks to the Rastafarian religion and the return of many Blacks even from the US.

On following this line, the next book in the series will be dealing with Jamaican English, drawing particular attention to Y-aric, that is Rastafarian English, a most interesting case of a sub-language based on standard Jamaican English which, through music, as hinted at above, is becoming a universal language.

On concluding, we are aware we have accepted a challenge comparable, as it were, to saving whales, a species threatened with complete extinction unless an immediate action is taken. Similarly, we need to drive certain languages and cultures back towards the sea of knowledge, that is the great sea of communication among the different peoples of the world, before they become stranded and perish.

Roma 6 October 2008 *Nick Ceramella*

Forbidden Fruits

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Introduction

This is one first volume of a series on Afro-Caribbean studies, entitled *Studies in Contact Languages, Culture and Communication*, which is part of a project called 'From Africa to Africa'.

The research presented here is the outcome of a period of time spent in Africa. It was further developed into its final shape, during a few more recent stays in Jamaica and Ethiopia, when working on my postgraduate thesis.

On carrying out my research, I have founded that he field of lexicography and vernacular phytonyms in the Caribbean and in Africa has evidenced certain complexities which stem from an ethnolinguistic approach and encompass many disciplines from creole lexicography to botanical descriptions and oral narration.

The primary problem with mapping, concerning what is left and what is lost in vernacular phytonyms, is dramatically evidenced by the constant loss of vernaculars and the impossible identification with the scientific nomenclature. In the case of medicinal plants, knowledge is passed down from one generation to the next. Unfortunately, a great deal of valuable information can be lost or distorted if a medicine man or herb vendor dies without revealing such knowledge. This I believe stigmatizes the risk of survival of botanical

language which, as it has been evidenced in the course of our survey, seems to overshadow the unrecorded history of the slave route.

1. Forbidden Languages

The case of phytonyms is not just a lexicographic issue (Conklin, 1962) related to lexeme definition and sequencing synonyms (hyponyms), generating confusion and ambiguity, thus validating the 'primitive mind' of creoles for excessive horizontal spread of terms. The names (apparent synonymy) are indeed many because the Caribbean is a mosaic of 'real' languages interacting and blending, from every continent. Even within one continent (Asia or the Indian subcontinent) there are different main language groups.

With reference to Africa, plant names and ritual healing practices come from oral tradition stemming from the No scientific name given and unrecorded history of slavery and African diasporas (Fabre and Benesch, 2004) intersecting with diverse languages and sub-languages.

In the Caribbean context, phytotherapy is a core value of the group identity expressed through sciamanic rituals, obeah herbs and herbs vendors (Banbury, 1894). The herb-vendor is an institutionalized role where a performer calls out a long list of medicinal herbs and aphrodisiacs. The same applies to the Reggae lyrics featuring 'the forbidden herb' or the leaves of the tree 'that are for the healing of the nation' which address a specific group in a distinctive jargon or sub-language. (Ras Steven, 2004: 59-61).

In the case of West or East African languages derived phytonyms patterns are intricate, because of variations in spelling and lack of written tradition (Anglade, 1998). There are many different African languages giving different names for lexemes and phytonyms, depending on what part of the Caribbean islands we refer to, and it is allonyms we are dealing with. These names, if they do survive through phonetic transcription in repertoires, are not easily identifiable as such (Dalby, 1971).

For example the language of funerary chants in Afro-Portuguese (Palenquero) has in common with rituals preserved in the Caribbean the loss of the linguistic knowledge which would allow their followers, and even their performers to fully understand their contents (Kouwenberg & Smith, 2000: 230).[1]

Once more this is a history of shame and No scientific name given and unrecorded events as well as loss of language and roots of tradition, which evolves along the slave-trade route.

We may guess that seeds, pods and inflorescences of plants, which had healing powers and were used in healing ceremonies, were to be kept secret and well guarded against the risk of punishment and prohibition.[2] We may also surmise that herbs of survival and rescue remedies were brought along on

1. For the specific case of chants and songs, see further. The influence of West African songs in the Caribbean evidences interesting similarities and, conversely, dissimilarities in the different contact zones. (See also Deumert and Durrelman, 2006). The detection of West African elements can be found in recordings and descriptions of early ethnographers and linguists as younger generations appear to treat chants as merely folkloric markers of identity.

2. Ato Quayson in his study on *Postcolonialism* states that "The historiographic protocols of colonial discourse analysis seem to be radically different from those of traditional historiography, even in that which shares an affinity of intent in trying to rewrite the history of resistance. For traditional historians, on the other hand, such postcolonial analyses of history

board as an aid to disease and to counteract the effects of nausea, vomit and the terrible conditions of the sea-journey.

The go-between in the human traffic was possibly part of the African culture and knew those plants. They were hired by the slave-traders to survey and coordinate the cargo of males, females and children. The West African *mestizo* could speak both Portuguese and the African languages. It is with them that rests the secret of diffusion of the healing herbs to the New World.[3]

The implementation of sciamanic medicine and natural healing practice may explain the secrecy of this plant life, not recorded as transplants to the new land where the extensive

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are nothing short of *irresponsible language games*" (2000: 58-59, emphasis added).

3. The language issue seems to be the major filter to identification of plants and transcription. When it comes to new world plant description narrators clearly state an avowed inadequacy to interpret different cultural systems, from Richard Hakluyt, Samuel Purchas, Captain John Smith, John Harriot and Exquemelin (Masiola, 2008a; Todorov, 1982: 204, notably his chapter on 'Slavery, Colonialism and Communication'). John Josselyn in his *New Englands Rarities* (1672) is oriented to a prevailing polysemy: 'Their Language is very significant, using but few words, every word having a diverse signification, which is exprest by their gesture; as when they hold their head of one side the word signifieth one thing, holding their hand up when they pronounce it it signifieth another thing.' (2006: 16). What is depicted for the Puritan readership evokes a fertile land of Canaan where aphrodisiacs are part of tribal wisdom: '*To procure love*. I once took notice of a wanton womans compounding the solid roots of this plant with wine, for an amorous cup, which wrought the desired effect.' What follows is a listing of plants which have all-Western names, as in traditional Anglo-saxon and Celtic folklore. 'Watercress, red lilies, wild sorrel, alders tongue, one blade, lilie convallie, *water plantane* (*here called water—suck leaves*)' (2006: 90, emphasis added). Native names are rare as are names derived via French colonization. However, the case of *water—suck leaves* Josselyn observes a new compound used by settlers, in full awareness that language 'here' is somewhat different.

agriculture would be implemented within the slavery plantation. Plantation was the domesticated space where utilitarian plants from other colonial dominions or from the Old World would be hybridized and experimented.

After two centuries of invasion and colonization, only sporadic references to native names or to new hybrids are recorded in chronicles and narrative accounts, in this differing from Christopher Columbus who could avail himself of the 'first contact' with population which were soon to be exterminated (see Tuttle, 1976: 594-611; Todorov, 1982:18-33; Greenblatt, 1991: 52-68). The image of an innocent garden of Eden depicted by the first explorers was to coexist in antinomy with slavery which the plantation complex entailed (Masiola, 2008a, 2008b; Pratt, 1992).

Sugar cane was celebrated in a poem (Mintz, 1985) just like other endemic fruits (pineapples, bananas, etc.). Coffee, tobacco and cotton could be the plants of economic value and of economic exchange (Lunan, 1814; Talbot, 1976: 833-845). The latter formed the 'plantation complex' and developed a language within the plantation. Medicinal herbs however were inconspicuous within the complex: the distinction between 'healing' and 'dangerous superstition' was not so marked as to produce a distinct selection of such herbs. To the external world of the master-class, there were no detectable names useful for branding and export. (cfr. Lovejoy, 1979)

The name of flowers came at a later phase gaining impulse with ornamental planting and post-Linnaean systematization (cfr. Jarvis, 2008). What really mattered was botanical experimentation on plants which had a surface commodity value.

In the specific case of non-endemic pidgin or creole vernaculars what would give us evidence of in-depth hybridiza-

tion (of languages and plants) and deportation are the names plants had before colonization and transplantation in their original geographical areas and the reference to current status of pidgin and creole (see also Mufwene, 1997: 35-69). There are extant plant names from the Arawak language, as Columbus himself recorded terms at first-contact stage. Columbus transcribed in writing the sounds of what he reputed to be an Arawak term for plant which he had to detail and describe in his Diary for the King of Spain. It is at this point that we can trace back a linguistic change in the new world and more specifically in the Caribbean area, through shifts in meaning and expanded meaning, calques and semantic borrowings.

The stages of language colonization in the decades to come were dramatic. When cultures collide, an hegemonic group expands over the many minority groups (cfr. Goody, 1977). What chances does a new English, which is born in contact situation, have? Language extinction occurs when the last speaker of the language community dies (Terracini, 1957).[4] In our approach language extinction and endangered survival correlates with plant extinction and endangered survival within the eco-sphere or *culture*-sphere.

Several plants from the Caribbean area, such as those on the Hawaiian Islands are not endemic species and come from elsewhere: some of them come from Latin America, some from India and Africa (Lucas, 1982; Lughadha, 2004). When plants and seeds are not carried by seed dispersion (trade

4. Umberto Terracini some fifty years ago in his seminal *Conflitti di Lingue e di Culture* (1957: 9-49) on the death of a language highlighted three different factors: the death of a language is an aspect of linguistic change; the death of a language may occur because of the decay of the system; it may occur out of the stiffening of the system and its progressive shrinking away. In the first case death may be only perceivable to the conscience of speakers.

winds and ocean streaming currents, birds), they come along with original names (Lewis, 2005). The plants which came from Africa, have East or West Africa names derived from the many African language groups and sub-groups (see also Anglade, 1998).[5]

The loss caused by lexicography (and botanical repertoires) on omitting native vernaculars is comparable to the loss of the plant itself. (cfr. Whistler, 1995). This is an issue that parallels the destiny of the vanishing languages of the Pacific Rim (Miyaoka, Sakiyama and Krauss, 2007).[6]

The specificity of medicinal plants may be very hard to detect when their name and metaphoric compounding bear no trace or indication of side effects. On giving those plants a 'white name', i.e. the scientific binomial celebrating a botanist (Stearn, 2000), the core meaning of the plant was blotted out. But plants are not only known through their scientific binomial. When there was no tentative transcription and *calque* or borrowing from the native names these were imported from the new coinage or transcriptions of other colonizers, as is the case with French and Spanish. Sometimes this could be an English translation of Western vernacular phytonyms or new loan words which entered into Spanish or French, Portuguese, or Dutch and thence were re-translated.

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5. Anglade offers a repertoire of African-derived terms which feature among other areas such as culinary and the medicinal, primary plant terms (*kalalou*: here is specified as *Hibisucs esculentus*) and the magical practices the slaves brought from their homeland, as well as ideophones and onomatopoeic terms.

6. Name changes in the indigenous flora have occurred in the Caribbean, Australia, New Zealand (Webb, 1987: 145-54; Taylor and Bieleski, 2000) and the Hawai'i.