

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

From colonial times up to the present, Mexico has been characterized by its linguistic pluralism as a result of multiethnic and multicultural encounters that have shaped what is called Mexican Spanish. In this sense, Mexican Spanish may be considered an amalgamation of modalities in which each region of the country exhibits a different variety. Although dialectal diversity itself is not considered a negative factor, sometimes it generates negative attitudes among speakers toward non-prestige varieties that tend to diminish and marginalize the speech of certain ethnic groups, as is the case with Afro-Mexicans.

The African presence in Mexico, as in the rest of the Americas, has been a sociohistorical fact since colonial times. Nevertheless, there are no records of the African speech of that period for two reasons: 1) the orality of their linguistic manifestations, and 2) because most speakers were illiterate. In this respect, Zimmermann (2012: 289) states:

El hecho de la escasa alfabetización de los africanos dificultó durante mucho tiempo la emergencia de productos literarios afromexicanos escritos. Solo después de la abolición de la esclavitud pudo resultar un cambio al respecto. Por eso habría que concentrar la investigación en la existencia de una eventual literatura oral durante la época de la esclavitud. Actualmente no se han encontrado testimonios de tal tradición oral, lo que [no] significa que no la haya habido.

Despite the absence of Afro-Mexican speech samples of the colonial era, there are written linguistic sources (historical documents, and some of a literary nature) that Zimmermann (1995: 64-67) has classified as follows:

1. **Direct documents of the language** (Inquisitorial Acts of the 16th and 17th centuries housed in the historical and archiepiscopal archives of Mexico, as well as some isolated historical documents).
2. **Metalinguistic observations on languages** (slave statements found in historical chronicles transcribed by missionary friars, in which slave uprisings are reported. This type of document, written in a literary indirect style, gives a “voice” to black slaves and freed mulattoes).
3. **Imitations of the black speech** (travel stories and literary texts, like *Villancicos*¹ or other popular songs, written by non-Afro-Hispanic authors that tried to “imitate” the speech of the blacks).

These historical and literary sources, although valuable, do not reliably represent the actual speech of the African population of Colonial Mexico. Regarding this, Zimmermann (2012) comments: “Por eso no podemos considerar la lengua de estos textos ni necesariamente típica de México no como lengua auténtica de la población afrohispana, sino como una imitación aproximativa y tal vez estereotipada transmitida por textos literarios” (294).

Besides the lack of reliable speech samples from the African population during the colonial period, when exegesis is made of the historical analysis of the African presence in Mexico, it is observed that its invisibility has covered the transit through the ages of modernity. Socio-politically, Afro-Mexicans, as an ethnical component of Mexico, have been relegated to a vacuum of social life due to the perceived inferiority of Africa and its descendants. This situation has been reinforced by the Mexican nationalist discourse of *mestizaje*² that

1 On villancicos (Christmas carols), Zimmermann (1995: 69) comments: “Los villancicos son secuencias de cantos. En aquel tiempo dentro de esas secuencias de cantos, se acostumbraba reservar un canto a los negros. Estos cantos se conocen con títulos como: ‘guineo a 5’, ‘negro a 8’, ‘negrillo’, etc. Por cierto, no debemos olvidar (como lo hace Megenny, 1985) que muchos villancicos no eran improvisaciones populares espontáneas, sino que habían sido compuestos por poetas profesionales, muchas veces por encargo. Un ejemplo de ello son los villancicos de Sor Juana Inés de la cruz, en los cuales aparecen también secuencias afrohispanas.” For an analysis and list of the Afro-Hispanic linguistic features of Christmas carols, see Zimmermann (1995) and (2012).

2 The term ‘mestizaje’ (from Latin *mixticus* “to mix”) refers to the biological and cultural mixture of individuals who come from different ethnic groups. Throughout history, the ethnic union has received various names. For instance, in colonial Mexico, the term *castas* was used

has helped to develop a political strategy of homogenization by considering all Afro-Mexicans to be *mestizos* of some sort³.

In Mexico, the invisibility of the Afro-Mexicans is a kind of “minimization”. It is a manifestation of institutional racism, which navigates among the resources of the denial of racism and its normalization. Certainly, racism is totally denied in Mexico. It has been reduced to total irrelevance to the point that it has never existed in Mexican society, due to its high degree of miscegenation. The racism towards the Afro-Mexican communities insists on three things: 1) a historical and cultural distance from Africa; 2) the exoticism and distant character of Afro America; and 3) a pre-Colombian past and a predominant indigenous presence. Each of these lines contends that miscegenation is the norm in all of the country. The third one, deeply instilled as ideology, is translated into a genuine expression of nationalism, which denies the racism and the African presence in Mexico. In this respect, Moreno (2012) argues: “La desracialización (*racelessness*) se refiere al proceso de normalización racial y racista que permite que el pueblo mexicano se exprese y esté convencido por la idea de que en México no hay racismo porque todos somos mestizos, porque todos estamos ‘mezclados’” (17). Akin to Moreno (2012), Michel Wieviorka (2009) in his analysis of the phenomenon of racism claims:

El problema radica en el funcionamiento mismo de la sociedad, de la cual el racismo constituye una propiedad estructural, inscrita en los mecanismos rutinarios que

to refer to a mixture or union of people of different ethnicity. The concept emerged with the Spanish conquest and colonization of the American continent, where Spaniards and Indians mixed. Most of these unions were often illegitimate. So, Spaniard colonists, concerned to distinguish the results of such miscegenation, divided offspring of mixed couples into three general groups: mestizo (Spanish-Indian), mulatto (Spanish-Black), and zambo or zambaigo (Black-Indian), which in turn overlapped, creating more subdivisions within each of these three main categories causing confusion and misidentification between groups and generating a complex social system of *castas*, which was based on physical characteristics (skin color and phenotype). Therefore, people of African descent, not only in Mexico but in the rest of Latin America, are the historical product of various degrees of miscegenation. The ideologization of the concept of miscegenation ignores the fact, hidden by this ideologization, that there are different types of miscegenation with different ethnic and cultural signs.

For more discussion on Mestizaje and castas see José Vasconcelos, *La raza cósmica*, México: Editorial Porrúa, 2007; Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán, *La población negra de México. Estudio etnohistórico*, México: SRA-CEHAM, 1981; María Elena Martínez, *Genealogical Fictions. Limpieza de Sangre, Religion, and Gender in Colonial Mexico*, California: Stanford University Press, 2008, 42-60; Serge Gruzinski, *The Mestizo Mind. The Intellectual Dynamics of Colonization*, New York: Routledge, 2002, 17-31; Ilona Katzew, *Casta Painting. Images of Race in Eighteenth-Century Mexico*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005.

3 This is one of the reasons why the term *Afromestizo*, introduced by the Mexican scholar Aguirre Beltrán, is avoided in the present study.

aseguran la dominación y minimización de los negros, sin que nadie necesite teorizarlos o trate de justificarlos mediante la ciencia. El racismo se presenta, por tanto, como un sistema generalizado de discriminaciones que se alimentan o se informan unas a otras: existe un círculo vicioso ... que asegura la reproducción casi automática de la discriminación de los negros en la vivienda, en la escuela o en el mercado de trabajo (37).

In contemporary Mexican society, Afro-Mexican communities occupy places at the lowest rank of the socio-economic ladders. Some of them remain forgotten and isolated from the mainstream and manifest extreme poverty and a lack of basic services.

Currently, Mexico has four Afro-Mexican enclaves. One of them is the small community of *Nacimiento de los negros* situated in Northern Mexico in the state of Coahuila. The other three are located in the Southern part of the country: the Gulf of Mexico region (the southern part of the state of Veracruz and the coastal area of the states of Tabasco and Campeche), the southeastern region of the Yucatan Peninsula (the state of Quintana Roo), and the Costa Chica region (the northern coastal area of the state of Guerrero and the southern coastal area of the state of Oaxaca, both on the Pacific Ocean), the latter being the largest, with approximately thirty-seven Afro-Mexican communities.

In particular, Costa Chica's black population is believed to have originated from African slaves who were brought to this area to work on the large cattle ranches and agricultural fields during the colonial period. In addition, runaway slaves reached this same area in search of refuge by forming small, marooned communities (Aguirre Beltrán 1989a; Motta Sánchez and Machuca Ramírez 1993; Vaughn 2001a).

For a long period of time this Afro-Mexican enclave remained isolated, basically until the mid-1960s⁴, when a coastal highway that currently links Acapulco to other towns and villages of the Costa Chica region of Guerrero and Oaxaca was finished. Such a situation of isolation not only allowed the African phenotype to survive in the area, but also permitted some social practices and cultural manifestations such as dance, music, oral tradition, the use of medicinal herbs, cuisine, the custom of bride capture, polygamy, round houses, hollowed-out canoes made from single logs, musical instruments, and names which evoke African regions and tribes to survive, just to mention a few.

It is also important to highlight that since colonial times the Afro-Mexicans of Costa Chica have been in contact with other neighboring indigenous groups

4 The Costa Chica region was not only populated by Afro-descendant communities; there were other local ethnic groups —such as Mixtecos, Amuzgos, Chatinos, including some mestizos— that also stayed isolated during the same period.

(coastal Mixtecs, Chatinos, and Amuzgos)⁵, as well as with Asiatic sailors and slaves, especially from the Philippines, who entered through the Port of Acapulco after 1573. By the middle of the 19th century, Costa Chica's population also received some influence from Chilean immigrants who spent time on the coast near Pinotepa Nacional on their route to the Sacramento Valley during the epoch of the California Gold Rush. As a result, these cultural and linguistic contacts have undeniably shaped the life and speech of the Afro-Mexicans of Costa Chica over the years.

Basically, the Costa Chica region seems so varied and complex that it has seduced many scholars in the last decades. Most of the current research on this geographical area has focused on historical and anthropological investigations, and only very few works have addressed linguistic aspects (Gillian 1976; Aguirre-Beltrán 1989b; Díaz-Pérez 1993; Althoff 1994). This situation seems also to have occurred in other Afro-Hispanic enclaves of Latin America, except for the Caribbean zone. Towards the end of the 20th century, most Afro-Hispanic linguistic research focused on the literary and folkloric testimonies of past centuries, in particular *Bozal* literature⁶, which to some degree reflects the earlier

5 Despite the inter-ethnic difficulties present in the region, given the prevailing economic and social asymmetries between the local indigenous people and Afro-descendants, economic (in some cases parental) and religious ties are common.

6 *Bozal* literature is understood as the samples of the speech of black *bozales* (slaves recently arrived from Africa, who barely spoke Spanish) pictured in the Spanish literature of the Golden Age and in the colonial literature of Latin America (Lipski 1986d; Diaz-Campos 2014; Jones 2019). In this vein, Jones (2019) in his book entitled *Staging Habla de Negros: Radical Performances of the African Diaspora in Early Modern Spain* points out that the *habla de negros* cannot be theorized without a close reading of the term “bozal”, saying that: “Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in their essay ‘What Is a Minor Literature’ argue: ‘Each language always implies a deterritorialization of the mouth, the tongue, and the teeth.’ Paradoxically, early modern Spanish constructions of Africanized Castilian fragment and rupture the black body, precisely indicating the ‘deterritorialization of the mouth, the tongue, and the teeth’ to which Deleuze and Guattari refer. *Habla de negros* or *habla bozal* depicts how illiterate black slaves might enunciate, pronounce, and speak Castilian incorrectly. Originally, the word ‘bozal’ meant ‘savage’ or ‘untamed horse,’ ultimately referring to the Portuguese and Castilian spoken by black slaves. The ‘bozal’ is also a muzzle: the device employed to censure, silence, and tame humans’ words and to also prevent animals from barking and biting. Africans labeled as ‘bozales’ were viewed as newcomers to the Iberian world in general, unacquainted with its social and cultural practices. As the category’s use rapidly declined on the Iberian Peninsula, due to shrinking black populations, the term did, however, continue to circulate in the Anglophone slave vernacular and Spanish Caribbean colonies —primarily in Cuba— well into the twentieth century, circulating in Blackface *teatro bufo* performances and private religious celebratory gatherings called *cajón de muerto* from the Congolese-centered Palo Mayombe religious-spiritual traditions ... My reading of bozal embodies a somatic-linguistic relationship based on the definition of the lexicographer Covarrubias, who defines ‘bozal’ as: ‘el negro que no sabe otra lengua que la suya; y la lengua, o lenguaje se llama labio, y los labios bezos; de boca, boza, y de allí bozal’. Covarrubias’s entry reveals Spain’s somatic

speech patterns of African slaves with a great tendency to exaggerate, stereotype and create distortions of “non-white” Spanish (Lipski 1986b, 2005; Zimmermann 2012). In the words of Lipski (1986b: 73, 75):

Dada la escasez de dialectos criollos afrohispanicos en la actualidad, para investigar los contactos lingüísticos entre esclavos negros y colonos españoles, es necesario recurrir a los pequeños núcleos dialectales que manifiestan vestigios del lenguaje acriollado de antaño, y sobre todo a la documentación literaria y folklórica de los siglos pasados ... es preciso examinar las primeras indicaciones del habla bozal española y portuguesa, que aparecen en documentos literarios de los siglos XVI y XVII, casi siempre con el fin de parodiar el habla de esclavos y sirvientes africanos, representados como bufones o charlatanes.

Although an interesting and somewhat helpful tool for the historical reconstruction of Afro-Hispanic varieties, this *Bozal* literature does not reflect the contemporary speech and sociolinguistic reality of many Afro-Hispanic communities of Latin America. However, remarkably in the last years, several linguistic studies have been carried out providing interesting and important data on the current speech of the African descent communities in the Americas. Along with a robust literature on the Afro-Hispanic varieties in the Caribbean (Puerto Rico, Cuba, and the Dominican Republic), also noteworthy are the more recent works on Afro-Hispanic varieties in the Mainland: Afro-Peruvian Spanish (Sessarego 2015; Gutiérrez Maté 2018), Afro-Ecuadorian Spanish (Sessarego 2013a, 2014a; Schwegler 1999, 2014; Lipski 2009), Afro-Bolivian Spanish (Sessarego 2014b, 2013b; Lipski 2008), Afro-Venezuelan Spanish (Díaz-Campos & Clements 2008, 2005; Megenney 1999; Álvarez & Obediente 1998), Afro-Colombian Spanish (Lipski 2020; Sessarego 2019; Schwegler 1999), Afro-Panamamanian Spanish (Lipski 2005, 1989), Afro-Costa Rican Spanish (Bell 2019; Pizarro Chacón & Fallas Domian 2014; Pizarro Chacón & Cordero Badilla 2015; Herzfeld 2001, 1995) among others. These academic works not only focus on the formation and evolution of these Afro-Hispanic dialects spoken in the Americas; but some of them also offer historical, socio-economic and demographical data on the black population of these Afro-Hispanic enclaves during the colonial period. They also provide a detailed analysis of their linguistic characteristics, adding to the long-lasting debate on the creolized or non-creolized state of these Afro-Hispanic language varieties.

and cultural fixation on big African lips. The trope of big (African) lips recurs in countless sixteenth- and seventeenth- century Spanish archival, poetic, prosaic, and theatrical works” (Jones 2019: Chapter 1).

The present study contributes to this linguistic arena by describing in a qualitative manner the current speech of two Afro-Mexican communities, Collantes and Santa María de la Luz Chicometepepec, locally known as La Boquilla, situated in the Costa Chica region of Oaxaca, and it is based on data collected *in situ*.

In the study of any Afro-Hispanic variety, it is necessary to consider the following three aspects: 1) What is a *creole* and how does it originate; 2) Why is there a scarcity of Spanish-based derived creoles in the Americas; 3) To what extent could an Afro-Hispanic variety be considered a remnant of a *creole* stage.

Keeping in mind the above three aspects, Chapter 2 of the present study offers a discussion of some of the most representative theoretical perspectives that have marked current research on creole genesis, such as: a) the Continuum Model (Hall 1962) that proposes a three-stage ‘life-cycle’ in which a creole designates the second stage; b) the Language Bioprogram Hypothesis (Bickerton 1981) which establishes that creoles originate from universal psychological or physiological laws, and not from the influence of substrate languages; c) the Theory of Relexification (Lefebvre 1998) that suggests that a creole is a product of three main structural processes: relexification, reanalysis and dialect leveling; d) the Approximation Theory (Chaudenson 2001) that considers creoles to be the result of a sociolinguistic change based on a centripetal continuum of language approximations marked by restructuring ‘marginal’ varieties (i.e. basilectal varieties) moving toward their autonomy in a new linguistic system (i.e. a creole); e) the Complementary Theory (Mufwene 2001) which postulates that creole evolution is triggered by a restructuring process of competition-and-selection favoring some linguistic features and disfavoring others in the communicative acts among speakers; f) the Afrogenesis Hypothesis (McWhorter 2000) —a theory derived from the Monogenesis Model first outlined by Lenz (1926)⁷—

7 The first systematic study dedicated to a Spanish-based creole language (Papiamentu) was carried out by Rodolfo Lenz (1926) — who in turn based his study on Schuchardt’s (1882) first observations of the Portuguese linguistic features in Papiamentu (Jacob 2012: 18). Lenz’s monograph entitled *El Papiamiento, la lengua criolla de Curazao (la gramática más sencilla)* —first published in the *Annals of the University of Chile* in 1926-1927 and one year later as a book (1928)—, correctly identifies Papiamentu as a Creole language derived from an Afro-Portuguese-based creole of West Africa. He describes Papiamentu as “el criollo negro-portugués traído por los esclavos ... La fuerte modulación melodiosa (que es característica para muchas lenguas de negros) le da un tono mui expresivo sentimental que falta en el holandés y el español” (705-706). Lenz’s (1928) analysis of Papiamentu’s grammatical structure raised the question of the Afro-Portuguese genesis of the Creoles, outlining, *avant la lettre*, the subsequent theories of monogenesis and relexification, and unwittingly unleashing the well-known controversy of monogenesis vs. polygenesis, by stating that: “La semilla portuguesa (el vocablo) cae en terreno africano (el modo de pensar i hablar de las lenguas negras) i nace un árbol (la jerga negro-portuguesa a la cual tienen que acomodarse todos los negros transportados en buques portugueses). Según la lengua europea que prevalece en el lugar de destino, en este tronco negro-portugués se hacen injertos españoles, franceses, ingleses y

establishes that the Caribbean and Indian Ocean creoles are derived from *pidgins* developed in West African slave stations and settlements rather than in the colonial plantations during the trade period; g) the Neurobiological Hypothesis (Zimmermann 2006) explains the genesis and evolution of Creole languages from linguistic constructs that take place in the brain of each individual, in which processes of selection and addition occur, as well as new creations. These individual constructions are verified explicitly or implicitly through a process called *viabilization* that becomes interactive and intersubjective when people socialize, allowing to explain not only the existence of idiolects, but also groups of idiolects (i.e. creole languages and dialects); and the h) Legal Hypothesis of Creole Genesis (Sessarego 2017) which points out a legal factor of colonial slavery that sets up apart the territories ruled by the Spanish Crown from other European powers: the presence versus the absence of slaves' legal personality. This legal factor precluded the formation of Spanish-based creoles in the Americas.

Chapter 2 also comments on the scarcity of Spanish-based creoles in the Americas based on criteria from Chaudenson (2001), McWhorter (2000), Lipski (2005), and Sessarego (2018). For Chaudenson (2001), creolization failed to occur in the Spanish colonies due to the following causes: Hispanicization, evangelization, education, black-white demographic disproportion, and a prolonged homestead society period. McWhorter (2000), on the other hand, asserts that Papiamentu and Palenquero are considered synchronically, but not diachronically, to be Spanish-based creoles. Lipski (2005) argues that the creole features found in Afro-Caribbean Spanish are not traces of an extinct Spanish creole but are the result of linguistic encounters with established Caribbean creoles in the area. Sessarego (2018), on the other hand, sustains that the paucity of genuine Spanish-based creoles is due, in great part, to the presence of legal personality among the Slave population in the Spanish colonies.

Finally, Chapter 2, based on the philosophical concept of the *rhizome* (Deleuze and Guattari 1987), proposes a rhizomatic model to interpret data derived from linguistic contact situations according to the following rhizomatic linguistic principles:

holandeses. Solo estas ramas injertadas se cultivan, pero la savia que los alimenta guarda sus caracteres del suelo africano en la articulación y en el modo de pensar (la gramática)" (Lenz, 1928: 80). According to Lenz (1926, 1928), the Afro-Portuguese transplanted to the ABC Netherlands Antilles suffered, especially at the beginning of the 19th century, a strong process of decreolization and Hispanicization.

Principles of the Linguistic Rhizome

- A language variety/creole is not derived from one unique linguistic root.
- There is not a single homogenous linguistic community.

Chapter 3 is divided into two parts. The first focuses on the qualitative methodology used in this study supported by the following fieldwork methods: participant-observation, open-ended oral interviews, recordings, transcription and fieldnotes (written notes, mental notes, drawings, maps, photographs and video recordings). The second part offers historical observations on the African presence in Mexico along with a socio-historical reconstruction of the two communities under study, Collantes and La Boquilla, due to a lack of written records.

Chapter 4 is devoted to the phonetic and phonological traits that characterize the speech of these two Afro-Mexican communities, henceforth *Costeño*, trying to maintain and respect the way the people of this region identify themselves. In general, Costeño Spanish exhibits the following phonological processes that are also found in many other Afro-Hispanic language varieties: a) vocalic, consonantal and syllabic reductions; b) vowel variation; c) epenthesis; d) consonantal substitution; e) weakness/deletion of the segment /d/ in intervocalic and word-final position; f) variable behavior of the segment /s/ especially in word-final position ranging from strong to weak realizations; g) occasional liquid mutation; f) invariable realization of the voiced palatal fricative /y/; and g) word-final nasal velarization.

In addition, Costeño Spanish presents a labialized phone [h^w], an allophonic variant of /f/ (i.e. *oficio* /ofisyo/ > [o.h^wí.syo] ‘occupation’, *café* /kafé/ > [ka.h^wé] ‘coffee’, *familia* /familya/ > [h^wa.mí.λya]), which I claim in this study is rooted in West African languages.

The high frequency of the segment /č/ in approximately 35.98% of the Costeño lexicon from different linguistic sources that are not heard outside of the Costa Chica region of Mexico is also remarkable as the following words illustrate: *chacalmaca* [ča.kal.má.ka] ‘a special type of net’, *chambalé* [čam.ba.lé] ‘mosquito’, *pachiche* [pa.čí.če] ‘creaseless’, *chacalín* [ča.kalín] ‘river shrimp’, *chimeco* [či.mé.ko] ‘dirty face’, *chincualear* [činj.kwa.λyár], ‘to be happy’, and so on.

Chapter 5 is divided into two parts. The first part accounts for the morphological characteristics of Costeño Spanish. The most significant of these morphological traits that have also been attested in other Afro-Hispanic varieties are the following: a) unmarked infinitives; b) deletion of the plural marker in different contexts; c) double plural endings; d) gender instability; and e) post-verbal redundant subject pronouns. These are all morphological traits that Costeño shares with other Spanish varieties worldwide. The second part of Chapter 5 presents syntactic characteristics of Costeño. Among these syntactic traits, it is important

to highlight those considered commonplace in Afro-Hispanic modalities such as a) the deletion of articles and common prepositions; b) the sporadic loss of copula; and c) negation-related variation. In particular, Costeño exhibits the following two types: 1) reduplication of the negative *no* (i.e. *No desprecio yo mi saber no* ‘I do not dismiss my knowledge’) and 2) the co-occurrence of the negative sentential *no* with the negative-indefinite expression *nadie* ‘nobody’ in preverbal position (i.e. *Nadien no la oyó* ‘Nobody heard her’).

Chapter 6 discusses the lexical composition of Costeño which exhibits words from various languages, a fact that reinforces its rhizomatic linguistic nature. Among the local indigenous languages that have contributed to shape the Costeño lexicon, since the beginning of its formation, the influence of coastal Mixtec, Chatino and, into a lesser extent, Amuzgo and Nahuatl is remarkable. The latter was probably brought through Nahuatl speakers who, at times, come down from the Mountain or from communities of Tierra Caliente (in the State of Guerrero) to the Costa Chica of Oaxaca to carry out commercial activities (Ortiz Álvarez 2005; Matías Alonso and Medina Lima 1995). In addition, historically, the presence of Nahuatl speakers in the area has been documented. In this regard, Dehouve (2002) argues:

En la Costa Chica, eran “mexicanos” cuatro pueblos (Nexpa, Cuauhtepic, Xalapa y Copalitech), y en la Costa Grande se encontraban dos: Coyuca y Citlala. En la parte oriental del estado, los códices, particularmente numerosos, nos proporcionan un cuadro cronológico que va del 1300 al 1565: del 1300 al 1461, hubo un periodo de convivencia entre los tlapanecos, los mixtecos y los nahuas. La dominación mexicana se inició hacia 1461 durante el gobierno de Moctezuma Ilhuicamina, señor de Tenochtitlán, concluyendo en 1522, después de la llegada de los españoles (37-39)⁸.

Apart from the local-indigenous languages influence in the lexicon, as any other Afro-Hispanic variety, Costeño exhibits African lexical remnants as well as Spanish words formerly used but now out of use in contemporary Mexican Spanish. In addition, it is important to underline the Philippine lexical contribution, mainly from Tagalog. Also, to a lesser extent, Chilean Spanish, along with other lexical sources of unknown origin, have influenced the lexicon of Costeño Spanish.

8 ‘On the Costa Chica there were four Mexican towns (Nexpa, Cuauhtepic, Xalapa and Copalitech), and on the Costa Grande there were two: Coyuca and Citlala. In the eastern part of the state, numerous codices provide us with a chronological table that goes from 1300 to 1565. Between 1300 and 1461, there was a period of coexistence among the Tlapanecos, the Mixtecos and the Nahuas. Mexica domination began around 1461 during the government of Moctezuma Ilhuicamina, Lord of Tenochtitlan, concluding in 1522, after the Spanish arrival (37-39).’ [All translations provided in footnotes are my own].

The aforementioned language sources have coexisted in the target region at different periods of time and have contributed to build up the current Costeño lexicon by giving to it a singular and regional air that is not found in any other part of Mexico.

The present study not only accounts for the Afro-Hispanic linguistic remnants in Costeño Spanish but also for the endangerment situation that current Costeño speech and culture face. The constant emigration from these rural communities either to the larger cities of Mexico or to the United States has dramatically affected traditional life in those communities as well as the status of language in the region. This situation together with the increase of globalization in the last decades, socioeconomic absorption, linguistic forces to adapt standard variety of Mexican Spanish, natural disasters, drug trafficking, and public insecurity in the region confirms our hypothesis that Costeño Spanish is in danger of extinction.