

Maurer, Philippe (2009) *Principense (Lung'le). Grammar, Texts, and Vocabulary of the Afro-Portuguese Creole of the Island of Príncipe, Gulf of Guinea*. London: Battlebridge Publications. Pp. viii + 280.

Reviewed by Angela Bartens

The book under review is a comprehensive description of the highly endangered Portuguese-lexifier creole of Príncipe – henceforth Principense –, formerly a Portuguese colony and since 1975 part of the independent Republic of São Tomé and Príncipe. So far, scholars have essentially had to rely on Günther (1973) for information on Principense. Maurer's monograph turns it into one of the best described creoles, especially when considering the size of the speech community which has less than a hundred speakers, a core group being constituted by elderly women. The language is under siege by Portuguese and Sãotomense or Forro, the main creole of the sister island São Tomé. The author attributes the obsolescence of the language to several factors (pp. 3–4). Firstly, a sleeping sickness epidemic befell the island around 1900. According to the sources consulted by Günther (1973: 12–13), only approximately 300 inhabitants of Príncipe survived. By consequence, indentured laborers from Angola, Mozambique, and the Cape Verde Islands had to be imported. For three or four generations, Principense has no longer been passed on to younger people nor have efforts been made to give speakers of the Cape Verdean Creoles or other languages access to Principense. What we find thence is a territorially heterogeneous speech community of multilingual speakers whose main means of daily communication is no longer constituted by Principense. Their linguistic production features the influence of language contact to varying degrees and it seems that both linguistic and meta-linguistic competence is really fading as, for instance, Maurer's informants were able to indicate only a few lexical and morphological isoglosses which may reflect former dialectal variants (p. 4). Therefore the volume at hand is even more valuable to creolists and anyone interested in the vanishing manifestations of linguistic diversity in that particular region of the world – and beyond.

The book is organized as follows: a short introductory chapter (pp. 1–6) gives the reader basic information about the sociohistorical and sociolinguistic setting; it also introduces previous work on Principense as

well as the corpus and the way in which examples are presented. The description of the language structure is divided into phonology (pp. 7–28), morphosyntax (pp. 29–172), and “Miscellaneous” (pp. 173–178). This section which I will comment upon below is followed by an anthology of texts (pp. 179–220; the shorter texts are both glossed and translated, the longer ones only translated), a comprehensive Principense-English word list of 1650 entries (pp. 211–244), and a shorter one into the reverse direction (pp. 245–256). The original Principense story “The mouth that says good things also says bad things” has been translated into the two other creole languages spoken in the Republic of São Tomé and Príncipe, Lung’Ie and Lunga Ngola, in order to give the reader an idea of the similarities as well as the differences between these languages. This task is facilitated by a comparative word list. The parallel texts plus the comparative word list constitute Appendix I (pp. 257–260) whereas Appendix II (pp. 261–274) is constituted by a critical edition of Ribeiro (1888), the first known grammar of Principense. The inclusion of this critical edition as well as the fact that several audio files of materials presented in the book can be freely downloaded from the editorial’s website (www.battlebridge.com/books/maurer/audio_files.html) greatly enhance this work which is, as I have already pointed out, extremely valuable for its description of the language structure of Principense. The volume also contains a table of contents (pp. iii–iv), acknowledgements (p. v), a list of references (pp. 275–276), and an index (pp. 277–280).

After commenting briefly on some aspects of the descriptions of the phonological system and the morphosyntax of Principense, I shall devote the remainder of this review to the chapter dealing with “miscellaneous” language features. For example, Maurer presents a new analysis of the tonal system of Principense, arguing that the language has two tones (H, L) with sequences of tones but no contour tones (p. 14–26). The phonological status of nasal vowels and implosive and labiovelar stops appears to be unclear as far as the present phonological system is concerned (cf. pp. 8–9), suggesting that some information on the original language structure may have been lost for good. Likewise, the validator *na* (pp. 67–68) was not identified by Günther (1973), the main previous scholarly work. Whereas Günther’s observations on sentence-final particles (1973: 171) formulated in a telegraphic style attribute clear functions to each of them, Maurer’s description of their use reveals significant overlap (pp. 169–170). It might be hypothesized that this be, at least in part, due to linguistic insecurity in the speakers. On the other hand, it becomes quite clear from the examples

given, for instance, for the use of *ê*, that the functions of vocative, interrogative and validating *ê* are actually interrelated.

As for the features listed by Maurer as miscellaneous, two phenomena strike me as particularly worthy of commenting. Firstly, the author discusses reduplication, identifying the following functions: intensification, indefiniteness, and distributiveness (with numerals). Reduplication is also involved in the substrate-driven formation of numeral plurals as exemplified by *dexi dexi kumin dôsu* ‘ten ten place two = twenty’ and *sen sen kumin têêxi* ‘hundred hundred place three = three hundred’ (p. 174). As for the second phenomenon, Maurer observes that in two (and only two – nevertheless, there may be others not present in his data) cases, “the partial or complete reduplication has the effect of changing the syntactic category.” The examples he gives, *kêtê* ‘small’ vs. *kêtê-kêtê* ‘little by little’ and *moli* ‘soft’ vs. *moli-moli* ‘slowly’, actually reflect Euro-centric divisions into word classes which are frequently not retained in creole languages – nor do they exist cross-linguistically (cf. Haspelmath 2007). Ladhams et al. (2003: 173) find that Principense patterns with its main substrate Edo in using reduplication to express intensification and distributiveness. In the terminology used by Bartens (2004: 239, 241, 244), this language also reduplicates nouns to express accumulation and verbs to express duration.¹ Indeed, for instance Maurer’s example (1250) of intensifying reduplication, *Mene sa udêntu matu a vya vya...* ‘Mene was in the forest turning around...’ (p. 174), actually conveys the duration of the action of turning around. By consequence, we have to conclude that the categories adopted for the classification of linguistic phenomena may have quite far-reaching effects on their subsequent analyses. The category of ‘indefiniteness’, also present in the taxonomy of Bartens (2004) as ‘indeterminacy’, was not identified in the Principense materials scrutinized for that study. It is interesting to note that all the reduplicated elements in Maurer’s category ‘indefiniteness’ are nouns which alone or modified by the determiner *ki* ‘what’ function as interrogative pronouns: *kumin* ‘place’ vs. *kumin kumin* ‘wherever’, *kwa* ‘thing’ vs. *kwa kwa* ‘some’, *modi*

¹ Ladhams et al. (2003: 167) state with regard to “intensive noun reduplication” that “[w]e use the term ‘intensive’ here to refer, first, to noun reduplication with a cumulative effect.” The possibility of reduplication expressing the duration of a verbal action in both Lunga Ngola and Lung’le is likewise mentioned in Ladhams et al. (2003: 169), in both cases based on Maurer’s data. Neither observation is repeated in the volume under review.

‘manner’ vs. *modi modi* ‘be it as it were’, *ningê* ‘person’ vs. *ningê ningê* ‘whoever; whomever’ (pp. 45, 174).

Whereas ideophones are usually described as items which prototypically modify only one lexical item (cf. Westermann 1907: 83), Maurer shows in his list of ideophones (p. 176) that some ideophones actually modify two (or more) items. His observation according to which “[i]t seems that ideophones that modify adjectives which refer to permanent states [...] are more likely to occur without the modified word” is a hypothesis intuitively worth exploring in other creoles as well. This hypothesis also allows for the postulate of ideophones occurring without (overtly) modifying another lexeme (cf. Bartens 2000: 42).

Summarizing, Maurer’s work is a valuable resource for creolists and other scholars and a landmark in the study of creoles in general and the Portuguese-lexifier creoles of the Gulf of Guinea in particular.

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