

**Some methodological issues regarding the participation of African languages in
Brazilian Portuguese**

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It is well known that Brazilian Portuguese (BP) exhibits several grammatical characteristics that distinguish it from European Portuguese (EP). Can some of these differences be attributed to the contact that Portuguese had with African languages?

Many attempts have been made to answer this question. In this paper, we suggest a new path for the investigation and approach the question from a different methodological perspective. If African languages have indeed had any participation in the grammar of BP, this influence is not related to direct borrowings of construction patterns from one particular African language. The idea we want to explore is that, in the course of the historical development of Brazilian Portuguese, because of the social and cultural influence of the Africans who were brought to Brazil, there has been a change in the way Brazilians conceptualize events and situations, such that the language had to adapt to this new way, giving rise to some structural differences between the Brazilian and the European varieties of Portuguese.

Paixão (2008)'s analysis of the argument structure of verbs and their projection in Portuguese texts of the 16th and 17th centuries shows three prototypical sentential features of this period: 1) non-agentive object topics in the left periphery of the sentence; 2) agentive arguments in subject position; 3) a strong preference for null subjects.

Our claim is that the general pattern of event conceptualization was reinterpreted because of contact pressures of languages such as Kimbundu, in which the dislocation of the topic to the left periphery of the sentence resembles the constructions of Classical Portuguese, with the difference that in Kimbundu the absence of the agent subject involves impersonalization. This will be considered a case of partial congruence of structural features (Mufwene, 2008), which we claim is in the origin of very productive constructions of BP.