INTRODUCTION

The study of language contact is intrinsically multidisciplinary, as it implies the movement of people and of ideas within a specific historical setting. The site of language contact is obviously in the heads of multilingual speakers of all ages who consciously or unconsciously change and adapt these languages in various degrees, from almost imperceptible structural changes to drastic reorganizations. In order to understand or explain to some degree of detail how languages are affected, what choices these multilingual speakers have made and why and how this is correlated to the observable outcome, we need to understand the sociological, historical, cultural, political, economic, even geographical background, against which sophisticated analyses of the syntax, phonology, lexicon, pragmatic structure etc. can be conducted. The articles published in this special volume answer to different facets of the issues introduced above, presenting fresh and innovative data and discussions from a wide range of perspectives, research topics and geographical settings.

The historical background of transatlantic language contact, the topic of this special volume, is the flow of goods and people who have crossed the Atlantic Ocean (and spilled into the Indian and Pacific Oceans) between the 15th century and now. Thousands of ships have carried millions of refugees, merchants of all trades, soldiers, slaves, colonists, administrators, and professionals of all kinds between Europe, Africa and the Americas to create highly dynamic scenarios of unprecedented contacts of peoples, languages and cultural practices of all sorts. These fluxes have influenced and changed the languages of the three continents, pushing some to extinction, changing others, or even creating new idioms against a backdrop of enormous complexity involving genocides, forced labour, plantation slavery, sedentary colonization, and piracy. The continental scale of these processes, involving millions of persons, hundreds of languages, social models, religious systems, technical abilities, and everything else that was brought across the ocean, poses a problem in itself for the interested scholar for the sheer amount of data involved and not all of it easily available. One way to cope with the overabundance of detail is to focus on linguistic facts and devise sweeping theories that focus on macrostructures. As the Haitian historian Michel-Rolph Trouillot dryly remarks, this has been the way the mainstream of 20th century research on Creole languages has gone. In his own words: "From an epistemological and methodological viewpoint, the striking similarity between these theories is their exclusiveness. Their adherents, past and present, right or wrong, tend to be virulently monocausal" (TROUILLOT, 2006, p. 11).

According to Trouillot, the contact theories, labelled by him as creolistic, in their exclusivity tend to filter all information through the lens of a single model that is supposedly able to "explain everything the same way at the same time" (TROUILLOT, 2006, p. 11).

The insistence that all contact effects can be satisfactorily explained through imperfect acquisition, or relexification, or any other grand theory led to bitter debates on almost all issues involved, but also to fascinating studies and a whole range of hypotheses. Interestingly, Trouillot insinuates that the situation in the historical and social sciences, when it comes to transatlantic contact, is even more dire than in the linguistic sciences: a general unwillingness to confront transatlantic history, the distorting effect of Eurocentric bias and a lack of reliable data on micro settings etc. are immense obstacles in the way of interested scholars. The situation has improved in the first decades of the 21st century, with linguistics assuming a more interdisciplinary outlook, a renewed interest in the social aspects of language and a willingness across disciplines to confront racism and ethnocentrism deeply embedded in scientific paradigms.

As researchers interested in transatlantic language contact, we need to understand the linguistic structures and processes that are the outcome of the transatlantic populational contacts, we also need to take into consideration the sociopolitical and historical background against which the contact happened and the choices that moved speakers to use language the way they did and the specific skills and abilities they brought along with them. Especially when it comes to Africans or their descendants elsewhere in the transatlantic space, the issues of agency, of identity, of strategies of physical and cultural survival, the ways they consciously built new societies out of the wrecks of their old lives, are still insufficiently explored, and considered, but neither do we know much about the strategic choices of Europeans or Amerindians involved in the situation. Research on multilingualism in Africa or precolonial America, on the rhetoric and pragmatic features of African and American languages, is still incipient and we know even less on how these persons navigated the highly multilingual settings of the transatlantic era based on their previous conceptions of language, their multilingual behaviour and their social needs and experiences.

The description and documentation of African and American languages, as well as New World varieties of European languages and the more heavily restructured so-called Creole languages has rapidly advanced, although many gaps in terms of still undescribed languages and little understood phenomena and areas of research, need to be filled still. The research on historic and socioeconomic aspects of the transatlantic era is also gaining steam, and the results are being incorporated into linguistic analyses.

Excellent archival research is revealing more and more detail about all aspects of life in macro and micro-settings across Africa, Europe and the Americas, allowing us to pinpoint more exactly which populations with which characteristics and linguistic skills entered into contact under which circumstances and power relations, allowing us to correlate linguistic and historical data in sophisticated ways.

Several contributions in this special volume cooperate to this endeavour with papers on various aspects contributing to our understanding of language contact in the transatlantic geographic and cultural space, including the Caribbean, South America and various parts of Africa. Thematically the papers present and discuss phonological, morphological and syntactic data from diachronic and synchronic perspectives, discuss issues of sociolinguistic relevance as well as issues of identity and transatlantic dynamics.

Three of the contributions present inedited aspects of transatlantic varieties of Portuguese, as spoken in São Tome, Guinea Bissau, Angola and Brazil. In the first article, *Concordância de gênero em Português: aproximações entre variedades africanas e afro-brasileiras* (Gender agreement in Portuguese: Approximations between African and Afro-Brazilian varieties), Ana Lívia Agostinho, Luana Lamberti e Eduardo Ferreira dos Santos present a comparative study of gender agreement in three Portuguese varieties spoken in Africa: The Angolan regional variety of Portuguese spoken in the Libolo Municipality, the Portuguese of São Tomé and Príncipe and the Brazilian variety of Portuguese spoken in the community of Helvécia in the State of Bahia. Based on published data on these varieties and data collected in the field, the authors conclude that the shared patterns of non-standard gender agreement can be attributed to contact with African languages. It is also suggested that similar social contexts can lead to similar linguistic outcomes.

In the second article, *Português Guineense e Português Europeu: um estudo preliminar sobre a percepção das suas diferenças entoacionais* (Guinean Portuguese and European Portuguese: A preliminary study on the perception of their intonational differences), Gabriela Braga, Sónia Frota e Flaviane Romani Fernandes-Svartman, share results from a pilot study of intonational features of Guinea Bissau Portuguese (GBP), one of the first analyses of intonation in African varieties of Portuguese and one of very few projects dedicated to GBP. Based on the prosodic data gained collected through experimental designs and correlated with facts of sociohistorical nature, the authors affirmed that GBP is intonationally different from European Standard Portuguese as spoken in Lisbon, the written standard used in Guinea Bissau. One of the conclusions of the study, which also compares the prosodic patterns found in Guinea Bissau to the equivalent patterns in European and Brazilian Portuguese, defines GBP as "a variety of Portuguese in development and not a wrongly spoken European variety".

In the third article, *O uso variável de artigo definido diante de pronome possessivo na variedade urbana do Português de São Tomé* (Variation in the use of the definite article before possessive pronouns in urban varieties of the Portuguese spoken in São Tomé), Danielle Kely Gomes and Livia Rodrigues Cordeiro provide an analysis of the use of the definite article in combination with possessive pronouns in the urban variety of São Tomé. Based methodologically on the Theory of Variation, the authors conclude that, in this variety of Portuguese, the presence of the definite article is productive. Its absence can be explained through syntactic conditions, types of possession and social factors such as schooling. The authors state that, contrary to the initial hypothesis, the observed variations in the use of the article in possessive constructions are not relatable to contact influences from the local language Forro.

The fourth contribution to this volume sheds light on the coexistence of Portuguese and Kimbundu spoken in the beginning of the 20th century in the Libolo region of Angola, where they are spoken until today. The Ambundu people, installed themselves and their language Kimbundu in the area from the 16th century on. Through a team effort, combining research on the lexicon morphosyntax and philology (critical editing) as well as history, the fourth article, *Análise comentada do manuscrito "Guia de conversação portuguesa para uso dos libolos", do padre Renato Robert* (Commented analysis of the manuscript "Portuguese conversation guide for the Libolos" by Father Renato Robert), Carlos Filipe Guimarães Figueiredo, Margarida Maria Taddoni Petter e Vanessa Martins do Monte give a detailed account of the first grammatical and lexical description of the Kimbundu of Libolo in Robert's (1923) manuscript. The description of the soon to be published manuscript focusses on the main characteristics of the text and its importance as historical evidence of two languages in contact spoken in Libolo: the local variety of Kimbundu and Portuguese.

In the fifth article, *O conceito de língua geral de Mina: apontamentos para a compreensão de seu significado histórico* (The concept of Língua Geral de Mina: Notes for a comprehension of its historical significance), Ivana Stolze Lima analyses the manuscript of Antonio da Costa Peixoto (1731 and 1741) from a perspective that units historical research and historical linguistic considerations. The author introduces the inclusive linguistic and cultural concept of Gbe, that allows to group various populations in an extensive multilingual area as speakers of closely related Gbe languages. From a transdisciplinary point of view, Ivana Stolze Lima zooms in on Gbe-speakers categorized by the Portuguese as mina or "of the Mina language" (or Jeje in the Bahian context). The author claims that the label of "língua geral de Mina" (LGM), as a political and cognitive category should not lead us to the conclusion that the linguistic practices of the West African Mina Coast correspond to a specific language. In the context of Peixoto's manuscript, this means

that the manuscript cannot be "representative of the totality of the established Gbe-communities, among themselves or including speakers of Portuguese and potentially other languages in the first decades of the 18th century in Minas Gerais".

In *A sintaxe da língua geral de Mina no contexto da sintaxe das línguas gbe: problematizando hipóteses de reestruturação* (The syntax of the Língua Geral de Mina in the context of Gbe syntax: A critical discussion of hypotheses of restructuring), article 6 of the volume, Wellington Santos da Silva pursues a different direction from Ivana Stolze Lima in his analysis of the *Obra nova da língua geral de Mina* by Antonio da Costa Peixoto (1731 and 1741), further enriching the readers' knowledge of an African language spoken in Brazil. Wellington Silva discusses various proposals made by previous authors, who have argued that the *língua geral* is a restructured variety of an African language, affected by processes of pidginization or creolization – a position that Silva ultimately rejects. Silva proposes, based on syntactic analyses, that the *língua geral* shares many traits and similarities with other Gbe languages, both from a diachronic and a synchronic perspective.

In article 7, *Predicational encoding in Upper Guinea linguistic area* (Codificação predicacional na área linguística da Alta Guiné), Chiara Truppi centers her analysis on the predicational encoding in the Creole languages of the Upper Guinea Coast (UGC) spoken in Cape-Verde, Guine-Bissau and Casamance. These languages exist in an intensely multilingual region and in contact with languages of two different genetic families, the Mande and Atlantic languages of the Niger-Congo phylum, and other languages spread through more recent colonial or cultural contact like French, Portuguese, English and Arabic. Truppi presents three criteria which characterize the copula constructions in UGCs: 1) distinction between nominal and locative predication; 2) non-verbal predication; 3) predications without copula. The comparisons between data, from the various UGCs and the languages they have been in contact during or after their formation, allows to evaluate the influences these various languages have had on the development of the predicational systems of the Creole languages.

The two papers that close this thematic edition discuss social and linguistic issues tied to questions of identity. The first one on the patterns of language maintenance and language shift of an ethnic minority using the Veneto language in the community of São Bento de Urânia in the Brazilian state of Espírito Santo. The second one addresses identity-based interrelationships of cultural and linguistic nature between populations of Jamaica and parts of Africa.

In article 8, *O sentimento de identidade e a manutenção/substituição linguística: o caso do vêneto em São Bento de Urânia, Espírito Santo* (Feelings of identity and language

maintenance and shift: The case of Veneto in São Bento de Urânia, Espírito Santo Espírito Santo), Katiusica Sartori Silva Cominotti and Edenize Ponzo Peres analyse processes of language shift within the district of São Bento de Urânia, in the town of Alfredo Chaves. The region has been heavily settled by migrants from the Italian Veneto region. The authors affirm that linguistic attitudes are a fundamental aspect in explaining linguistic behaviour and choices of individuals and whole language communities, which can lead to either the maintenance or extinction of the minority language. Cominotti and Peres conclude that the feelings of identity attached to the Veneto variety are favourable, although the language is rapidly losing domains to the Portuguese language, heavily present in the community. The participants of the study express positive attitudes towards the Veneto variety used in São Bento and are in favour of its maintenance within their community.

In *From Africa to Jamaica and back: The Atlantic as a dynamic linguistic contact zone* (Da África à Jamaica e vice-versa: o Atlântico como zona de contato linguístico e dinâmico), article 9 of this volume, Andrea Hollington discusses linguistic, cultural and ʹidentarian links between Jamaica and Africa from a dynamic point of view. Multidirectional information flows manifest as African cultural and linguistic heritage in Jamaica, but these same traits reflect to Africa through the global diffusion of Jamaican music and culture. The author uses these examples to point out that the transatlantic linguistic dynamics are both more multidimensional and more conscious than most publications on the language contact scenarios resulting from transatlantic trade and slavery suggest.

As linguists working on issues related to transatlantic language contacts, we sincerely hope that these nine contributions of this thematic edition of the *Revista do GEL* will stimulate dynamic and productive reflections not only on linguistic structures and processes, which are certainly dear and relevant to all of us, but also on the sociopolitical and historical processes that affect the speakers and their languages in contact.

Alexander Cobbinah[1]
Carlos Filipe Guimarães Figueiredo[2]
Márcia Santos Duarte de Oliveira[3]
(The Organizers)

1 Universidade de São Paulo (USP), São Paulo, São Paulo, Brasil; cobbinah@usp.br; https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6399-5488

2 University of Macau (UM), Macau, China; carlosgf@um.edu.mo; https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2416-0060

3 Universidade de São Paulo (USP), São Paulo, São Paulo, Brasil; marcia.oliveira@usp.br; https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4495-9489

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