

CAPE VERDEAN CREOLE: LINGUISTIC CHANGE, ORTHOGRAPHIC POLITICS, AND EDUCATIONAL CHALLENGES

O CRIOULO CABO-VERDIANO: MUDANÇA LINGUÍSTICA, POLÍTICAS ORTOGRÁFICAS E DESAFIOS EDUCACIONAIS

EL CRIOLLO CABOVERDIANO: CAMBIO LINGÜÍSTICO, POLÍTICAS ORTOGRÁFICAS Y DESAFÍOS EDUCATIVOS

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ABSTRACT: This study examines Cape Verdean Creole (CVC) through contact linguistics, phonology, and language policy frameworks. Based on 2014 fieldwork and literature review, it traces CVC's evolution from a 15th-century Portuguese-lexified variety to a pluricentric language with nine dialects shaped by geographic and sociolinguistic factors. Phonological changes include loss of [dʒ] in favor of [ʒ], nasal diphthong development, and syllabic simplification. The sociopolitical dynamics surrounding ALUPEC orthography highlight tensions between linguistic unity and dialectal variation. Field observations reveal Brazilian cultural influence and policy challenges, such as Creole's marginalization in education despite its broad vernacular use. Findings problematize traditional creolization models, proposing "strategic hybridization" as a framework to understand CVC's selective feature adoption. The study emphasizes the urgency of inclusive language policies that recognize Creole as a full language, balancing standardization with dialectal diversity to reinforce linguistic equity and national identity.

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Keywords: Cape Verdean Creole. Linguistic identity. Bilingual education. Language policy; Dialectal diversity.

RESUMO: Este estudo analisa o crioulo cabo-verdiano (CVC) por meio de linguística de contato, fonologia e política linguística. Com base em trabalho de campo de 2014 e revisão bibliográfica, traça a evolução do CVC desde sua origem no século XV como variedade lexificada pelo português até se consolidar como língua pluricêntrica com nove dialetos, moldados por fatores geográficos e sociolinguísticos. Mudanças fonológicas incluem perda do [dʒ] em favor de [ʒ], desenvolvimento de ditongos nasais e simplificação silábica. A dinâmica sociopolítica em torno da ortografia ALUPEC evidencia tensões entre unidade linguística e variação dialetal. Observações de campo indicam influência cultural brasileira e desafios educacionais, com o crioulo marginalizado apesar do uso amplo. Os achados questionam modelos tradicionais de crioulação, propondo "hibridização estratégica" para explicar a adoção seletiva de traços. O estudo destaca a urgência de políticas inclusivas que reconheçam o crioulo como língua completa, conciliando padronização e diversidade para promover equidade linguística e identidade nacional.

Palavras-chave: Crioulo Cabo-verdiano. Identidade linguística. Educação bilíngue. Políticas linguísticas. Diversidade dialetal.

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RESUMEN: Este estudio analiza el criollo caboverdiano (CVC) desde las perspectivas de la lingüística de contacto, la fonología y la política lingüística. Basado en trabajo de campo de 2014 y revisión bibliográfica, rastrea la evolución del CVC desde su origen en el siglo XV como variedad lexificada por el portugués hasta convertirse en una lengua pluricéntrica con nueve dialectos, influenciada por factores geográficos y sociolingüísticos. El cambio fonológico incluye la pérdida de [dʒ] en favor de [ʒ], el desarrollo de diptongos nasales y la simplificación silábica. La dinámica sociopolítica en torno a la ortografía ALUPEC refleja tensiones entre la unidad lingüística y la variación dialectal. Observaciones de campo revelan influencias culturales brasileñas y desafíos en la política educativa, con el criollo marginalizado pese a su uso amplio. Los resultados cuestionan modelos tradicionales de criollización, proponiendo una “hibridación estratégica” para explicar la adopción selectiva de rasgos. El estudio subraya la necesidad de políticas inclusivas que reconozcan el criollo como lengua completa, equilibrando estandarización y diversidad dialectal para fortalecer la equidad lingüística y la identidad nacional.

Palabras clave: Criollo Caboverdiano. Identidad lingüística. Educación bilingüe. Política lingüística. Diversidad dialectal.

INTRODUCTION

This investigation analyzes Cape Verdean Creole (CVC) through an integrated framework combining contact linguistics, phonological theory, and language policy. Based on 2014 fieldwork data, it traces the evolution of CVC from its 15th-century emergence as a Portuguese-lexified contact variety (Holm, 2000) to its status as a pluricentric language with nine mutually intelligible dialects, shaped by the Barlavento-Sotavento divide. CVC's present sociolinguistic profile reflects ongoing lexicosemantic erosion and diglossic marginalization, as Portuguese continues to dominate formal domains despite CVC being the L1 of 95% of the population (Veiga 2004; Quint 2000).

Phonological changes in CVC reflect systematic restructuring shaped by contact, substrate influence, and internal evolution. Documented changes include consistent simplification of syllable codas—such as intervocalic consonant reduction and coda /l/ resyllabification—as found in both Santiago and São Vicente varieties. Emerging nasalization patterns align with a contrast between oral and nasal vowels, though fully developed nasal diphthongs remain rare. Variation in affrication is attested; the voiced palatal affricate /dʒ/ persists in many lects, and wholesale substitution by [ʒ] is not consistently evidenced across dialects (Baptista, 2015; Lang et al., 2023; Michaelis et al., 2013).

Drawing on these phonological patterns, this study also examines the sociopolitical dynamics of orthographic codification, particularly in relation to The

Unified Alphabet for Cape Verdean (ALUPEC; Cabo Verde, 2005) and its reception among speakers. The analysis considers how ideological stances on language standardization intersect with linguistic variation, reflecting broader tensions between unity and diversity in postcolonial language planning.

GEOGRAPHICAL AND HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS OF CAPE VERDEAN CREOLE

The Cape Verdean archipelago, 570 km west of Senegal, is a volcanic island chain whose geography shaped linguistic microvariation. The ten main islands, marked by rugged terrain and aridity, developed distinct phonological substrates between windward (Barlavento) and leeward (Sotavento) groups due to settlement and trade patterns (Seibert, 2014; Laurent et al., 2023; Lobo; Furtado, 2023).

Santiago Island, location of the capital Praia, was the main center for early creole formation, preserving hydronymic evidence of L1 transfer through Portuguese toponyms such as Ribeira Grande, where /ʁ/ shifted to [R] (Carvalho, 2009). This geolinguistic division created a nasal vowel harmony isogloss with stronger nasalization in coastal than interior varieties (Baptista, 2002). Portuguese colonization began in 1462, triggering a three-phase koinéization shaping the linguistic landscape (Seibert, 2014, Veiga, 2004).

The Founder Principle phase (1460–1500) involved phonological reduction, consonant cluster simplification (/ʃtʁ/ → [st] in *estrago* → *stragu*), and grammaticalization of TMA particles (*ta* < *estar*). The Trade Network phase (1500–1700) added Mandinka lexical borrowings (~12% core vocabulary) via Guinea-Bissau trade (Andrade, 1996; Holm, 2000), and prosodic leveling that caused the stress-to-tone shift in northern islands like Santo Antão. Post-independence saw diglossic stratification and hypercorrections in palatal fricatives (e.g., *jenti* [ʒẽ'ti] replacing *genti* [dʒẽ'ti]) (Quint, 2000; Veiga, 2004; Michaelis et al., 2013).

Post-1975 political evolution reinforced phonological prestige hierarchies, with elites favoring Portuguese phonotactics in formal speech. This politicized orthographic

debates, notably ALUPEC's ⟨x⟩ = [ʃ] versus dialectal [ks], symbols of broader cultural identity conflicts (Cabo Vede, 2005; Michaelis et al., 2013; Rodrigues, 2015).

Cape Verdean cultural identity involves metalinguistic negotiations. Since the 19th century, literature uses orthographic markers like ⟨nh⟩ = [ɲ], preserving L2 Portuguese influence while asserting vernacular authenticity. Performing arts such as *morna* use glottal stop insertion ([kɔ'raʔsõ]) as cultural phonological markers. Diaspora communities, e.g., Boston, display phonological shifts like /u/-fronting ([u] → [ʊ]), evidencing ongoing contact effects (Quint, 2000; Veiga, 2004; Michaelis et al., 2013).

These developments question assumptions in creole formation. Geographic isolation alongside linguistic homogeneity indicates trade networks stabilized supralocal features like TMA while preserving microvariation. Syntax analyses attribute 38% to Portuguese, 52% to West African substrates, and 10% to innovations (Baptista, 2015), challenging monogenetic models. Orthographic disputes over ALUPEC reflect tensions between etymological preservation (⟨x⟩) and dialectal phonology ([ks]) in vernacular speech (Veiga, 2004; Michaelis, 2013; Baptista, 2015).

LINGUISTIC STRUCTURE

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Cape Verdean Creole (CVC) exemplifies systematic phonological and morphosyntactic restructuring under prolonged language contact. Originating from 15th-century contact between Portuguese colonizers and West African populations, CVC evolved through stages of structural reconfiguration influenced by both superstrate and substrate elements.

PHONOLOGICAL FEATURES

CVC exhibits consistent phonological changes driven by markedness reduction, substrate transfer, and universal constraints (Veiga, 2004; Michaelis, 2013; Baptista, 2015):

- Vowel reduction: Unstressed vowel deletion (e.g., Portuguese /e.'sko.lɐ/ → CVC /'sko.la/), often accompanied by nasal harmony.
- Consonant cluster simplification: Reduction of complex consonant clusters to

simpler onsets, consistent with the Sonority Sequencing Principle (e.g., /ʃtr/ → [st] as in *estrango* → ['stragu] → ['stagu]).

- Palatalization variation: Portuguese /ʎ/ realized as [j] in Sotavento and [ʒ] in Barlavento varieties.

MORPHOSYNTACTIC FEATURES

CVC grammar reflects deep restructuring and reanalysis of Portuguese input (Veiga, 2004; Michaelis, 2013; Baptista, 2015):

- *Auxiliary grammaticalization*: Portuguese auxiliaries (e.g., *ta* < *estar*, *sâ* < *ser*) refunctionalized within the TMA system.
- *Zero copula*: Omission of overt copular elements in equative constructions (e.g., *el profesor* 'he [is a] teacher').
- *Double negation*: Substrate-influenced negation patterns comparable to Mandinka.

DIALECTAL FEATURES

The archipelago's insular geography fostered nine dialects, traditionally divided into (Veiga, 2004; Michaelis, 2013; Baptista, 2015):

- *Barlavento*: Vowel raising (/ɔ/ → /o/) and increased nasalization.
- *Sotavento*: More conservative phonological traits resembling earlier Portuguese.

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LEXICAL FEATURES

Despite approximately 95% Portuguese-derived lexicon (Quint, 2000), *CVC displays significant semantic and structural shifts* (Veiga, 2004; Michaelis, 2013; Baptista, 2015):

- *Semantic reanalysis*: Portuguese words often acquire new meanings (e.g., *fala* 'speech' → 'language').
- *Hybrid compounding*: Words blend Portuguese and African morphemes (e.g., *badjuda* 'help').

THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

CVC challenges several foundational assumptions in creole linguistics, particularly regarding creolization models, morphological simplification, and language standardization. Evidence from specific varieties such as the Creole of Santo Antão suggests that prosodic complexity—particularly in stress and accentuation patterns—does not conform to traditional unidirectional models of creolization that assume a toneless, morphologically reduced pidgin as a precursor. Studies such as Rodrigues de Souza (2007) and Baptista (2014) document stress assignment rules and syllable structure in Santo Antão Creole, highlighting phonological systems that exhibit internal regularity and prosodic depth. These findings suggest that the assumption of a phonologically impoverished pidgin origin may not be adequate to explain the emergence of such features (Swolkien; Cobbinah, 2019).

CVC displays variable retention of inflectional morphology, notably the plural suffix *-s*, across its varieties. In São Vicente Creole, for example, the use of *-s* is influenced by syntactic and semantic factors such as animacy, definiteness, and specificity. The Atlas of Pidgin and Creole Language Structures documents this variability, showing that while the suffix is frequently omitted in certain contexts, it is systematically retained in others (Michaelis et al., 2013). Historical data from 19th-century texts, as well as contemporary sociolinguistic studies (Holm; Swolkien, 2006; Duarte, 1998), support the view that this morphological variation is a stable feature of the creole's grammar rather than evidence of decreolization or convergence with the Portuguese lexifier (Baptista, 2015).

Debates surrounding the orthographic standardization of CVC—especially regarding the implementation of the ALUPEC — reveal significant ideological tensions within the sociolinguistic landscape of Cape Verde. Although ALUPEC was officially recognized in 2005 as a unified phonemic writing system for the national language, its adoption remains partial and contested. Many speakers' express preference for etymologically motivated spellings closer to Portuguese, while others advocate for representations that align more transparently with local phonology. The permissiveness of ALUPEC, which allows for systematic variation across dialects, has intensified

debates about linguistic authenticity, educational policy, and identity (Baptista, 2014; Bartens; Sandström, 2008; Lang, 2012).

METHOD

This study employs an exploratory qualitative approach based on field observations and cultural immersion during a 2014 visit to Cape Verde (Dal'Ava, 2014), supplemented by a review of existing literature on CVC. Primary insights derive from informal conversations, public language use observations, and documentation of salient linguistic features in everyday contexts. Findings are indicative and exploratory rather than definitive.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Field observations and linguistic analysis reveal a complex interaction between language and identity in Cape Verde. In urban centers like Praia, Brazilian cultural influence appears through consumer practices and linguistic adaptations, where Portuguese loanwords undergo phonological reshaping to align with CVC patterns. This transculturation reflects active cultural negotiation rather than passive imitation (Sánchez Gibau, 2005).

The bilingual literacy initiative at Jean Piaget University exposes tensions in language policy. Despite Creole-Portuguese materials, instruction remains predominantly Portuguese, creating a paradox where literacy is acquired in a second language. This reflects broader national debates on ALUPEC, which struggles to reconcile phonological variation—such as Santiago's [dʒ] versus São Vicente's [ʒ]—with political aims of linguistic unity. Standardization tends to privilege certain dialects, marginalizing others.

Phonological data demonstrate CVC's evolution beyond mere Portuguese simplification. Consonant cluster reduction (/ʃtr/ → /st/, *estrago* → *stragu*) and vowel centralization follow linguistic principles of perceptual salience and articulatory economy. The occurrence of nasal vowel harmony across word boundaries in CVC

reflects phonological processes not derived from Portuguese. Such patterns are more consistent with substrate influences from West African languages and suggest strategic restructuring in the formation of the Creole, rather than a mere loss or simplification of Portuguese features (Baptista, 2015).

In education, structural challenges persist. Diaspora programs show progress in transitional CVC instruction, but domestic schools face teacher training deficits and assessments privileging Portuguese. Thus, CVC remains vibrant vernacularly but institutionally marginalized—a paradox requiring policy reform that recognizes Creole as a full linguistic system (Veiga, 1982, 2013).

CVC's development reflects neither linear decreolization nor isolation, but “strategic hybridization”, whereby linguistic features are selectively adopted to serve social functions. Language planning must thus balance systemic integrity with national identity. The tension between standardization and dialectal variation situates Cape Verde as a key case in postcolonial linguistic sovereignty debates.

CONCLUSION

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CVC embodies cultural resilience and sociolinguistic tension. Historical, phonological, and educational analyses highlight the need for inclusive policies recognizing Creole as a complete language, not merely a vernacular. Balancing standardization with dialectal diversity is essential for linguistic equity and national identity reinforcement.

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