

SUB-SAHARAN CULTURAL EXTENSIONS IN BRAZIL:
THE RELEVANCE OF LEXICAL DATA

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A method of obtaining lexical data pertinent to sub-Saharan African cultural extensions in Brazil is presented. The possible utility for linguists and historians of such lexical material is illustrated by data from one widely used current Brazilian dictionary.

0. Introduction

New insights concerning the nature of the 3.6 million Africans brought to Brazil during three centuries of slave trade [Curtin 1969] may be inferred from an analysis of the lexical items they contributed to Brazilian Portuguese. This paper illustrates the possible utility of such a lexical study, describing aspects of about 1500 meanings for which an origin in sub-Saharan Africa is claimed, found in a dictionary with over 100,000 headwords [Ferreira 1975]. This comprehensive and widely used dictionary is known as *Aurélio* in Brazil. If the information so obtained appears to fill a need, the method will be applied to a much more extensive and more representative list of similar items collected from a wide variety of sources.

The compilers of *Aurélio* do not list the authorities responsible for etyma given. When specific languages are named, it is nearly always "Kimbundu" for Bantu languages and "Yoruba" for West African. Lacking confidence in their specific language designations, I divided the many sub-Saharan languages brought to Brazil into two broad groups:

- (a) West African: Those languages of the western and southern portions of the so-called Sudan strip, corresponding roughly to the I.A.4 (Kwa) language group [Greenberg 1966].
- (b) Bantu: Essentially the Bantu as envisioned by Guthrie [1967]: a "narrow Bantu", which excludes some of the languages of Cameroon and Nigeria that

linguists with a genetic perspective would have included under this heading.

Classification into these two main groups should be relatively error-free, and at the same time lead to generalizations about two groups that could be of interest to linguists and historians.

Among the 1481 Brazilian meanings (not words) attributed to a sub-Saharan source, 529 can not be classified into these broad language groups since in *Aurélio*, they are listed as "African origin" only. The remaining 952 can be classified, and there is a twelve to one preponderance of Bantu items. Since a ratio of about four to one of Bantu to W. African speakers can be inferred from import data [Curtin 1969], this is a reminder that we are probably not dealing with a representative sample. We are demonstrating the kind of information that such a sample could provide, not presenting soundly based findings. When more complete data are available, inferences can be drawn and hypotheses subjected to test with some measure of confidence. We hope that historians, sociolinguists and other students of African cultural extensions in Brazil will be able to exploit these possibilities.

1. An Index of Cultural Presence: Distribution of Items by Region in Brazil

About 400 items taken from *Aurélio* are indicated to have specific areas of use in Brazil. We shall call these items "regionalisms" and classify them according to the state-defined areas shown in Fig. 1 (p. 226) and Table 1 (p. 225) which approximate the six different linguistic regions in Brazil [Cunha 1980: 32]. It is also possible to show the extent to which several states in each region account for most of the items in their region. Figure 2 (p. 227) shows, for instance, that sixty percent (.6), of all Northeastern items are in the state of Pernambuco; forty percent (.4) of all the Southern region's items are in the state of São Paulo. In the Bahian region, 97 percent are in the state of Bahia, implying three percent in the only other state in this region, Sergipe.

More than half of all the regionalisms are found in the Northeast and the Southern areas. The concentration in the Northeast is to be expected, since slaves employed on the extensive sugar cane plantations there would have been an important source of African borrowings.

Over one hundred regionalisms in the South seems high, though, since Brazil-

Table 1. Distribution of all Regionalisms

LINGUISTIC REGION	NUMBER OF ITEMS	PERCENT
1. AMAZONIAN	48	12%
2. NORTHEASTERN	117	30%
3. BAHIAN	76	19%
4. RIO COASTAL	28	7%
5. MINING	24	6%
6. SOUTHERN	<u>104</u>	<u>26%</u>
ALL REGIONS	397	100%

ian writers have commented that the influence of African languages there was minimal. There were twenty-five Africanisms in the southern-most state of Rio Grande do Sul alone. One Brazilian writer said it was certain that African slaves never did enter the state of Rio Grande do Sul [Raymundo 1936:55]. He attributed the dozen Africanisms he found there to indirect African influence. Since his lexical evidence included only one word which also appears in the *Aurélio* source, there is now much more lexical evidence on the subject than Raymundo had, and one becomes suspicious of his "no slaves" interpretation. By asking the opinion of the Brazilian historian, Nancy Naro, I was given a reference that documents the existence of about 70,000 slaves in Rio Grande do Sul, showing their distribution by type of work over a 50 year period [Cardoso 1977: 50]. This illustrates how lexical data can lead us to question assertions that might otherwise be accepted as fact.

1.1. Distribution by region: West African vs. Bantu influences. The relative importance of cultural extensions in Brazil by Bantu and West African language groups has long been a subject of debate. Dr. Raimundo Rodrigues was credited with an early pronouncement on the subject based on his anthropological studies in Bahia from 1890 to 1905:

"He [meaning Rodrigues] disproved the long accepted idea that the Bantu predominated among Brazilian Negroes by demonstrating the strong cultural presence of the Sudanese groups, particularly the Yoruba, in Bahia" [Burns 1970: 268].

His "disproof", however, did not settle the question. Holm and Oyedeji [1984] found it necessary to provide new lexical data to refute the still cur-

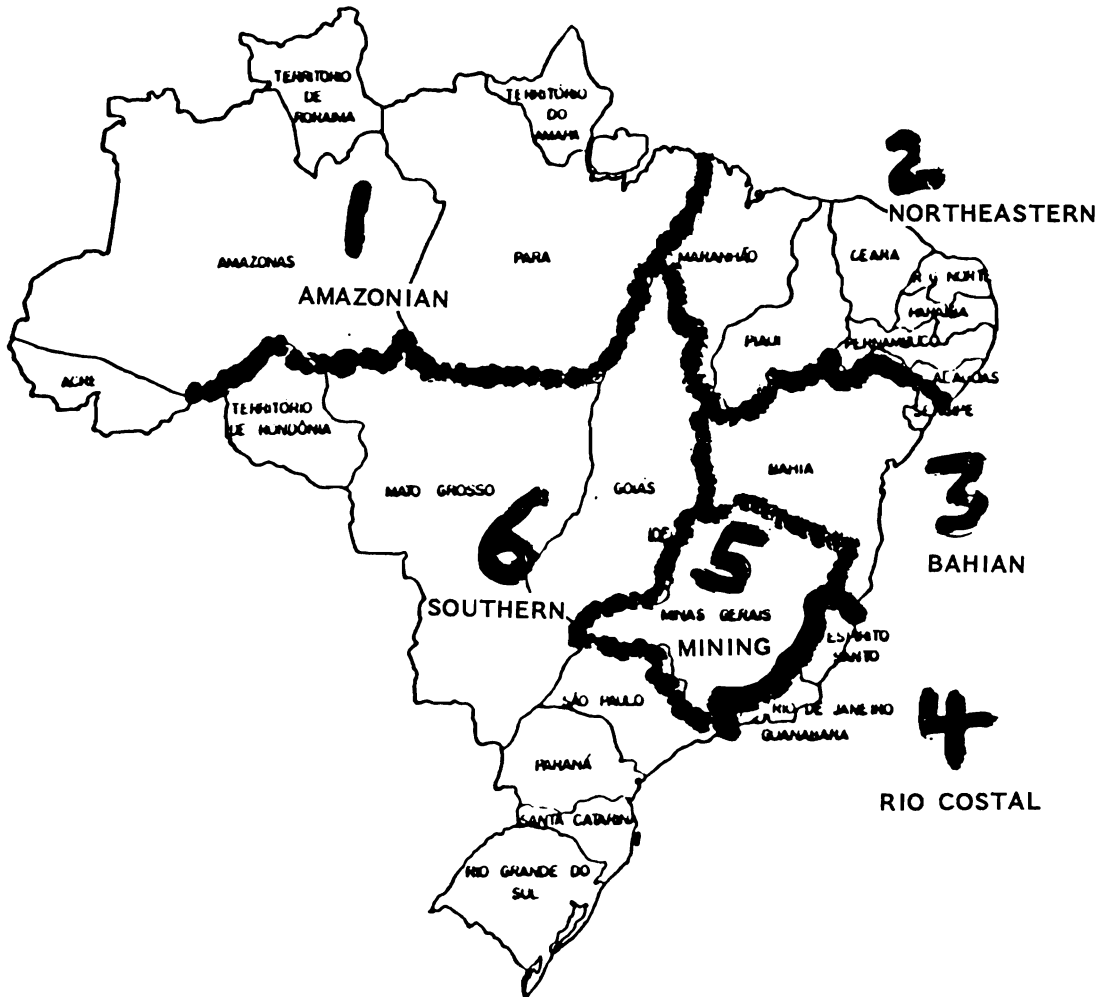
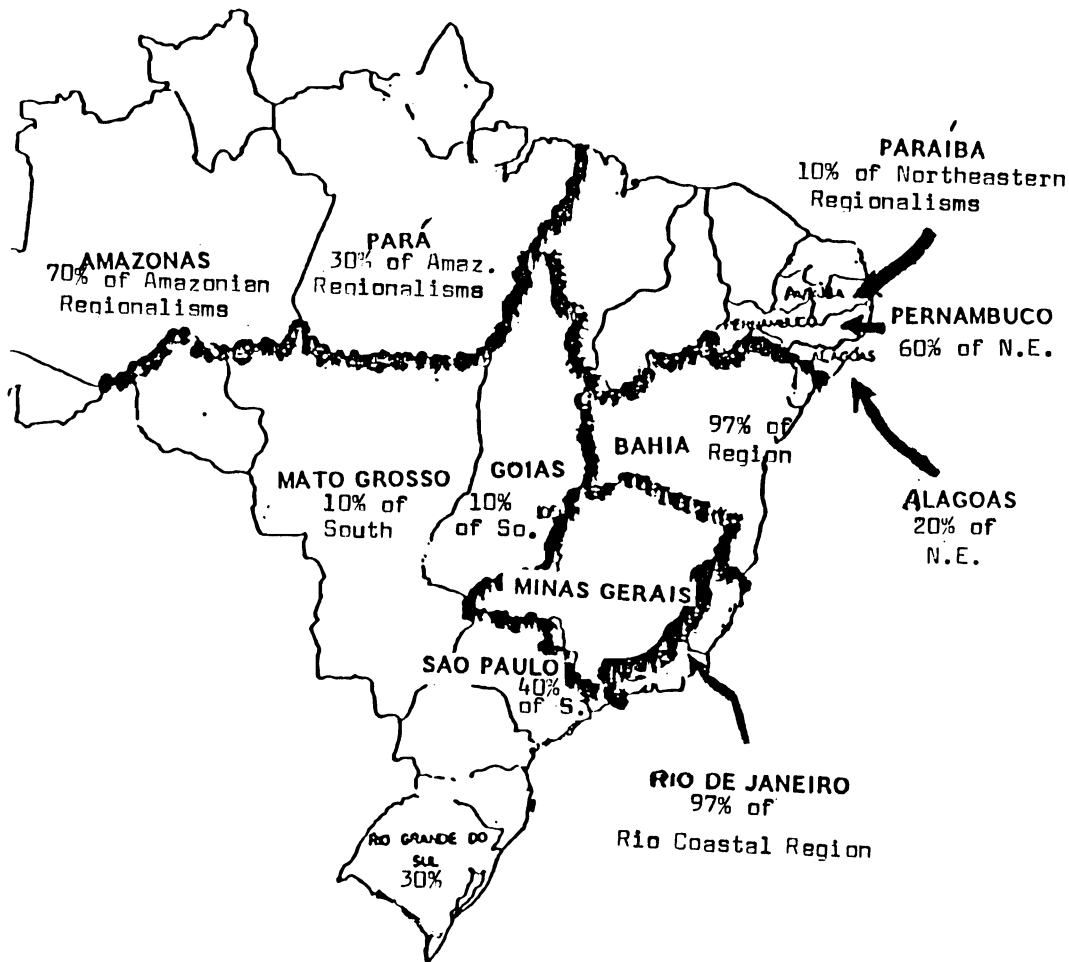
Figure 1. Approximation to Linguistic Areas Using State Boundaries

Figure 2. Location of Regionalisms Within Linguistic Areas

(States whose Items Total 90% or More of their Region)



rent idea that Yoruba (and West African languages in general) had no significant influence on New World languages. They presented forty-six Brazilian Portuguese words with Yoruba cognates.

Our lexical data can be arranged by region of use in Brazil and by provenance in Africa to shed further light on the "relative cultural presence" issue (Table 2).

Table 2. Regionalisms With Known Provenance Only

LINGUISTIC AREA	NUMBER OF ITEMS		WEST AFRICAN REGIONALISMS AS % OF REGION
	W. AFRICA	BANTU	
BAHIAN	20	16	56%
NORTHEASTERN	3	66	4%
RIO COASTAL	2	14	13%
AMAZONIAN	0	27	0%
MINING	0	12	0%
SOUTHERN	<u>0</u>	<u>60</u>	0%
TOTAL	25	195	

Using our previously defined concept of regionalism, we can count those of West African and of Bantu provenance in each linguistic area. Only in the Bahian area is there a majority of West African provenance, and the advantage there is slight. In only two other regions, the Rio Coastal and the Northeastern, are there any other West African regionalisms, and here they are only 13% and 4% of the total. Thus, if we were willing to use the percentage of regionalisms as a surrogate for "cultural presence", the conclusion based on the *Aurélio* data would be the following: only in the Bahian linguistic area is there evidence of a West African predominance, and there it is only marginally greater than the Bantu influence. Only in two other areas, the Northeast and the Rio Coastal, is there any evidence of this type indicating a West African presence, and it is relatively weak there. Using this measure, then, we find a strong predominance of the Bantu language speakers' cultural presence in every linguistic area in Brazil except the Bahian.

Inferences from the expanded word list (forthcoming) will be more soundly based on more representative and more adequate data, and will have the advantage of "date of first use" for some items, opening up the possibility of diachronic

speculations based on lexical data. Information will then be available for testing substrata theories. According to Bickerton [1981:49] these must obviously be based on a showing that "the necessary groups were in the necessary places at the necessary times", and some information on all these aspects will be available.

2. Distribution of Items by Semantic Category

A pragmatic classification of items into semantic groups led to about fifty different categories which were then summarized into the five major headings with three subgroups each as shown in Table 3a. Representative examples from each category are listed in Table 3b on the following page.

Table 3a. Distribution by Semantic Categories

		WEST AFRICAN (73 ITEMS)		BANTU LANG. (863 ITEMS)	
		COUNT	% of W.AF.	COUNT	% BANTU
ESSENTIALS	FOOD	13	18%	98	11%
	CLOTHING	0	0%	26	3%
	SHELTER	0	0%	35	4%
ATTRIBUTES	ANATOMY	1	1%	58	7%
	TEMPERAMENT	4	5%	138	16%
	ATTITUDE	1	1%	118	14%
KINSHIP AND CULTURE	RELIGION	35	48%	31	4%
	KINSHIP	3	4%	17	2%
	LANGUAGE	0	0%	6	1%
ACTIVITIES	PLAY	7	10%	86	10%
	WORK	4	5%	66	8%
	TUMULT	0	0%	45	5%
ENVIRONMENT	GEOGRAPHY	2	3%	33	4%
	FAUNA	2	3%	63	7%
	FLORA	1	1%	43	5%
TOTAL		73	100%	863	100%

Table 3b. Examples by Semantic Category

	BRAZILIAN TERMS WITH YORUBA COGNATES	BRAZILIAN TERMS WITH KIMBUNDU COGNATES
FOOD	acaça 'small cakes of ground white corn' akassa same meaning	quitute 'a tasty dish' kitutu 'indigestion'
CLOTHING	burucutu 'necklace made from small metal disks' burukutu 'sorghum seed'	assungar, sungar 'to pull up one's pants or skirt by the waistband' kussunga 'to pull'
SHELTER	cubata 'a shack where black slaves used to live' kubata 'to lie in agony' (Ewe)	zungu 'low class collective housing' nzangu 'noise'
ANATOMY		muxibento 'having loose and wrinkled skin' mu'shiba 'nerves, veins'
TEMPERA- MENT	fiota 'a dandy or dude' fiodua 'rich' (Ewe)	malambeiro 'one who likes to tell others his hard luck stories' lamba 'misfortune, disgrace, affliction'
ATTITUDE	virar exu 'to become furious' exu 'a spirit representing the forces of evil'	tambi 'a mournful and solemn state' tambi 'funeral'
RELIGION	grigri 'an amulet with verses of the Koran written on paper' grigri 'enchantment, sorcery'	Umbanda 'a cult with spiritist and Afro-Brazilian elements' umbanda 'magic'
KINSHIP	baba 'father or ancestor in the Yoruba religious cult' baba 'father'	gungunhana 'an individual of the black race' Gungunhana 'the last Gaza (Shanga- na) king in Mozambique from 1884 to 1895'
LANGUAGE		bundo 'incorrect manner of speak- ing' Ambundo 'group of people'
PLAY	aiê 'among the Yoruba, a New Year's festival' aie same meaning	papangu 'one who dresses in carnival costume'; Portuguese <i>papar</i> 'to eat' and <i>angu</i> 'gruel, a food associated with carnival' 'angu 'gruel'
WORK	alabe 'leader of a candomble musical group' alagbê same meaning	pombeiro 'a travelling merchant in the backlands of Brazil' pumbelo same meaning relative to Africa

TUMULT		moquear 'to assassinate', a popular term in São Paulo state. Possibly mu'keka 'to cut, quarter, carve' in Kimbundu may be a cognate.
GEOGRAPHY	ogó 'fool's gold; iron or copper pyrites which resemble gold' ogo 'money, riches'	canjica 'coarse sand or gravel' kanjika
FAUNA	Maria-nagô 'a fish whose body designs approximate those used by Yoruba speakers' nago 'Fon (Ewe) term for Yoruba'	calango 'a type of lizard' kalanga 'small lizard'
FLORA	atare 'pepper plant' atare same meaning	maxixeiro 'an African plant cultivated for its edible fruit' mashishi same meaning

Note: Meanings have been selected to represent items in different semantic categories. For many of the items cited, there are other, possibly better known meanings in other categories.

Some important West African and Bantu language differences taken from Table 3a are shown below:

RELIGION AND FOOD:	66% of all West African items 15% of all Bantu language items
TEMPERAMENT & ATTITUDE:	6% of all West African items 30% of all Bantu language items

"Temperament" refers to a person's nature as it controls the way he feels, thinks, and behaves; "attitude" refers to a more transient mental state. Such sharp differences in the lexical data from different language areas should be helpful to historians and sociologists in their attempt to reconstruct the complex pattern of African influences in Brazil.

The class "tumult" requires some explanation. All forty-five items in this category with an identified provenance were of Bantu origin. The category includes riots, disorders, and brawls, which may have accompanied dances of an African origin in Brazil. There are many instances of the same word representing both an African dance and a riot. One of these pairs is:

bangule(1) *n.m.* An African dance, accompanied by the cuica (a friction drum), hand clapping, stomping, and obscene songs.

bangule(2) *n.m.* A conflict involving many people.

Both of these are indicated to have an origin in the Bantu linguistic area. *Bagunça*, which may be related to these items, is not indicated by *Aurélio* to have an African origin. It is a popular Brazilian term, though, and may have an etymon in one of the Bantu languages. *Bagunça* was used by Carlos Eduardo Novaes, the Brazilian Art Buchwald. He reported that he returned to Brazil after a three-month stay in organized and disciplined Scandinavia "with a mania to plunge again into the national Brazilian confusion..." *Voltei louco para me reintegrar à bagunça nacional...* (*Jornal do Brasil*, 11 Oct., 1984).

2.1. Polysema. A tabulation of the degree to which a given African etymon led to two or more different senses in the Brazilian language shows the tendency of the Bantu-based borrowings to have grown more vigorously in the Brazilian setting (Table 4). The simplest measure of this type of growth is the percentage of all words of each language which took on multiple meanings in Brazil. While this was the case for less than 30% of all West African words, more than 50% of the Bantu-based words had two or more distinct senses in the Brazilian lexicon. This could simply be the result of the Bantu etyma entering the Brazilian milieu at an earlier date, as multiple meanings would be more likely after a longer period of time. Distribution of Bantu and West African items by date of first attestation in Brazil may be useful here when the more complete data is studied.

Table 4. Distribution by Number of Meanings Per Word

MEANINGS PER WORD	WORD COUNT	
	WEST AFRICAN	BANTU
ONE	37	259
TWO	12	184
THREE	1	41
FOUR	1	32
FIVE	0	7
SIX	1	6
SEVEN	0	4
EIGHT	0	3
TOTAL WORDS	52	536

3. Distribution of Items by Grammatical Class

About 80% of all *Aurélio* Africanisms are nouns, with the remaining items

about evenly distributed between adjectives and verbs (Table 5).

Table 5. Distribution by Grammatical Class by Provenance

	<u>% of 74 WEST AFRICAN ITEMS</u>	<u>% of 878 BANTU LANGUAGE ITEMS</u>	<u>% of all 1481 ITEMS-KNOWN & UNKNOWN PROVEN.</u>
NOUNS	93%	77%	81%
ADJECTIVES	3%	10%	10%
ADVERBS	0%	1/2%	<1/2%
VERBS	3%	12%	8%
INTERJECTIONS	<u>1%</u>	<u><1/2%</u>	<u><1/2%</u>
	100%	100%	100%

West African items are more highly concentrated, with 93% of them in the noun class, compared with 77% for Bantu-based items. One list of forty-six Brazilian Portuguese words reporting only items with Yoruban etyma contained 96% nouns [Holm and Oyedéji 1984:85-86]. Another showed 83% of the West African and 74% of the Bantu items were nouns among over two hundred Africanisms in the state of Bahia [Megenny 1978]. The higher percentage of nouns in the West African borrowings may be related to the importance of religious terms there. Many of the religious borrowings are names of deities, church functionaries, and religious objects. The Bantu borrowings, on the other hand, are more evenly spread through all semantic categories, and thus occur relatively more often as verbs, adjectives and adverbs.

3.1. Other grammatical features. The *Aurélio* data contained one hundred and three verbs, and every one of them was an -ar verb. All but two of these verbs were from a Bantu language, and most forms of Bantu verbs (including the infinitive) end in -a, which could account for this [Luiz I. Ferraz, personal communication]. This is not just a characteristic of African borrowings, however, as the -ar category is often mentioned as the only productive verb class. Borrowings into -er and -ir groups must be very rare in general.

Another feature of interest is the very large number of items from *Aurélio* that are masculine nouns or adjectives, and yet have the feminine ending -a. There were seventy-one nouns and adjectives derived from West African etyma,

and 14% of them were masculine items with the feminine ending -a . Among Bantu language nouns and adjectives, there were also 17% of this type. I found it interesting that a leading Brazilian grammarian, in his discussion of this phenomenon [Cunha 1980:207], listed twenty items with Greek etyma as examples. He also cited a dozen or so other examples in Brazil, without mentioning that it is also common among items borrowed from Africa.

4. Conclusion

This exploratory study indicates that lexical studies can provide a useful supplement to other linguistic tools of analysis. Used together with syntactic and phonological evidence, lexical studies should increase the probability of linking historical, social and linguistic data creatively.

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