António da Costa Peixoto's *Obra nova de língua geral de Mina* (1731/1741)

A print and online edition of a unique historical document on the Ewe-Fon-legacy in Brazil

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The Project

A critical edition of the original documents of António da Costa Peixoto's *Obra nova de língua geral de Mina,* based on two handwritten originals, a shorter version from 1731 (BNP, Lisbon, 3052, F. 2355) and an extended version from 1741 (BPE, Évora, CXVI/1-14)

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A digital **collaborative research platform,** applying the XML-standard TEI (Text Encoding Initiative), that allows the two manuscripts to serve both as *philological sources* and as a *glossary* with additional *multilingual translations* to modern Ewe, Fon, French, English and German, intended as a *diachronic linguistic database.*

Scientific Importance of the Document

Peixoto's glossary documents a variety of Ewe-Fon (Gbe sub-group of Kwa language family) spoken by slaves in the Brazilian gold mining town of Vila Rica in the 18th century. Peixoto called this variety *língua geral de Mina.* Presumably, it was a koiné version of Ewe-Fon varieties functioning as a local (resistance) vernacular among Africans in Brazil. The entries in Peixoto's glossary have already been linked to modern Fon (Castro 2002) and will be compared to modern Ewe in the project. The glossary is one of only two known historical documents bearing witness to the vitality of an African language during colonial rule and slavery. As a unique source on 18th century Ewe-Fon varieties spoken in the African diaspora of slave communities in Brazil, it is an unparalleled and immensely valuable source document for comparative and diachronic linguistic research.

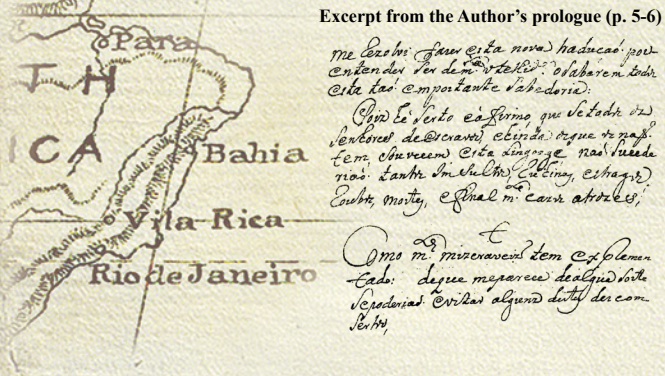
Document

The 42-page text (in the extended version from 1741) contains 899 lexical entries, more complex expressions and dialogues from different semantic domains of the gold trade and everyday life. Peixoto intended to publish the glossary, accompanied by a dedication, a prologue to the reader, and an *Advertência* at the end of the 11,5 x 11 cm booklet, as an additional source of income and prestige.

Author

António da Costa Peixoto was born in 1703 in Lamas, Entre-Douro-e-Minho, Northern Portugal and migrated to Brazil as a 12-year old in 1715. He is known to have lived in different settlements (the *freguesias* S. Bartolomeu, S. António da Casa Branca and N. Sra. de Nazaré da Cachoeira do Campo) around Vila Rica (today called Ouro Preto) in Minas Gerais, where he worked as a writing clerk and municipal judge (cf. Araujo 2013). The region Minas Gerais, the colonial centre for gold and diamond extraction, had over 70% African and Mestizo populations by the middle of the 18th century. The majority of slaves shipped to Brazil at the time were coming from Costa da Mina, and where therefore captured predominantly from Ewe-/Fon-speaking populations in the regions of today's Togo, Benin & Ghana. We know that Peixoto had frequent relationships with slaves, familiarizing him with the *Língua geral de Mina*, and that he was publicly scolded for sozializing with the African population in a letter sent to Vila Rica's city council by the inhabitants of S. Bartolomeu in 1741: *anda metido pellas tavernas com as negras e negros* (18/02/1741, quoted in Araujo 2013)
['He hangs out in taverns with black women and men']

Excerpt from the Author's prologue (p. 5-6)



Transcription

[…] me rezolvi fazer esta nova tradução por entender ser de m.ta otellid.e e saberem todos esta tão emportante sabedoria:
Pois hè serto e áfirmo, que se todos os senhores de escravos, e hinda os que os não tem, souvecem esta lingoage não sucederião tantos imsultos, ruhinas, estragos, roubos, mortes, e finalm.te cazos atrozes, [6] como m.tos mizeraveis tem exprementado: de que me parece de algũa sorte se poderião evitar alguns destes descomsertos, […]

Translation

[…] I decided to make this new translation because it is very important that everyone gets familiarized with this important knowledge:
For it is definitely certain that if all slaveholders, and also those who don't own slaves, knew this language, there wouldn't be so many insults, damages, destroyed possessions, robberies and murders and all these horrifying incidents [6] which so many miserable ones have suffered. It appears to me that, with some luck, some of these discomforting incidents could be avoided […]

State of Research & Aim of the Project

1) Editions from 1944 and 1945 are available in print with minor errors and some censured contents (pointed out in Fernandes 2012 and Araujo 2013)

Our objective:
- to contribute to the visibility of Peixoto's glossary through a new non-censored, commented, and **critical edition** of the original manuscripts in open access print form & as an **online glossary** embedded into a **collaborative research platform**

2) Existing publications on the manuscript are nearly exclusively published in Brazil & Portugal, in the Portuguese language

Our objectives:
- to make the manuscript known and more easily accessible to franco- and anglophone researchers interested in Ewe/Fon linguistics, especially from West-Africa,
- to bring researchers from West Africa, Europe and the Americas together in academic events in order to promote interdisciplinary academic exchange between currently unconnected research communities through digital humanities tools

3) A variety of dispersed publications on the subject

Our objectives:
- to assemble academic contributions (from linguistics, historiography, anthropology, cultural studies) about Peixoto's glossary
- to add to the discussion on the socio-linguistic texture of the Brazilian slave holder society, especially with regard to the maintenance and vernacular functions of African languages in the colonial mining communities
- to publish research results for a wider audience

Linguistic analysis of Entries from the Glossary

Use of N + masculine and feminine markers –si (fem.) and –su (masc.)

nhi si = vaca femea	nhi → nhi si = vaca	femea cattle → cattle female = cow
vgam si = porca femea	vgam si = porca femea	pig female = sow

Lexical compound formation

nhinósim = Leite	nhi nó sim = Leite	breast water = milk

(Peixoto 1741: 9, analyzed in Samla & Märzhäuser 2013)

Selected References

Araujo, Fernando (2013). "Fome do ouro e fama da obra. Antonio da Costa Peixoto e a 'Obra Nova de Lingoa Geral de Mina' – alianças, proximidades e distâncias de um escritor português no Brasil colonial do século XVIII", www.antropologia.com.br/arti/colab/a53-faraujo.pdf. | Castro, Yeda de Pessoa (2002). *A língua mina-jeje no Brasil: Um falar africano em Ouro Preto do século XVIII* . Belo Horizonte, Brazil: Fundação João Pinheiro; Secretaria de Estado da Cultura. | Fernandes, Gonçales (2012). "A Língua geral de Mina (1731/1741) de António da Costa Peixoto", https://repositorio.utad.pt. | Peixoto, António da Costa (1944). *Obra Nova de Lingua Geral de Mina.* Ed. by Luís Silveira. Lisboa: Agência Geral das Colónias. | Peixoto, António da Costa (1945). *Obra Nova de Língua Geral de Mina.* Ed. by Luís Silveira and commented by Edmundo Correia Lopes. Lisboa: Agência Geral das Colónias. | Petter, Margarida. (2001). "Africanismos no Português do Brasil". In: Eni Orlandi (Org.). *História das Idéias Lingüísticas: Construção do saber metalingüístico e constituição da Língua Nacional.* Campinas: Pontes, Cáceres: UNEMAT Editora, 223-234. | Petter, Margarida & Fiorin, José Luiz (Eds.) (2008). *África no Brasil: a formação da língua portuguesa.* São Paulo: Editora Contexto. | Rodrigues, Aryon Dall'Igna. (2003). "*Obra Nova da Língua Geral de Mina*: A língua Ewe nas Minas Gerais". *Papia* 13, 2003. 92-96. | Samla, Dzidula & Märzhäuser, Christina (2013). "Ewe-Fon in contact with Portuguese – new insights from Peixoto's '*Obra nova de Lingua Geral de Mina*'", Abstract for *5th. European Conference on African Studies* (ECAS), Lisbon.

Editions

The project will comprise an **open access print critical edition** in the **Bamberger Editionen** series which has a focus on commented editions of previously underrepresented historical texts from Romance language cultures

University of Bamberg Press

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a **multilingual online research platform** comprising
- a multilingual edition of the glossary with equivalents from modern Fon, Ewe, English, French and German TEI encoded edition of the source text with download option
- research data base with translations of key texts by selected scholars on Peixoto and his glossary
- option for peer-reviewed publications and discussion on the platform through
  a) an interactive **comment function** for the linguistic analysis of the glossary
  b) a database for linguistic, historical & cultural studies about Peixoto and related topics managed, published and long-time archived in the digital archive GAMS (*Geisteswissenschaftliches Asset Management System*) at the *Austrian Centre for Digital Humanities*, Graz.

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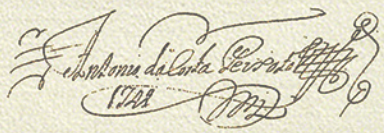

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