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**Review of MAURER Philippe, "Principense", London /  
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*Principense: Grammar, texts, and vocabulary of the Afro-Portuguese creole of the island of Príncipe, Gulf of Guinea*, Philippe Maurer. London/Colombo: Battlebridge. 2009. Paperback £24.95, US \$43.00. [To order electronically, visit <http://www.battlebridge.com>; in North America, the book is distributed by William, James & Co. <http://www.wmjasco.com>]

Reviewed by Nicolas Quint (LLACAN (UMR8135 — INaLCO / CNRS — France))

Principense is one of the four Gulf of Guinea Portuguese-based Creoles (GGPCs) — the other three being Sãotomense, Angolar, and Annobonese. Accurate, detailed descriptions for these island creoles are still scarce. Prior to the publication of this book, Günther's (1973) study — a serious but comparatively short work — was the main source of linguistic information on Principense. In the book under review, Maurer (M.) provides new, extensive and very welcome documentation on Principense. His publication is particularly timely because the number of surviving native speakers of this endangered language has dwindled to fewer than 50, most already in their sixties.

M. has authored several well-regarded earlier publications in the field of creole linguistics, in particular an in-depth study of the Papiamentu verb system (1988) and the only available description of Angolar (1995). He has excellent command of Portuguese (the main lexifier of all four GGPCs), and has been studying these creole languages for over twenty years. M. is thus highly qualified to produce an insightful description of Principense. As this review will make clear, *Principense* ranks among the very best descriptive studies of any Ibero-Romance-based Creole.

M.'s book begins with a short *Introduction* (1–6) about the language and its ecology (history, number of speakers, etc.), followed by a chapter on *Phonology* (7–28), which addresses in some detail the question of tones and their role in the language. The *Morphosyntax* chapter (29–172) constitutes the central part of the book: the principal parts of speech are analyzed in two sections: the *Noun Phrase* (29–66), and the *Verb Phrase* (67–140); this is followed by several shorter sections devoted to syntactic matters (simple and complex sentences, and so forth). Under the umbrella title *Miscellaneous features* (173–178), a short chapter gives information on interjections, onomatopoeias, reduplication and ideophones. There follows a selection of *Texts* (179–210), mainly folktales and songs, several of which are presented with useful interlinear glosses, thus providing three distinct levels:

(1) Principense, (2) morphological segmentation, and (3) English translation). A *Principense-English word list* (211–244, with 1650 entries), an *English-Principense word list* (245–274), two Appendices (a Principense folktale translated into both Sãotomense and Angolar for comparative purposes and a copy of Ribeiro's 1888 manuscript, historically the first grammatical sketch of Principense), a list of *References* (275–276), and a thematic *Index* (277–280) make up the rest of the book.

I will summarize briefly the principal qualities of the volume under review. First, this book achieves its aim as it provides a clear idea of the general nature and salient features of this language. Second, the data are always presented in a systematic, rigorous way: each feature discussed is carefully and adequately illustrated by a wealth of numbered examples (totalling 1274); in the chapter on tone, there are more than 50 diagrams showing the diverse tonal melodies of the language; and when dealing with Principense stative verbs, M. provides us with a complete list of these items from his corpus (72), thereby allowing readers to make fruitful comparisons with other creoles. Third, M. regularly refers to the work of his predecessors, and compares their analyses with his own findings (see references to Günther 1973 on pages 37, 50, 69, 106, 138, Ribeiro 1888 on pages 37, 87, 151, or Rougé 2004 on page 72). Fourth, this description also profits from unusually candid statements by the author, who has regularly worked with several native speakers (5) and consistently informs us of the cases for which acceptability judgments differ (cp. for instance 146, 155). Fifth, the linguistic data are original, well explained, and often stimulating. Particularly impressive are his presentation of serial verbs (107–118), the analysis of the complementary distribution of the two markers of verbal negation (*fa* and *na*, 133–139), and the discussion of the *êli*-focus constructions (142–144). Sixth, with regard to the texts, I applaud M.'s decision to reconstruct 'with the help of native speakers' (179) the unintelligible parts of the recordings and to supply Principense equivalents of the lusitanized passages (this helps to preserve as many genuine Principense structures as possible). Seventh, the Principense-English wordlist identifies many Portuguese and African etyma, enabling us to better understand the origins of Principense: the word *unwan* 'moon', which can be traced back both to old Portuguese *lũa* and to Igbo *onwa* 'moon, month' (p. 240), symbolizes particularly well the mixed Afro-European roots of the island's indigenous Creole. Lastly, the text contains very few typos or inconsistencies, and is well illustrated with pertinent photographs of M.'s informants and their physical environment.

Nevertheless, there are a few particular aspects of *Principense* which merit critical discussion. First, M. seems at times to superimpose the conceptual categories of European languages onto the Principense linguistic reality. For example, the choice of the label 'past participle' for the *-du* form of the verb (*fadu*, 'said' < *fa* 'to say') seems questionable, when it is apparent to me that the usage of this form

is essentially resultative (93–94).<sup>1</sup> I have the impression that M. introduces the notion of ‘past participle’ in Principense mainly because this form can be traced to the past participle of Portuguese, rather than for its intrinsic value. In a similar vein, when he says that ‘[in a Principense clause headed by the negated form of the verb *sêbê*, ‘to know’] it is not possible to differentiate between ‘whether’ and ‘that’ (135) I wonder whether such a formulation is not somewhat incongruous, as it (1) implicitly gives the impression that Principense does not fit a particular model (e.g. English) and (2) leaves unanswered the question whether other elements (e.g., context or prosody) may not allow speakers to make the distinction rendered by the *whether* vs. *that* contrast in English.

Second, M. (rightly) pays much attention to syntax. Since the corpus of spontaneous texts or sentences he gathered appears to be somewhat limited in size,<sup>2</sup> he frequently resorts to elicitations in order to test the acceptability of certain constructions (cp., for instance, his treatment of the complementizer *ya* in examples 1159a–b on page 162, where several supposedly synonymous pairs of sentences contrast only by the presence or absence of *ya*). I have no difficulty in believing that Principense speakers, when presented with such formally differing pairs, qualified them as having the same meaning or function; I am, however, less confident that the scrutiny of numerous spontaneous occurrences (assuming the corpus was large enough to provide them) would have confirmed such functional or semantic equivalence (see Quint 2008: 41–42 for the discussion of a similar case in Capeverdean).

My other comments are more limited in scope. As regards tonology, I have reservations concerning M.’s claim that ‘the scarcity of minimal [tonal] pairs is certainly due to the fact that the overwhelming majority of the Principense lexicon is of Portuguese origin, a language which is not tonal’ (p. 19). I am currently working on the description of Koalib, a Niger-Congo tone language spoken in Central Sudan. This language similarly features few minimal lexical pairs based on tone contrast (Quint 2006: 159), and the words that Koalib borrows from Arabic (a non-tonal language) are assigned various tonal schemes in Koalib. This indirectly suggests that the paucity of minimal tonal pairs in Principense is not necessarily linked to the Portuguese origin of its lexicon, or to the non-tonal nature of Portuguese.

Concerning the possessive pronouns (e.g. *ki mêt*, ‘mine’), I wonder if the *ki* element (see discussion on 38–39) could not be also partly derived from Principense

1. With the exception of the controversial use of *tê*, ‘to have’ + the *-du* form (90).

2. When reading the entire book, one is struck by the fact that many examples are used several times over (e.g. example 153 on page 40 is repeated on page 44 as example number 190), a fact that I interpret as indicative of the relative paucity of available material.

relativizer *ki*: thus *ki mê* might possibly be glossed as ‘which (is) mine’ (cp. ... *ki bôn fa*, REL + good + NEG, ‘... which (is/ are) not good (190)’ p. 44).

In the Principense-English word list, M. groups pairs of homophones with distinct etyma under a single entry (e.g. 231 *paga* ‘pay’ [< Pt. *pagar*] and ‘switch off’ [< Pt. *apagar*]). Such an arrangement may lead to confusion, and separate entries for each item would have been clearer. Various words in the texts are missing from the wordlist (e.g. *bolo-bolo*, 194, *bogotamyan*, 198). In a few cases, some plausible Portuguese etyma have been overlooked: e.g. *arê* ‘king’ (213) and *mwin* ‘to grate’ (229), which can be traced, respectively, to Pt. *el-rei* (a classical form which would resolve the question of the prothetic vowel discussed in fn. 2, 213) and *moer* ‘to grind’.

In the larger context of M.’s book, my critical remarks above are of minor relevance. This clearly is an excellent book, and major contribution to our field. As such, it will be invaluable to linguists, and especially meaningful to the Principense speech community.

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