

A DISTINCTIVE USE OF R AS A MARKER OF SANTOMEAN IDENTITY

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ABSTRACT. This paper examines the ideologies that surround the use of rhotics (or r-sounds) in the Santomean variety of Portuguese. This emerging variety spoken in São Tomé and Príncipe diverges from the European and Brazilian Portuguese norms and shows great variability in its use of rhotics. More specifically, Santomeans often use a strong-R in positions that require a weak-r in other Portuguese varieties (Bouchard, 2017). I argue that this distinctive use of rhotics is becoming a marker of Santomean national identity. Through the use of sociolinguistic interviews, I examine where this new variety of Portuguese is emerging from, and how Santomeans view their distinctive use of rhotics. Results demonstrated that the use of strong-R is associated with younger Santomeans who grew up after the independence of the country (in 1975), and who are starting to show pride in their national variety of Portuguese.

RÉSUMÉ. Cet article examine les idéologies entourant l'utilisation des sons R en portugais santoméen. La variété émergente de portugais parlée à São Tomé-et-Príncipe diverge de la norme brésilienne et européenne et fait preuve d'une grande variabilité quant à l'utilisation des sons R. Plus précisément, les Santoméens utilisent souvent le R-fort dans des positions qui exigent un r-faible dans d'autres variétés de portugais (Bouchard, 2017). Je considère que cette utilisation distincte des sons R est en train de devenir un trait caractéristique qui marque l'identité nationale santoméenne. Par l'entremise d'entrevues sociolinguistiques, j'examine l'origine de cette nouvelle variété de portugais et la vision des Santoméens vis-à-vis de leur utilisation des sons R. Les résultats montrent que l'utilisation du R-fort est associée aux jeunes santoméens nés après l'indépendance du pays (donc après 1975) et qui démontrent une plus grande fierté de leur variété nationale de portugais.

Keywords: *Language ideologies, rhotics, Santomean Portuguese, national identity, youth.*

INTRODUCTION: AN EMERGING VARIETY OF PORTUGUESE IN SÃO TOMÉ

São Tomé and Príncipe is characterized by its great linguistic diversity, and has been called a “labyrinth and laboratory of languages” (translated from Hagemeyer, forthcoming). During the sixteenth century, three native creoles formed on the islands: Forro, Angolar, and Lung’le.¹ According to Hagemeyer (in press), these creoles were the most widely spoken languages on the islands until the beginning of the twentieth century. The Portuguese language had been restricted to a small group of Portuguese nationals. This sociolinguistic picture changed at the end of the nineteenth century due to the massive arrival of contract laborers coming from different regions of Africa, causing Portuguese to become a lingua franca. Consequently, a linguistic shift from creoles to Portuguese emerged in São Tomé and Príncipe. This shift intensified in the 1960s with the rise of the nationalist movement, the generalized access to education, and the spread of the parental practice of forbidding children to speak creole. When the country became independent in 1975, Portuguese became a symbol of national unity and was more widespread in use.



Additionally, there were several other factors that contributed to disfavoring the use of the creoles on the islands: greater social mobility (related in part to Santomean immigration to Portugal), greater access to education and means of communication in Portuguese (e.g., television, Internet), and the absence of language politics in favor of the creoles. Currently, children are growing up with the local variety of Portuguese as their first (and often only) language. This emerging variety of Santomean Portuguese is central to the current study and provides an opportunity to investigate an emerging Portuguese variety in Africa, and the significance of language ideologies in the choice of language and in national identity.

One of the most salient variables that distinguishes Santomean Portuguese from other varieties of Portuguese is the use of rhotics (r-sounds). In European and Brazilian Portuguese, the distribution of rhotics is determined by syllable structure (Mateus & d'Andrade, 2000). The 'weak-r' [ɹ, r, Ø] is required when the rhotic is the second element in an onset consonant cluster (e.g., *branco* "white"). The 'strong-R' [r, R, x, ʁ, χ, ʁ, h, h̃] is required word-initially (e.g., *rato* "rat"), and, word-medially in syllable-initial position, if the preceding syllable ends with a coda consonant (e.g., *honrado* "honored"). In coda and word-final positions, these varieties of Portuguese have variable or optional realizations of rhotic variants. Intervocally, there is a phonemic contrast of rhotics, in words such as *carro* "car" and *caro* "expensive". This means that the use of the strong-R (*carro*) or the weak-r (*caro*) affects how the word is perceived by listeners, as it can lead to multiple meanings.

In contrast to this standard distribution of rhotics, some Santomeans pronounce a strong-R in phonetic environments that require a weak-r in other varieties of Portuguese. The following example compares the pronunciation in Santomean Portuguese (STP) to European Portuguese (EP):

STP: *tu és brasileira* (pronounced [bʁazileiʁe])?
 EP: *tu és brasileira* (pronounced [brezilejɾe])?
 ENG: you are Brazilian?
 'Are you Brazilian?'

The current paper focuses on the distinctive use of rhotics in Santomean Portuguese, the significance of the language change underway in São Tomé, and the ideologies that surround this change. The main objectives of this paper are to discuss linguistic differentiation (Irvine & Gal, 2000) in São Tomé, in a bid to show how the Santomean Portuguese variety has been erased from public discourse, and to examine how the use of the strong-R has become, and continues to be, a marker of belonging and national identity for young Santomeans.

Background

São Tomé and Príncipe stands out among other Portuguese-speaking African countries, as Portuguese is the first language of the great majority of the population. It is spoken by 98.4% of citizens (INE, 2012). It is the official language of the country, of the government, media, and school, and of everyday life.



Lorenzino (1996) was one of the first linguists to note that the Portuguese variety spoken in São Tomé and Príncipe varied from its target language, European Portuguese. Since then, few studies have looked at Santomean Portuguese. Most research on Santomean Portuguese is related to morphosyntactic and syntactic features (Figuereido, 2010; Gonçalves, 2012, 2015); whereas, research on the linguistic anthropology, sociolinguistics, phonetics, and phonology of the language variety are scarce (Brandão, 2016; Bouchard, 2017; Christofolletti, 2011).

Santomean Portuguese varies from Brazilian, European, and other African varieties of Portuguese, especially because of the influence of creoles (Afonso, 2009; d'Apresentação, 2013) and their distinctive use of rhotics. Previous studies from Bouchard (2016, 2017) indicate that this distinctive use of rhotics in Santomean Portuguese (i.e., the use of a strong-R in weak-r positions) is part of a linguistic change underway in São Tomé. Based on the apparent-time construct (Bailey et al., 1991; Bailey, 2004), Bouchard (2017) showed that younger Santomeans use strong-R the most (54.8%), and older Santomeans the least (5.9%) (Figure 1).

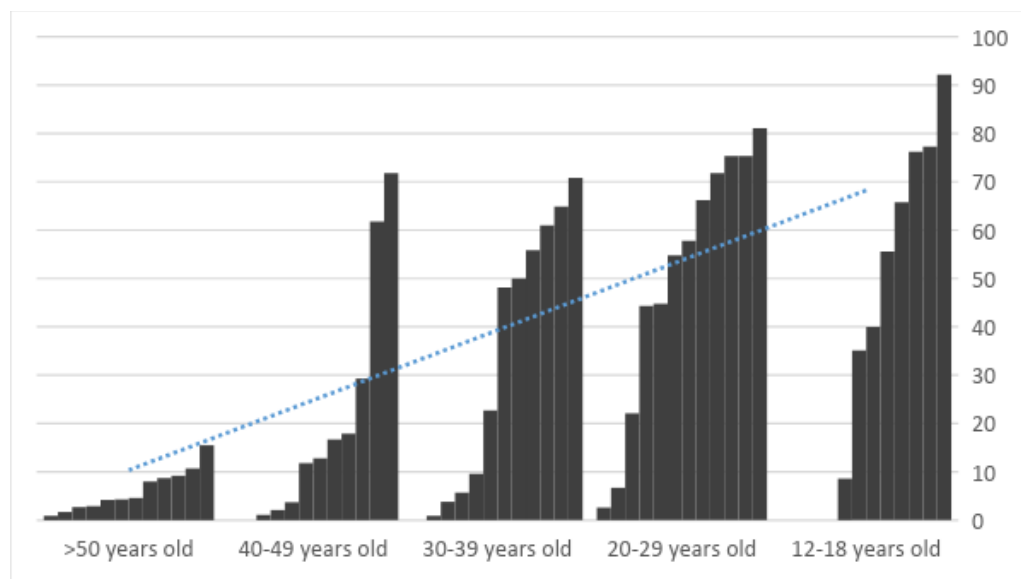


Figure 1. The use of strong-R according to age and speaker, based on percentage (Adapted from Bouchard, 2017, p. 262)

To my knowledge, no previous studies have investigated language shift (from creoles to Portuguese) and language change (regarding the use of rhotics) in São Tomé from the perspective of language ideologies. Language ideology is the link between forms of talk and social structures; it is “the cultural system of ideas about social and linguistic relationships, together with their loading of moral and political interests” (Irvine, 1989, p. 255). In a linguistic community, that is a group of people who use the same linguistic code and signs, language practices are measured against those of the dominant group (Bourdieu, 1982). In the case of São Tomé and Príncipe, the linguistic practices have been measured against and compared to speakers of European Portuguese during the five centuries of colonial rule. European Portuguese was, and may still be, considered to be the standard variety. It is viewed as the “good” way of speaking Portuguese and



the linguistic objective to attain; whereas, in contrast, creoles were believed to be “bad.” This encounter between European Portuguese, Santomean Portuguese, and the creoles of São Tomé will now be examined in terms of a language ideology of differentiation (Irvine & Gal, 2000).

CURRENT STUDY

In this study, I examine the emerging variety of Portuguese spoken in São Tomé and Príncipe. I discuss how the distinctive use of rhotic in Santomean Portuguese is being associated with national identity, and to *santomensidade* “Santomean-ness.” The main questions addressed herein are: What is the role of language ideologies in language change in São Tomé? How are language ideologies interrelated with national identity and rhotic use in Santomean Portuguese? The answers to these questions are important given that studies about language use and practices in São Tomé and Príncipe are scarce, and that the Santomean distinctive use of rhotics is a linguistic innovation currently emerging. This paper demonstrates how the use of rhotics is becoming a marker of the young, post-independence, Santomeans, and it contributes to the existing literature regarding the use of certain linguistic features vis-à-vis identity formation and nation building. This is achieved by focusing on the Santomeans’ language ideologies in terms of their use of rhotics in relation to their speakers and identity. Moreover, the semiotic processes of Irvine and Gal (2000) are utilized to shed light on the Santomean sociolinguistic reality and show how the Santomean Portuguese variety spoken by the middle class has been erased from public discourse. Irvine and Gal (2000) suggest that people construct their ideological representations of social and linguistic difference through the use of three semiotic processes: iconization, recursivity, and erasure.

First, Irvine and Gal (2000) describe the process of iconization as being a transformation of the relationship between linguistic varieties or features and the social images they map onto: “Linguistic features that index social groups or activities appear to be iconic representations of them, as if a linguistic feature somehow depicted or displayed a social group’s inherent nature or essence” (p. 37). The second semiotic process in the construction of ideologies and differentiation is called fractal recursivity, and it “involves the projection of an opposition, salient at some level of relationship, onto some other level” (Irvine & Gal, 2000, p. 38). In other words, the contrast that exists in some opposition between groups or linguistic varieties reappears (or persists) at some other levels. Finally, erasure is the process by which ideology renders a group or a sociolinguistic phenomenon invisible (Hachimi, 2012; Hollington, 2016; Irvine & Gal, 2000). It is a form of “forgetting, denying, ignoring, or forcibly eliminating those distinctions or social facts that fail to fit the picture of the world presented in ideology” (Gal, 2005, p. 27). This tripartite framework will be used to access and understand the emerging variety of Portuguese, which I suggest is being created by a growing number among the younger generations who take pride in their Santomean and African identity.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology chosen for studying locally embedded language use, the role of language use in the construction of social and national identity in a multilingual society, and the language ideologies that surround language use included: observation, field notes, and individual



sociolinguistic interviews. The fieldwork for the data was conducted mainly in the city of São Tomé, the capital of São Tomé and Príncipe, and its surroundings between June 2015 and March 2017. The 56 participants included in this study were Santomeans, born and raised on São Tomé Island, and who are still residing in the capital or its surroundings. This study is based on roughly 46 hours of tape-recorded sociolinguistic interviews (Becker, 2013; Labov, 1984; Tagliamonte, 2006) from 48 adults (20-73 years old) and eight teenagers (12-18 years old) (Table 1).

Age group	Gender		Education Level			TOTAL
	Male	Female	Primary	High school	University	
12-18	4	4	1	7	0	8
20-29	6	6	4	4	4	12
30-39	6	6	4	4	4	12
40-49	6	6	4	4	4	12
50+	6	6	4	4	4	12
TOTAL	28	28	17	23	16	56

Table 1: Participants in this study

Interviews with adults lasted between 33 and 82 minutes, and interviews with teenagers lasted between 24 and 30 minutes (with the exception of one interview that lasted an hour). Interviews were recorded after I had spent a period of time (starting during the third month, more precisely) in São Tomé and getting to know more about the culture, in terms of their ethnic groups, religious practices, traditional dances, etc. This cultural immersion allowed me to ensure that the questions were relevant to Santomeans. During the interview, I elicited comments on language, ethnicity, identity, and localness to arrive at a clearer picture of the ideologies underlying linguistic choices and perceptions within the speech community. Interviews were conducted in Portuguese, but only the translation of excerpts are provided in this paper.

I also present a concrete example, a narrative description of a Santomean named Célia with whom I discussed the used of rhotics. By examining more deeply the case of Célia, I aim to understand in a more holistic way the experience of one speaker. This includes information about the complexities regarding one's social network, background, and education, among other things. Although generalizations from one observed case to all other cases is not possible or necessarily desired, this brief case study is an opportunity to derive broader principles and observations of relevance regarding ideologies about pronunciation of rhotics in Santomean Portuguese (cf. Duff, 2008).

Language Ideologies and Linguistic Differentiation in São Tomé

As indicated earlier, I applied Irvine and Gal's (2000) tripartite semiotic processes to discuss how language ideologies might contribute to language change. Specifically, these three processes made it possible to examine how Santomeans map their understanding of linguistic varieties to people, how language ideologies are constructed among the speakers of the island of São Tomé, and what are some of the consequences of this mapping.



Iconization: European Portuguese, Creole Languages, and their Social Images

Iconization served as a means to examine the mapping of language use onto its speakers. During colonial times in São Tomé, although the Portuguese were in the minority, they held the position of power. They formed the highest social class on the island, had a higher level of education, and had greater economic means. Over time, their variety of Portuguese came to index their social identity; European Portuguese became a marker of powerful, educated, and elegant people. Santomeans were aware that their native languages, the creoles, were considered to be inferior to European Portuguese. This ideology of inferiority was in part transmitted to Santomeans by the Portuguese colonizers who did not even consider the creoles to be “real” languages, but rather mere dialects of Portuguese. As one participant commented:

They didn't call it creole, but rather *dialect*, because Portuguese made sure to minimize creole, they would say that it was only a dialect of Portuguese - which is not true. (Tomás, 50 years old)

In this excerpt, dialect does not refer to a variety of Portuguese, but rather to a language variety that is considered to be inferior to the Portuguese language. In fact, the creoles were spoken by enslaved Africans and their descendants, whom the Portuguese considered inferior. These ideas of inferiority about the languages were then transferred to the speakers of those languages. The creoles became associated with backwardness, savagery, stupidity, and inferiority², and these ideologies surrounding creoles were not only transmitted by the Portuguese, but also between Santomeans themselves. If Santomean parents wanted their children to “become someone”, they forbade their children to speak creole:

They were forbidden [to speak creole] because there was a feeling that one who speaks creole is poor, backward, and that creole spoils Portuguese [han han], that's what they used to say. (Tomás, 50 years old)

Our children have to learn to speak well, to speak well Portuguese, like if fine people, good people, educated people had to speak Portuguese, that it is the language of what... the right language, right, the correct language, the creole is seen as a person who is backward, who doesn't know Portuguese and only speaks creole, I think they thought or think that by speaking creole, a child won't be able to learn Portuguese well, [Hum... like if...] yeah, one would interfere with the other, and they wanted their children, well... hey, my son has to speak Portuguese well, he has to be someone, he has to be a fine person, he has to express himself well, I think that's what it is. (Natália, 33 years old)

Thus, European Portuguese became an icon of people with a higher socioeconomic status, and the creoles became an icon of the people from with a lower socioeconomic status. The ideologies surrounding those languages help us understand the ongoing loss of the creoles in São Tomé, as Santomeans gave more value to Portuguese and favored the learning of Portuguese over creoles.



Fractal Recursivity: Settings and Varieties

In the case of São Tomé, the framework for understanding linguistic difference at one level, for example the difference between Portuguese and creole languages in terms of linguistic value and recognition within the society, served to construct differences at other levels, such as linguistic varieties between the city and the plantations. This was achieved through Irvine and Gal's second semiotic process: fractal recursivity. As Gal (2005) wrote, "fractal recursions are repetitions of the same contrast but at different scales" (p. 27), meaning that the contrast can be reproduced by projecting it onto broader or more narrow comparisons.

According to the 2014-2015 *Instituto Nacional de Estatísticas* (National Statistical Office) survey results, 66.6% of Santomeans live in urban areas, while 33.4% live in rural areas (MICS, 2014). When talking about language during my fieldwork and interviews, Santomeans often highlighted the difference between the variety of Portuguese spoken in the city and the one spoken in what they called the *roças* "plantations" (i.e., rural setting). All participants (urban and rural) commented that the variety of Portuguese spoken in the city is "better" than the variety spoken in the plantations:

The first difference I see is the way they speak. [Yeah?] Yes, people in the city speak better than people here in the plantation because, as you know, the environment here is closed. (Carlos, 28 years old, external informant living in rural area³)

M-E: So, on the island, where do you think that people speak better Portuguese? Where is Portuguese better spoken?

Zé: In the center of the capital.

M-E: Why?

Zé: Because, well, all this, Portuguese, was centralized there and it's the peak of the country, the head of the country, the president, the prime minister, I don't know, I don't know, the best quality stayed there, so it means Portuguese was mainly centralized in the center of the capital then in the other parts of the country, that's why the most adequate Portuguese is there. (Zé, 52 years old, external informant living in rural area)

There is a higher number of creole speakers living outside the center of the capital, especially in the district of Caué (the southern part of the island, where Zé lives), who speak creole more frequently than those in the center of the capital. For this reason, the influence of the creole languages on the rural variety of Portuguese is believed to be greater than on the city variety. Moreover, people from the city are not only seen as speaking better Portuguese, but also as being more educated, more economically comfortable, better dressed, etc. People from the plantations, on the other hand, are seen as speaking "bad" Portuguese, as having a lower level of education, as being bad-tempered, etc. In this example of fractal recursivity, it is possible to see the reproduction of the contrast (Portuguese/creoles) onto another level (urban/rural).



Erasure of the Speech of a Growing Middle Socioeconomic Class: The Emerging Variety of Santomean Portuguese

Finally, the process of fractal recursion allows for erasure. This process makes it possible to examine elements that do not fit into the ideology of contrast that was constructed. In the case of São Tomé, what is being erased, or rather, ignored, is the speech of the middle-class Santomeans. The middle-class Santomeans are those who have a certain level of schooling (at least high school), a certain economic comfort (a job, a house, perhaps a car, etc.), but who do not necessarily turn towards Europe to find their social and linguistic models. They differ from the higher-class Santomeans in that they are not at the apex of the social pyramid; for example, they are not necessarily members of traditionally important families in the country, nor have they lived abroad (although some may have studied abroad and come back), and they earn money locally (i.e., in *dobras*, not in euros). Thus, Santomeans, and their speech, do not fit the old stereotypes which consist of dichotomies of European Portuguese/creoles, urban/rural, and rich/poor. The Santomeans that I spoke to only discussed their variety when I asked specific questions, such as “Is Santomean Portuguese different from European Portuguese?” or “Which variety do you prefer: Santomean, European, or Brazilian Portuguese?”. Otherwise, they always preferred talking about creoles, or about what they consider to be “bad” Portuguese (with creole features) and “good” Portuguese (that corresponds to Portuguese grammar and the European standard). I believe that it is in this space, this process of erasure, that Santomean Portuguese is emerging. As mentioned earlier, one linguistic feature that is characteristic of the Santomean emerging class is the use of the strong-R instead of the weak-r in some positions of the word. Most Santomeans are not aware of the use of rhotics, as being typical of their variety of Portuguese, but several informants cite it as a local feature. Furthermore, the social facts show that this particular use of the rhotics indexes the youth and the post-independence period.

In São Tomé, some of the consequences of language ideologies are the deprecation of the creole languages, the growing loss of the creoles, and the prejudices attached to creole speakers; although, this latter part seems to be slowly changing. Moreover, examining the rhotics as used and pronounced in Santomean Portuguese and the ideologies that surround their pronunciation reinforce these consequences.

VIEWS ON RHOTICS IN SANTOMEAN PORTUGUESE

More than any other feature, for non-Santomeans, the pronunciation of rhotics iconically indexes Santomean Portuguese. On the one hand, most, if not all, lower socioeconomic status Santomeans I interviewed and questioned about pronunciation of rhotics in their variety of Portuguese were not aware of this linguistic difference. On the other hand, higher socioeconomic status Santomeans who studied or worked abroad and who had come into contact with Portuguese or Brazilians had a greater metalinguistic awareness of this feature (Silverstein 1979, 1981). Here is an excerpt from my interview with Pilar who discusses rhotics in Santomean Portuguese.



But I think, I think that we have a particularity, we don't differentiate the R when it's one or two. [Hum. . .] Yeah, I think there is only one pronunciation. [Yeah. . .] Yeah. . . Just like we say "car" (*carro*) the same way we say "cheap" (*barato*), for example. (Pilar, 44 years old)

Pilar refers to the phonemic contrast of rhotics. She suggests that there might be only one way to pronounce rhotics in Santomean Portuguese. To her, the word *carro* "car" (underlying strong-R, spelled with two <r>'s) and *barato* "cheap" (underlying weak-r, spelled with one <r>) can both be pronounced with the same type of rhotic, i.e., a strong-R. In this excerpt, Pilar pronounced both words with a strong-R, although *barato* "cheap" is usually pronounced [beratu] in European and Brazilian Portuguese. This suggests that there is a merger between strong-R and weak-r and that the phonemic contrast in intervocalic position might not exist anymore. Interestingly, Pilar is one of the participants in this study that uses strong-R in weak-r positions more frequently. In order to understand why her use of strong-R is so distinctive, I questioned her about the Santomean accent (referring here to the rhotics) and identity:

M-E: And the adults, you think they keep their accent unintentionally, or because they want to, as a form of identity?

Pilar: The adults? That. . .there I think it's like this. . .I think. . .that. . . when. . .if maybe they want to show that they're in Portugal, things like that, they adopt the accent from there, but when not... at least in my case, nothing influenced me.

In Pilar's opinion, some Santomeans adopt the European Portuguese accent in order to show that they are in or have been to Portugal. This certainly reflects the higher status attributed to European Portuguese. However, more subtly, Pilar's explanation of the adaptation to European Portuguese also implies a certain lack of authenticity, when she proudly says that nothing influenced her speech.

In fact, speaking Santomean Portuguese is about being African rather than Portuguese or creole. It is important to note that Santomeans from the middle and lower socioeconomic class identify as African first, and not as Portuguese:

M-E: Do Santomeans feel African?

Elzo: Yes! We feel African, we identify with Africa, we feel, we feel African, we feel African. . . . And it's a pride, right, to be African, right. (Elzo, 50 years old)

As seen above, Pilar did not consider the distinctive use of rhotics to be problematic; however, it was distinct for most of the other participants who were aware that the Santomean distribution of rhotics was not identical to that of European Portuguese. In an interview with Marcelo, a 45-year-old Santomean who has also spent time abroad, other perspectives on rhotics can be seen:

M-E: One thing I noticed the first day I was here is the way that. . .that you pronounce your R, but not everyone does it.



- Marcelo: (Laughs!) *Carregam nos R!*
 M-E: Yeah, you noticed?
 Marcelo: (Laughs!) It's possible, I have I think I have this problem of *carregar nos R* too. [. . .] I think it's a bit of a defect of language.

Santomeans usually refer to the distinctive use of strong-R as *carregar nos R*. *Carregar* in this sense means “to turn stronger or more intense”. Marcelo considers this distinctive pronunciation of rhotics to be a “problem” and a “defect of language.” This represents the most common opinion expressed regarding the distribution of rhotic variants in the Portuguese spoken by Santomeans. However, it is important to point out how this idea that Santomean Portuguese is different in pronunciation comes from contact with speakers of other varieties of Portuguese. During my stay in São Tomé, I never heard a Santomean discussing, mocking, or criticizing another Santomean's pronunciation of rhotics, except for a few who had lived abroad.

Some participants have tried different techniques to “remove” this pronunciation, as Alberto, a 32-year-old Santomean who studied in Brazil, did:

- Alberto: I notice that I make my R stronger. [. . .] I tried, I did some exercises with friends who know about diction to try to remove this R, but then I stopped (laughs) and I gave up. [. . .]
 M-E: You thought it was something that needed to be corrected?
 Alberto: I think so. . . I think so because. . .
 M-E: Still today, you think this?
 Alberto: I think that if it was easier to correct, I would have corrected it, but. . . because it's something that I tried once, and twice, and it needed a bit more work, I didn't insist on changing, if it was easy to change yes, but it's not something that for me. . . it doesn't bother me that much, it's something that, you know, is kinda different.

Alberto knows there is something “different” about his pronunciation. He tried to change it but quit because it demanded too much effort. He now seems to accept the way he speaks. However, this was not the case for all Santomeans interviewed. In the next section, I turn to the case of a young Santomean who felt discriminated against because of her use of rhotics.

THE CASE OF CÉLIA

Célia, a 27-year-old Santomean journalist, shared her views and experiences regarding her pronunciation of rhotics. Célia grew up in Riboque, a lower- to middle-class neighborhood that is centrally located in the city of São Tomé. Many people of lower socioeconomic status live there. In this area, the houses, which are made of wood and covered with a simple corrugated iron sheet, are very close one to another. The streets are busy, loud, full of kids running around, and people sit by their door to look at people walking by. Célia grew up in this area with her mother and her siblings. She has spent her entire life in São Tomé City, where she attended primary school, high



school, and university. She has never travelled outside the island of São Tomé. According to Célia, her social environment and origin explain her pronunciation of rhotics:

I come from a very poor social circle and I didn't have any contact with people who speak Portuguese from Portugal [yeah] so my mom speaks like this, my sisters speak like this, people close to me, my family speaks like this, my partner does not though because he lived in Cuba for a long time [ok] so his pronunciation changed and everything, so I think that Santomeans who are Santomeans, especially the ones from a low social circle, a lower social class, that. . . who never traveled outside São Tomé, who never had any other kind of interaction and all, direct interaction [yes] they talk like me.

Interestingly, Célia links this distinctive pronunciation of rhotics to Santomean identity (“Santomeans who are Santomeans”), more specifically to Santomeans from a lower socioeconomic status who have not interacted with speakers of Portuguese who are not Santomean. For the purposes of clarity, there is a need to nuance Célia’s words. In my opinion, Célia is part of the growing Santomean middle class. Her mother used to be a *palaiê* (seller at the market). Eventually, her mother became a small business owner and she now earns a better living. Célia has a high level of education, even though she did not study abroad – an opportunity which is deemed more prestigious. She has a good job working as a journalist. She acknowledges in the interview that her life now is better than when she was a child. I consider her to be part of the emerging middle-class of São Tomé and Príncipe, and yet, regardless of her qualification and status, Célia is still questioned about her identity based on her pronunciation.

When Célia and I met, she said she was a bit nervous because she thought I wanted to talk to her about her “pronunciation”. I was a bit surprised, so I asked why. She answered that she had been criticized on the Facebook page of the web-journal she works for because of her pronunciation:

It was a Brazilian man, he commented that the journalist had a French accent. After, other people who are Santomeans said no, that she doesn't have a French accent, she is Santomean. [. . .] Another said that I speak like this because of our creole Forro [yeah] but another came and answered that I speak like this simply because I speak badly (laughs).

After this interview with her, I found on Facebook the discussions she referred to during the interview (Figure 2).





Figure 2. First excerpt from a Facebook page discussing Célia's speech

- M: The reporter needs to go back to school, she speaks very badly.
 H: Why does the reporter have a French accent? Very weird.
 J: We Santomeans have this "half"-French accent because of our "dialect."
 H: I haven't seen other interviewees with an accent like the one of the reporter. Well. . . If you're from there and say that's how it is, who am I to think it's not.
 A: French accent? Since when does our creole remind people of a French accent? I've been living in France for 8 years, and sorry but I know the two accents very well and they are totally different.

It is unclear where the first person (M) is from, but the second one (H) is Brazilian, and the two answering (J and A) are Santomeans. In this Facebook interaction, the different people discussed the quality of Célia's language ("she speaks very badly", "why does the reporter have a French accent? Very weird"), and the origin of her accent. One person asks why she has a French accent. One Santomean suggests that it is because of the influence of Forro on Portuguese, and another Santomean who lives in France disagrees and comments that Forro and French accents are totally different. This was the first time that Célia was criticized because of her speech. However, a few



days later, people commented on Célia’s accent again on Facebook (Figure 3), and this time she felt very offended:

What really offended me is something from two weeks ago, I did an interview with a lady and then I did a story about the STP Music Award, you know, the contest? [Yes, yes.] I did an interview about that and a video, and the Facebook page of the STP Music Award shared the news and somebody saw it, a lady even a young lady, she commented “this journalist, gee, for heaven’s sake, she didn’t do justice to this story, she has phonetic deviation, she urgently needs speech therapy”, I saw that and I was so so hurt, I was really hurt, I was even going to write something to send the person but because I also show my colleague first, he said “Ah [Célia], don’t do that you’ll start an argument, so don’t do it”, I breathed deeply and I let it go but since then I’m so worried I spend my time on the Internet looking for exercises for phonetic deviation, I saw something about putting a pen in your mouth, saying “ma ma mi mi mi” (laughs) for real I saw that (laughs).

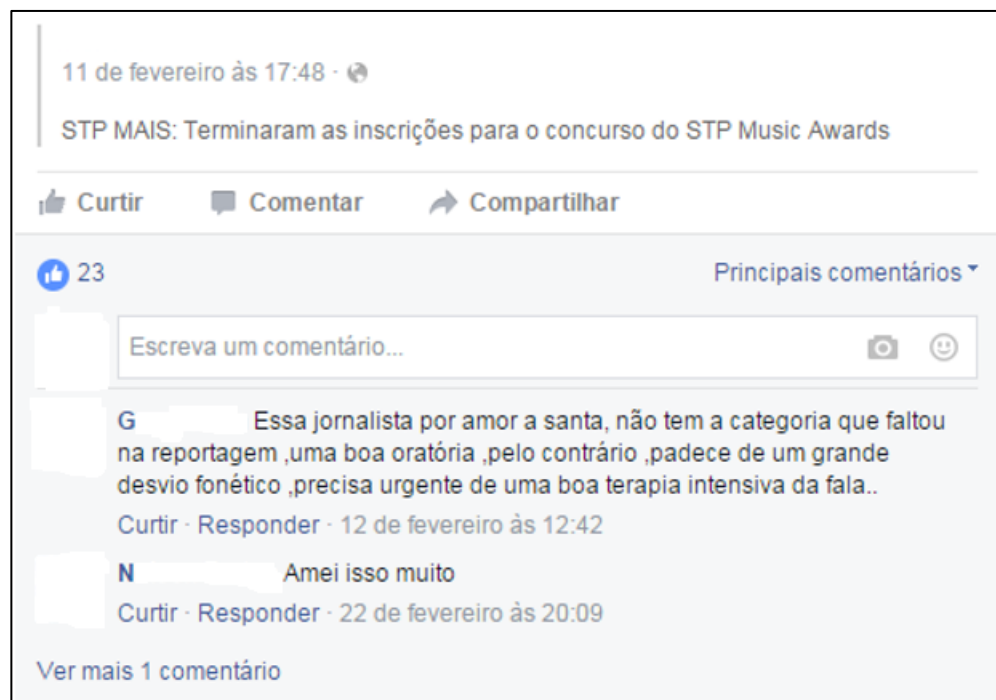


Figure 3. Second excerpt from a Facebook page discussing Célia’s speech

- G: This journalist, for heaven’s sake, she does not have what is needed for this news report, good public speaker skills, on the contrary, she suffers from an important phonetic deviation, she urgently needs good intensive speech therapy.
- N: I loved this a lot.

The person who wrote this comment is a Santomean living abroad. She criticized Célia for her “bad public speaking skills” and her “phonetic deviation,” and because of this pronunciation, G. does not consider her qualified to be a journalist. This comment highlights how negative the ideologies surrounding this pronunciation of the rhotics can be.



These comments were hurtful to Célia, as they criticized her speech, her sense of personhood, but also herself as a journalist; they made her insecure about her accent. She now feels ashamed of her pronunciation, and would prefer to speak as the Portuguese do, as illustrated in the following three excerpts:

I didn't know I admit that I didn't know that I spoke like this [ok] I really didn't have any idea that I spoke like this, I only realized it when I started to work at STP News.⁴

I'm ashamed of the way I speak right now, I'm ashamed.

I think I prefer to speak the way the Portuguese speak just to see if people will leave me alone, but I can't keep it up.

Célia's position as a public figure makes her more exposed to criticism. It is this criticism that made her self-conscious of her "accent," of which she is now "ashamed." She would prefer to speak European Portuguese not because she likes it better but rather to stop criticisms about her accent. Célia also reports that Santomeans who are abroad suffer from criticisms as well when in Portugal:

My colleague, we were talking about pronunciation again the day before yesterday, he went to Portugal at the end of last year to study, to do his bachelor, and he said that his Portuguese teacher said that we Santomeans speak in a very weird way, but the tone that she used to say that, he didn't like it [yeah]. He felt that she was belittling the way we speak [yeah]. The teacher made him so mad, but not as much as another friend who has been living in Portugal for a while did and who speaks like Portuguese do [hum. . .]. He was surprised by how my friend speaks, in a way that made my friend really angry because on top of telling him that he speaks differently, he also told him that he makes his R much stronger in a weird way [ok]. My friend got more upset with this colleague who is Santomean exactly because he is Santomean. He used to speak like this before getting out of here, and only because he's there now he speaks like the Portuguese do (laughs). He's acting like that [yeah]. I don't know, people tend to do that, right.

Célia's friend disliked the teacher's comments regarding his speech, but he disliked it even more when the same comment came from a Santomean colleague. Why would a comment from another Santomean be more frustrating than from someone who is Portuguese? It is as if this pronunciation was a marker of *santomensidade*, of being Santomean. In that case, the friend's comment was an act of inauthenticity. Rejecting Santomean pronunciation is akin to denying his roots, a part of his culture, a part of his *santomensidade*.

In the excerpts from this case study, we have seen that Célia links the use of strong-R to a shared sense of national identity and socioeconomic status. However, it is not so straightforward, as some Santomeans from a higher socioeconomic status who have lived abroad (Pilar and Marcelo presented above, for instance) do "draw out" the R, while other Santomeans who have never travelled outside the island do not. Even so, Santomeans, like Célia, and non-Santomeans, such as Célia's friend's teacher in Portugal, associate this feature with being Santomeans. I suggest that



this emerging feature in the speech of Santomean is becoming a marker of Santomean Portuguese, and at the same time, of *santomensidade*.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The information obtained from the interviews make it possible to draw several conclusions in relation to the questions posed in this study. The first question is concerned with the perspective of Santomeans toward language use and change. Irvine and Gal's (2000) semiotic processes were used to look at the Santomean reality and showed how Portuguese became associated with being the "good language" and creoles, with being the "bad languages." With such beliefs, parents prefer to socialize their children in Portuguese, hoping to offer their children a better future. This may explain in part why the majority of Santomeans speak Portuguese today and why the use of creole languages is receding. This iconization process is reproduced within the Santomean variety of Portuguese, with people considering the speech of urban Santomeans (which is less influenced by its contact with creole) to be "better" than the speech of rural Santomeans. In the narratives of the interviewees, little attention has been given to their own variety of Portuguese, which I suggest emerged covertly between the creoles and European Portuguese. The speech of the Santomean middle-class does not fit into the well-known dichotomies from the past, but it is this variety of Portuguese that is unconsciously being attached to national identity.

This brings me to the second research question, how are language ideologies interrelated with national identity and use of rhotics in Santomean Portuguese? Results from this study show that the rhotics are a feature that can be mapped onto socioeconomic status and national distinctiveness, and that using a strong-R in weak-r positions is a marker of *santomensidade*. The older generations, the ones born before the independence of the country, use strong-R the least and tend to consider Santomean Portuguese to be *errado* "wrong". Conversely, the younger generations use strong-R the most and show pride in their variety of Portuguese as illustrated in the following two excerpts:

Well, many people say that the right Portuguese is the one spoken in Portugal. . . . [Hum hum. . . .Do you agree with that?] No, I don't agree. [Why?] Because I even noticed that they don't speak that well there. . . . [Ok.] I think people believe that the best Portuguese is spok... is the one spoken there [Hum hum. . .] because it comes from there. . .we speak Portuguese, but it doesn't mean that the best Portuguese comes from there. (Michel, 22 years old)

I find São Tomé Portuguese, Santomeans, very clear, [more] than the Portuguese from. . . from. . .from Portugal, yeah. Yeah. . .the Santomean person expresses himself/herself well... words like, clear, with no difficulty, with no difficulty at all because who can't understand them is someone who is not used with Portuguese, you know? I think that it's a very clear Portuguese, and. . .it's my land, I can only answer with my Portuguese, because of course, I'm not gonna say that Portuguese from Brazil is a good Portuguese! (Maria, 31 years old)



These two young Santomeans hold their variety of Portuguese in high regard in comparison to other varieties of Portuguese. Thus, what does it mean today to be Santomean? What is the link between languages and identity in São Tomé and Príncipe? Very little has been written about Santomean identity by Santomeans, and the little information that does exist appears quite pessimistic. The literature refers to the national creoles as being an intrinsic element of Santomean culture and identity. However, it also criticizes both the preference that Santomeans have for what comes from outside their nation rather than inside it, as well as the undefined nature of their identity (Bragança, 2012; Costa, 2016). I agree with these authors in the sense that the Santomean identity is still under construction, but I also believe that Santomean Portuguese is the language that is slowly becoming attached to Santomean identity. There is still nostalgia for the past and the creole languages, as if they embodied the Santomean identity as opposed to the Portuguese of the colonizers. Now that the colonizers are gone and have left their language as a trace of their long stay on the islands, Santomeans are becoming a nation, a Portuguese-speaking nation, with its own variety of Portuguese.

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¹ The term “creole” is still problematic to creolists (Kouwenberg & Singler 2011). But most creolists recognize that creole languages develop in contact situations that involve more than two languages, and that they are native languages (Thomason 2001). The creoles of São Tomé and Príncipe are Portuguese-based creoles, which means that their lexicons were mainly drawn from Portuguese.

² Refer to Smedley and Smedley (2011) who examined the evolution of the concept of race and how we came to believe that our societies were composed of unequal human groups.



³ I also include in this paper a few excerpts of interviews I did with Santomeans who live outside the capital. I call them “external informants”, and two of them are included in this paper. Their inclusion in my analysis is helpful to understand the contrast between urban and rural Santomeans.

⁴ *STP News* is a fictitious name for the journal where Célia works.

