

Fa do Vesu, a language game of Fa d'Ambô

Fa do Vesu, um jogo de linguagem do fa d'ambô

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Abstract: In this paper we present a description of Fa do Vesu, a language game of Fa d'Ambô, a Portuguese-based Creole language spoken in Annobón Island, Equatorial Guinea. We intend to show how this language game can help improve understanding of some issues of the syllable in Fa d'Ambô, specially those related to glides and syllabic nasal consonants. We will show that although related, Fa do Vesu has a different syllable structure as compared to Fa d'Ambô.

Keywords: Fa d'Ambô, Fa do Vesu, Portuguese-based Creoles phonology.

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Resumo: Neste artigo, apresentamos uma descrição e análise do Fa do Vesu, um jogo de linguagem do Fa d'Ambô, língua falada na Ilha de Ano Bom na República da Guiné Equatorial. Pretendemos mostrar como o estudo deste tipo de jogo de linguagem pode lançar luz em algumas questões da fonologia do Fa d'Ambô, especialmente aquelas relacionadas aos glides e às consoantes nasais silábicas. Para isso, mostraremos que o Fa do Vesu apresenta estruturas silábicas diferentes de sua língua de origem, o Fa d'Ambô.

Palavras-chave: Fa d'Ambô, Fa do Vesu, fonologia das línguas crioulas de base portuguesa.

1 Introduction

This paper presents a description of *Fa do Vesu*, a language game of Fa d'Ambô, a Portuguese-based Creole language spoken in Annobón Island, Equatorial Guinea³. Language games are used as evidence for syllable structure by many phonologists (see Bagemihl 1995 for an overview). Thus, we will show that Fa do Vesu will help us understand some phonological issues of syllable structure and the status of glides and syllabic nasals in Fa d'Ambô. At the same time, we will propose some generalizations that can shed light on similar issues regarding other Portuguese-based Creole languages of the Gulf of Guinea. Because we know so little about Fa d'Ambô, the words from John Holm (2000: 7) remain strong 'Perhaps the most basic challenge for creolists in the twenty-first century is to write exhaustive linguistic and sociohistorical descriptions of all the known pidgin and creole languages and their various dialects'.

This paper⁴ is organized as follows: first, in section 2, we will draw a general background of the phenomena of language games, mainly the insertion type as it is found in Portuguese and in Spanish, the former being the lexifier language and the latter one of the official languages of Annobón. After this, in section 3, we will describe Fa d'Ambô's syllable, Fa do Vesu, and present some remarks on each specific point where ludling meets syllable structure.

³We dedicated this work to Professor John A. Holm who has inspired generations of Creolists through his research, lectures, books, and friendship.

⁴We thank a reviewer for valuable comments which helped to considerably improve the quality of this paper.

At this point, we will discuss as well some issues on syllabic nasals in the Gulf of Guinea Creoles. Finally, in section 4, we will summarize the discussion and propose a syllable structure for Fa do Vesu.

2 Language Games

Language games are alternate languages that exist alongside natural languages (Bagemihl 1988), manipulating its natural structure. These fairly widespread language play phenomena alter the phonological forms of words so as to disguise what they are (Botne and Davis 2000). Language games, also called *ludlings*, are commonly used as evidence for phonological concepts such as the syllable (Botne and Davis 2000). Laycock (1972) first used the term *ludling* in order to refer to such systems.

- (1) Definition of Ludlings: ‘A ludling is [...] the result of a transformation or series of transformations acting regularly on an ordinary language text, with the intent of altering the form but not the content of the original message, for purposes of concealment or comic effect.’ (Laycock 1972: 61, *apud* Piñeros 1998).

According to Piñeros, Bagemihl (1988) redefines the concept of ludling. He proposes to characterize ludlings as linguistic systems that utilize ‘various forms of non-concatenative (and occasionally concatenative) morphological manipulation’. A ludling shares with its host Separate Language every one of its linguistic domains except for the morphologic domain, for which it has an alternate one. The morphology of language games is semantically empty (Bagemill 1995).

Botne and Davis (2000) point out that the two most common types of language games are transposition of phonological constituents (usually syllables) and addition of phonemes at one or more locations within the word. In this paper we will concentrate on this second type.

Portuguese is the lexifier language of Fa d’Ambô (see Zamora 2010, Araujo *et al.* 2013, *inter alios*). As in Fa d’Ambô, there are language games with templatic morphology both in European Portuguese and in Brazilian Portuguese. In Portugal, there is a language game called *Língua dos Pês* (Ps language), (2), which inserts a [-pV] after each syllable while the stress is realized on each non-ludling syllable. This European Portuguese style is also found in Brazil (locally called *Língua do Pê*, P language):

(2) *Língua do Pê 1* (Portugal and Brazil)a. ci.'da.de → ci.'**pi**.da.'**pa**.de.'**pe** 'city'b. fe.'liz → fe.'**pe**.liz.'**piz** 'happy'

Here, we will focus on the Brazilian variety, as described by Abaurre (1979) and Guimarães and Nevins (2009), which has at least three variants of *Língua do Pê*. Besides (2), there are *Língua do Pê 2* (3) and *Língua do Pê 3*, em (4). The variant 2, em (3), inserts a harmonic syllable with a copy vowel [pe-] before each syllable and stresses each ludling syllable. In this variant, the rime (nucleus and coda) is copied altogether:

(3) *Língua do Pê 2* (Brazil)a. ci.'da.de → **pe**.'ci.**pe**.'da.**pe**.'de 'city'b. fe.'liz → **pe**.'fe.**pe**.'liz 'happy'

The variant 3 inserts a harmonic [-pV] after each syllable, where V is a copy vowel. However, in this variety, the coda of the original syllable is attached to the ludling syllable and each ludling syllable is stressed:

(4) *Língua do Pê 3* (Brazil)a. ci.'da.de → ci.'**pi**.da.'**pa**.de.'**pe** 'city'b. fe.'liz → fe.'**pe**.li.'**piz** 'happy'

In sum, variant 1 has the unstressed ludling syllable aligned to the left of the foot, while dialects 2 and 3 have the stressed ludling syllable aligned to the right of the foot. Therefore, all of them have iambic foot. However, variant 2 inserts a fixed template. Variant 1 regards the internal structure of the syllable and copies the full rime, while variant 3 is the only one that considers the syllabic structure and targets the nucleus of the syllable, moving coda constituents to the ludling syllable.

In Spanish⁵ there is a language game called *Jerigonza*. Piñeros describes three varieties of this game: Peruvian, Colombian and Costa Rican *Jerigonza*⁶.

⁵From the last quarter of the 19th Century Spanish was the colonial language in Equatorial Guinea.

⁶These are not the only styles of this game in Spanish.

The Peruvian variant inserts a [cha-] before each syllable and maintains the original stress. This pattern is similar to *Língua do Pê 1*, the difference being in the syllable that is inserted and the unchanged stress position. The Colombian variant inserts a harmonic [-pV] with a copy vowel after each syllable of the base and maintains the location of the original stress. Only the nuclear vowel quality is copied. The template is similar to *Língua do Pê 2*, but the stress falls on the ludling syllable instead. The Costa Rican variant inserts a [-pV] syllable with a copy vowel after each syllable and the coda of the original syllable is attached to the ludling one. Complex onsets are ignored. This variety has the same template as *Língua do Pê 3*, but the stress pattern is different. Colombian variant regard the nucleus as a target, while Costa Rica's considers the coda, moving it to the ludling syllable.

(5) Peruvian Jeringonza

- a. can.'ción → **cha.can.cha.'**ción
- b. ma.'és.tro → **cha.ma.cha.'**és.**cha.tro**
- c. 'pá.ja.ro → **cha.'**pá.**cha.ja.cha.ro**

(6) Colombian Jeringonza

- a. can.'ción → cam.**pa.'**cióm.**po**
- b. ma.'és.tro → ma.**pa.'**és.**pe.tro.po**
- c. 'pá.ja.ro → 'pá.**pa.ja.pa.ro.po**

(7) Costa Rican Jeringonza

- a. can.'ción → ca.**pan.'**ció.**pon**
- b. ma.'és.tro → ma.**pa.'**é.**pes.tro.po**
- c. 'pá.ja.ro → 'pá.**pa.ja.pa.ro.po**

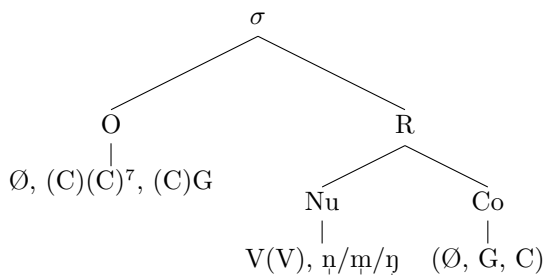
All three variants stress the original syllables and not the ludling ones, despite their place of insertion. Therefore, in Portuguese language games, the stress will always be on the right edge of the foot (iambic) while in Spanish language games what counts is keeping the stress in the syllables of the base and not in the inserted ones. In Spanish, as well as in Brazilian Portuguese variants 1 and 3, the harmonic vowel is copied from the vowel in the syllable to its left.

3 Fa d'Ambô and Fa do Vesu

In this section, we will present an overview of Fa d'Ambô syllable structure followed by a Fa do Vesu typology. In the end of this section, we offer some remarks on syllabic nasals in Portuguese-based Creoles of the Gulf of Guinea.

3.1 The syllable in Fa d'Ambô

The syllable in Fa d'Ambô can be onsetless or codaless, glides do not occupy the nucleus, complex onsets are allowed and any syllabic nasal must share its point of articulation with any following consonant or vowel. Below, C stands for consonant; G for glide; and V for vowel. Contents in parenthesis mean an optional element, while \emptyset means an empty position. Thus, the minimal syllable can be formed by a vowel alone, as in *o.pa* 'tree'.



3.2 Fa du Vesu

Fa do Vesu⁸ (*inside-out speech*) is a language game from Fa d'Ambô⁹ which inserts a syllable after any Fa d'Ambô syllable, being although optional if the final syllable is unstressed. Most words in Fa d'Ambô are mono-morphemic and are composed of one or two syllables. In CV words, the ludling (-pV) is inserted after the syllable (8a). In the inserted syllable, V is always a vowel copied from the syllable to its left. In this paper we will assume that [-pV] is an inserted infix, with [p] as an onset followed by a copy vowel, instead of an infix formed by a vowel followed by a [p], such as [-Vp], as shown in (8c):

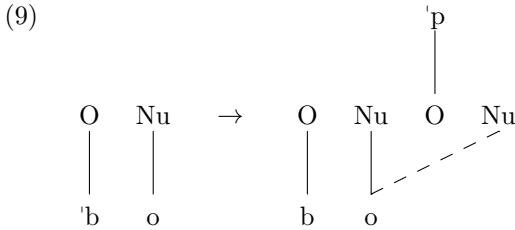
⁷Syllabic nasals and complex onsets are allowed.

⁸The data of Fa do Vesu was recorded and tested with native speakers.

⁹The data of Fa d'Ambô comes from Zamora (2010) and from our fieldwork in Annobón; the data from Santome is from Ferraz (1979) and Araujo & Hagemeyer (2013); the data from Lung'Ie is from Maurer (2009) and Agostinho (2014); and the data from Angolar is from Maurer (1995).

- (8) a. 'bo → **bo.'po** 'pronoun, 2nd person singular'
 b. bo.'po
 c. *bo.'po

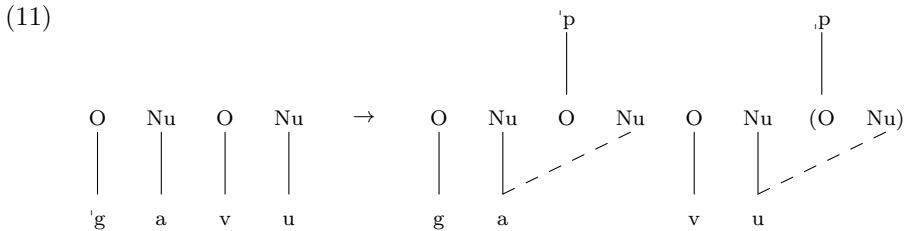
Thus, the vowel in the nucleus of the ludling is shared with a Fa d'Ambô vowel (8a), represented in (9):



In CVCV words, [-pV] is inserted after every syllable of the base. However word-final unstressed syllables [-pV] is optional.

- (10) 'ga.vu → **ga.'pa.vu.(pu)** 'pretty'

The stress for the ludling words is always located in the ludling syllable inserted after the original stressed syllable. Thus, in a word with penultimate stress as 'gavu, the ludling word can be realized as ga'pavu or ga'pavu,pu in Fa do Vesu, as represented in (11). This variation is only possible in bases with penultimate stress because the stress of the ludling word will not be final. A word as ga,pavu'pu will be ungrammatical. The secondary stress symbol indicates a second level prominence.



Words with final stress like **se'be** will be realized as **se,pebe'pe** in the ludling, which is related to Língua do Pê's dialects 2 and 3.

(12) **se.'be** → **se.pe.be.'pe** 'to know'

A word like *se'be* shows no variation, otherwise the stress would fall on an inserted syllable that does not follow the original stressed syllable **se'pebe*, or not be in an inserted syllable at all **sepe'be*:

(13)

On onsetless syllables, the pattern is the same as in CV syllables:

(14) a. 'ɔ.su → ɔ.'pɔ.su.(pu) 'you (sg.)'

b. o.'pa → o.po.pa.'pa 'tree'

Thus, the target of the language game is the nucleus of the syllable. However, if there is a coda in the base, it will be moved into the inserted ludling syllable, i.e., in words with coda, Fa do Vesu inserts stressed CV syllables with [p] as onset, the vowel from the nucleus of the base is then copied (pV_i) and the element in the coda of the base is moved to the coda of the ludling. The delinked line shows that [m] is connected to a ludling syllable, instead of its base syllable (cf. Goldsmith 1990). Thus, a CVC word turns CV_i.(pV_i)C.

(15) 'kum → ku.'pum 'to eat'

(16)

In example (17), the behavior of coda is similar to (15):

In Fa do Vesu, the main stress is always located in the inserted syllable that follows the original stressed syllable. According to this analysis, the foot of the ludling is always iambic. The coda is aligned to the right edge of the foot; therefore, all heavy syllables are stressed. Thus, the coda is visible to the phonological operation, as it is in Língua do Pê's dialect 3.

- (21) a. (**bo. 'po**) 'you (sg.)'
 b. (**se. 'pe**).(**be. 'pe**) 'to know'
 c. (**ga. 'pa**).(**vu. 'pu**) 'pretty'
 d. (**ku. 'pum**) 'to eat'

Fa d'Ambô has complex onsets. However, because complex onsets are not allowed in Fa do Vesu, an epenthetic vowel will be inserted in order to break a consonant duo like [pl], which is then realized as [pu.la]. In general, a high epenthetic vowel [u] will be inserted:

- (22) a. **kum. 'pla** → **ku. pum. pu. la. 'pa** 'to buy'
 b. ***ku. pum. pla. 'pla**

Fa d'Ambô also has a few words beginning with falling sonority clusters with /sC/, where this C can be [p, t, k]. However, no clusters are allowed in Fa do Vesu. As such, an epenthetic vowel [u] will be inserted in the cluster in order to decluster it, creating a [su] syllable, and after it a ludling syllable [pu] will follow. At the same time, any labialized consonant, such as [kw], will not be visible to the ludling operation because [w] is not part of the nucleus. Thus **spu.kwE. 'pwE.la* will also be ungrammatical in Fa do Vesu.

- (23) a. '**skwε.la** → **su. pu. kwε. 'pε.la** 'school'
 b. '**skwε.la** → ***spu.kwε. 'pε.la**
 c. '**skwε.la** → ***,spu.kwε. 'pwε.la**

Consequently, complex onsets are not allowed at all in the game. Thus, vowel epenthesis happens in consonant clusters in general.

Lastly, Fa d'Ambô and Fa do Vesu have long vowels. As expected, in Fa do Vesu the full nucleus of a Fa d'Ambô syllable is copied, which include its long vowels. Thus, a word as '*pεε.tu* 'black' is realized as *pε. 'pεε.tu(pu)*, where the whole nucleus containing the long vowel, εε, is copied while shortening the base vowel. In cases where the long vowel is not copied in the ludling syllable (24c) or both the base and the ludling syllable have long vowels (24d) the word becomes ungrammatical in Fa do Vesu.

- (24) a. 'pɛɛ.tu 'black'
 b. 'pɛɛ.tu → pɛ.'pɛɛ.tu(.pu)
 c. 'pɛɛ.tu → *pɛɛ.'pɛ.tu(.pu)
 d. 'pɛɛ.tu → *pɛɛ.'pɛɛ.tu(.pu)

Sometimes, in addition to a long vowel, a syllable can have a coda (example 25). In this case, Fa do Vesu copies the nucleus, shortens the long vowel of the base and attaches the coda to the ludling syllable. The point of articulation of this consonant in the coda, if nasal, is assimilated from the next consonant.

- (25) a. 'baaŋ.ku 'white'
 b. 'baaŋ.ku → ba.'paan.ku(.pu)
 c. 'baaŋ.ku → *bam.'paan.ku(.pu)
 d. 'baaŋ.ku → *baam.'paan.ku(.pu)

3.3 Syllabic Nasals in Gulf of Guinea Creoles

There are four Portuguese-related Creoles in the Gulf of Guinea: Fa d'Ambô, Lung'ie (or Principense), Santome and Angolar. There are reports in the literature for syllabic nasals in all of the Gulf of Guinea Creoles (Ferraz 1979, Maurer 1995, 2009). They can occur in the beginning of words before a homorganic consonant and in the singular first person bound pronoun, as shown by the orthographic forms in Table 1. Singular first person free pronoun is realized as *ami* or *amu*.

Tab. 1: First person singular pronoun in Gulf of Guinea Creoles

	Fa d'Ambô ¹¹	Santome	Angolar	Lung'ie
1PS BOUND	m'	N-	n ~ m	in ~ un ~ n ~ m
1PS FREE	ami ~ amu	ami	am (?)	ami

In Santome, Ferraz (1979: 72) uses N- as a cover symbol to 'designate a bound morpheme with members /m, n/ [m, n, ŋ], which are selected according to the point of articulation of the initial consonant of a following verb'. Ferraz does not name them 'syllabic nasals', however his own notation, (26), indicates their separate status.

¹¹Zamora 2010: 157-8.

- (26) a. 'n-tlaba 'I worked'
 b. 'm-bi 'I came'
 c. 'ŋ-gɔfta 'I liked'

In Angolar, Maurer (1995: 25) describes three syllabic nasals [ŋ], [m] and [ɲ], which assimilate the point of articulation of the following element as well, just like Santome and Lung'ie. He gives these examples:

- (27) a. n'tê 'head'
 b. m'butu 'coverture'
 c. n'kome 'fist'

According to Maurer (1995: 58-59), the syllabic nasal is realized as [m] before a vowel or [b, m, p], and as [n] or [ɲ] elsewhere (without specifying it).

- (28) a. [m mɛ] 'I ate'¹²
 b. [ŋ ga] mat'ɔ 'I will kill you'¹³
 c. aie [ɲ] na ka pô siê wa 'Now I can't leave'¹⁴

For Lung'ie, Maurer (2009: 8) describes two syllabic nasals: [m] and [ɲ]. He claims that 'they appear only in word initial position, whereby most of the words beginning with [m] or [ɲ] have an allomorph containing the vowel i-, except for m'baka 'machette' which takes -u'¹⁵.

- (29) a. m'baka ~ umbaka 'machette'
 b. n'dala ~ indala 'palm leaf'
 c. n'komoda ~ inkomoda 'to bother'

¹²Maurer 1995: 59.

¹³Maurer 1995: 164.

¹⁴Maurer 1995: 166.

¹⁵Although Maurer mentions the syllabic nasal, he also says that 'prenasalized stops are very marginal (...), there are only two words with this kind of stop: *nda* 'to walk' and *ndili* 'indigo', the latter having an allomorph *nili*.' In our analysis, these initial clusters [nd] would belong to the same group (as a syllabic nasal followed by an obstruent). See Agostinho 2014 for a different analysis.

Maurer (2009: 57) claims that the choice for $n \sim m$ 'depends on the onset consonant of the following verb and the rapidity of speech'. Maurer adds that the choice between $[\text{̃n}]$ or $[\text{̃}n]$ 'depends on the linguistics habits of the speaker'. For Agostinho (2014), the first person bound pronoun is a syllabic nasal that assimilates the point of articulation of the following element. Before vowels and velar consonants, the nasal is realized as $[\text{̃n}]$, before coronals as $[\text{̃n}]$, and labials as $[\text{̃m}]$, concerning Angolar and Santome Creoles.

- (30) a. $[\text{̃n da}]$ 'I gave.'
b. $[\text{̃m bi}]$ 'I pushed.'
c. $[\text{̃n ga}[\text{̃}t\text{a}]]$ 'I spent.'
d. $[\text{̃n alikansa}]$ 'I reached.'

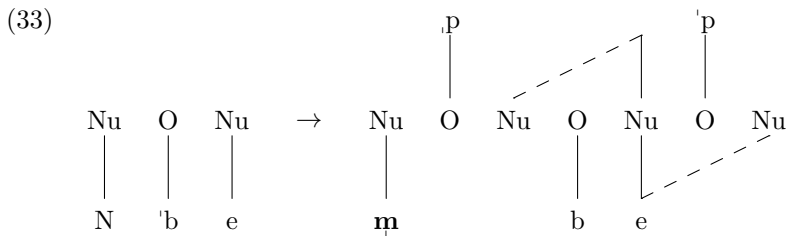
In Fa d'Ambô's literature, Barrena (1957) and Zamora (2010) do not use the term 'syllabic nasal'. However, in our analysis, the singular first person bound pronoun is realized as a nasal consonant with no point of articulation and behaves, as a syllabic nasal, identically to its sister languages. Incidentally, the orthographic form, usually *m*, hides the fact that this nasal has no point of articulation and it gets its point of articulation from the following element. Examples in (31) show how the syllabic nasal in the first personal bound pronoun assimilates the point of articulation of the following consonant: if the next consonant is coronal, the consonant is realized as $[\text{̃n}]$, if labial as $[\text{̃m}]$, and if dorsal as $[\text{̃ŋ}]$:

- (31) a. $[\text{̃n ta kum}]$ 'I am eating.'
b. $[\text{̃m be xa}[\text{̃}]]$ 'I saw a box.'
c. $[\text{̃ŋ g\text{̃} kum}]$ 'I will eat.'

In cases that have a syllabic nasal in the base, an epenthetic vowel will be inserted only in the ludling syllable and not in the syllabic nasal syllable. All syllabic nasals will have their own ludling syllable. The syllabic nasal will always be $[\text{̃m}]$ because it will assimilate the place of articulation of $[\text{p}]$. That being so, it is ungrammatical to have a $[\text{̃n}]$ before a $[\text{p}]$, as well as a non-realization of a ludling syllable as in (32c). However, the vowel in the first insertion is borrowed from the following syllable and the insertion does not carry a generic vowel $[\text{u}]$ as (34) and (35). The mechanisms which trigger $[\text{u}]$ or $[\text{e}]$ insertion is not yet fully understood.

- (32) a. **N be** → **ṃ.pe be.'pe** 'I saw'
 b. **N be** → ***ṇ.pe be.'pe**
 c. **N be** → ***ṃ.ø.be.'pe**

This shows that these nasals are syllabic, because they do not behave like other consonant clusters that need a vowel to avoid complex onsets, as shown in (32, 33). In the example (33), we can see that, in the ludling syllable, a vowel is copied from the syllable on the right. The syllabic nasal can appear before another consonant without resyllabification because it is already in another syllable. Therefore it does not violate the minimum syllable rule (no empty nucleus syllables are allowed) and Fa do Vesu's no complex onset rule.



Nevertheless, there are initial nasal consonants elsewhere which can be interpreted as prenasal consonants or syllabic nasals. Again, there is a correlation between the point of articulation of the onset of the next consonant and the nasal consonant itself. Examples (34) and (35) show the prenasals [nd] and [ŋg] in the beginning of the word. In the ludling, the nasal phase behaves as syllabic nasals while the obstruent phase forms the onset of a full syllable followed by its nucleus. The nasal phase changes its point of articulation to labial because of the assimilation process triggered by [p], creating a nuclear syllable (syllabic nasal) for itself.

- (34) a. **n'da** → [**n'da**] 'to walk'
 b. [**n'da**] → **ṃ.pu.da.'pa** 'to walk'
 c. [**n'da**] → ***ṇ.pu.da.'pa**
 d. [**n'da**] → ***ṇ.da.'pa**

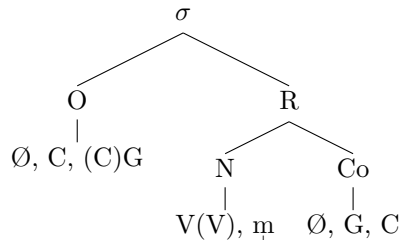
- (35) a. [ŋ'ge] 'person'
 b. [ŋ'ge] → m.pu.ge.'pe 'person'
 c. [ŋ'ge] → *N.₁pu.ge.'pe
 d. [ŋ'ge] → *N.₁ge.'pe

Consequently, all options with coronal or dorsal points of articulation are ruled out. Besides, the primary stress in the ludling is located in the final syllable, just as in Fa d'Ambô basic forms.

Language games in Portuguese-based Creoles of the Gulf of Guinea can help us understand some issues on the phonology of these languages and the evidence presented here to Fa do Vesu can be applied to language games in its sister languages.

4 Conclusion

Differently from Fa d'Ambô, however, Fa do Vesu allows no syllabic consonants other than [m] and no complex onsets. It means that [m] must occupy a syllable by itself and shares its point of articulation with the infix [-p], and complex onsets should be interpreted as heterosyllabic segments even if the first element is a nasal consonant or [s]¹⁶. If syllable medial, complex onsets are avoided in Fa do Vesu, but not in Fa d'Ambô. Onsetless and codaless syllables are allowed and glides are limited to non-nucleus position, just like in Fa d'Ambô.



Fa do Vesu sheds some light into Fa d'Ambô syllable structure but it does not mimic it whatsoever. At the same time, the study of language games in Gulf of Guinea Portuguese-based Creoles can clarify some issues on the syllable structure of these languages. In our case, Fa do Vesu helps us to

¹⁶The issue of a syllabic [s] offer perspectives for future research.

understand the behavior of long vowels, coda, glides, complex onsets, and syllabic nasals in Fa d'Ambô and in its related Creole languages¹⁷.

Fa do Vesu seems to be related to Brazil's Língua do Pê dialect 3. This connection can be linked to when Annobón was a Portuguese colony, given that Brazilian variants of Língua do Pê are also an old Portuguese heritage. Nevertheless, Fa do Vesu is quite different from Spanish Jeringonza varieties, although Spain has been officially the local colonial power since 1871 (Caldeira 2000). Future research on Fa do Vesu and related language games in Angolar, Lung'ie and Santome would contribute to the study of the languages of the Gulf of Guinea.

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¹⁷Agostinho 2014 describes a language game in Lung'ie which shed light on syllable structure and stress behaviour as well.

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