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# Fa d’Ambô (Equatorial Guinea) – Language Snapshot

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<b>Language Name:</b>	Fa d’Ambô, Fa d’Ambu, Annobonese Creole, Annobonese, Annobonense, Annobonês
<b>Genetic Classification:</b>	Gulf of Guinea Creole, Portuguese-lexifier
<b>ISO 639-3 Code:</b>	fab
<b>Glottolog Code:</b>	fada1250
<b>Population:</b>	approximately 6,000
<b>Location:</b>	Annobón Island, Equatorial Guinea; other parts of Equatorial Guinea; Spain
<b>Status:</b>	No official status
<b>Vitality rating:</b>	EGIDS 6a

## Summary

Fa d’Ambô is a Portuguese-lexifier creole language spoken in Annobón Island in the Gulf of Guinea and part of Equatorial Guinea. The language is genetically related to three other creoles spoken in the Gulf of Guinea, in São Tomé and Príncipe: Lungwa Santome or Forro, Angolar, and Lung’le or Principense. During fieldwork on Annobón conducted in 2012, I observed that all locals speak the language. There are a few elderly monolinguals but the majority are bilingual in Spanish, or multilingual. As a minority language in a multilingual country, there is no linguistic planning or policy for Fa d’Ambô in education, nor any standardization. However, its situation is stable, since children continue to acquire it as a first language. The language shares many lexical and grammatical characteristics with the other Gulf of Guinea creoles. Research on Fa d’Ambô encompasses a corpus, word lists, grammars, and research papers.

## Resumen

Fa d'Ambô es una lengua criolla de origen portugués que se habla en la Ilha de Ano Bom, ubicada en el Golfo de Guinea, que forma parte de Guinea Ecuatorial. El idioma está genéticamente relacionado con otras tres lenguas criollas que se hablan en el Golfo de Guinea, en Santo Tomé y Príncipe: lungwa santome o forro, angolar y lung'le o principense. Durante mi trabajo de campo en Annobón realizado en 2012, noté que todos los locales hablan el idioma. Hay algunos ancianos monolingües, pero la mayoría de la población es bilingüe en español o multilingüe. Como lengua minoritaria en un país multilingüe, no existe una planificación lingüística o política para el fa d'Ambô en la educación ni ningún proceso de estandarización. Sin embargo, su situación es estable, ya que los niños continúan adquiriendo fa d'Ambô como primera lengua. El idioma comparte muchas características léxicas y gramaticales con los otros criollos del Golfo de Guinea. La investigación sobre el fa d'Ambô abarca un corpus, listas de palabras, gramáticas y artículos de investigación.

## Resumo

O fa d'Ambô é uma língua crioula de base lexical portuguesa falada na Ilha de Ano Bom, localizada no Golfo da Guiné, sendo parte da Guiné Equatorial. A língua é geneticamente relacionada a três outras línguas crioulas faladas no Golfo da Guiné, em São Tomé e Príncipe: lungwa santome ou forro, angolar, e lung'le ou Principense. Durante o trabalho de campo em Ano Bom realizado em 2012, observei que todos os locais falam a língua. Há alguns idosos monolíngues, mas a maioria da população é bilíngue em espanhol ou multilíngue. Como uma língua minoritária em um país multilíngue, não há planejamento linguístico ou política para o fa d'Ambô na educação ou qualquer processo de padronização. No entanto, sua situação é estável, pois as crianças continuam a adquirir fa d'Ambô como primeira língua. A língua compartilha muitas características lexicais e gramaticais com os outros crioulos do Golfo da Guiné. A pesquisa sobre o fa d'Ambô abrange um corpus, listas de palavras, gramáticas e artigos de pesquisa.

## 1. Overview

Fa d'Ambô, lit. 'speech of Annobón', is a minority Portuguese-lexifier creole language spoken in the tiny Island of Annobón, in the Republic of Equatorial Guinea, located in the Gulf of Guinea. During fieldwork conducted in 2012, I observed that Fa d'Ambô is the mother tongue of all Annobónese, independent of their age, and it is their main vehicle of non-official communication. According to Agostinho et al. (2019), besides the residents of Annobón, there are additional speakers in the country's capital Malabo, and the Equatorial-Guinean diaspora. The Census shows that the population of Annobón was 5,008 in 2002, and 5,314 in 2018 (DGEN 2002, INEGE 2018). The 2002 Census reports 834 non-Annobónese living in Annobón (both Equatoguineans and foreigners), and 2,282 Annobónese living elsewhere in Equatorial Guinea and abroad. Considering that the language is still being learned by children in Annobón, and that there are not a considerable number of second-language (L2) speakers, it is possible to estimate the total number of speakers of Fa d'Ambô to be around 6,000.<sup>1</sup>

Based on my fieldwork from 2012, I consider Fa d'Ambô to be *vigorous* (EGIDS 6a). However, the migration of younger generations to Bioko and abroad, where the Annobónese are heavily exposed to other languages, such as the lingua franca Pichi, might present a future threat to the vitality of Fa d'Ambô (Hagemeyer & Zamora 2016).

There is no linguistic planning or policy for Fa d'Ambô. Yakpo (2011: 21) argues for the use of Fang (ISO code 639-3: fan), Bube (bvb), Pichi (fpe), and Fa d'Ambô in education, and development of linguistic policy in Equatorial Guinea, but nothing has been done concerning Fa d'Ambô. The language is not currently used in schools and national media outlets, and it lacks an official orthography. However, Fa d'Ambô is present in the local media and cultural practices and expressions such as songs, religious rituals, oral literature, video clips, soap operas, and, more recently, YouTube videos.<sup>2</sup> Hagemeyer & Zamora (2016: 205) mention the work of

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<sup>1</sup> Other authors estimate the total number of speakers to be between 5,000 and 5,600 (Lewis et al. 2009) and between 4,000 and 4,500 (Post 1998).

<sup>2</sup> Two examples are EBPRO G.E (<https://www.youtube.com/user/epiblas55>) and Nelía Zamora (<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCukAo6BNef5xHnJTE57LuSA/featured>) (both accessed 2021-05-20).

Lêdjam (2008a,b), in particular his *Cancionero oral annobonés*, a collection of poems from the oral tradition, with Spanish translations.<sup>3</sup>

Equatorial Guinea is comprised of a mainland territory and the islands of Annobón and Bioko (formerly Fernando Pó), where the capital Bata is located. It is a multilingual and multicultural country whose official languages are Spanish, French, and, more recently, Portuguese. In contrast to Spanish, French and Portuguese are not actually present in Annobón. Most of the population is bilingual or multilingual, with very few elderly monolingual speakers. Bantu languages such as Bube and Fang, as well as Pichi, an English-lexifier creole, are spoken in Bioko, and in the continental part of the country. As will be shown, the origin of these Gulf of Guinea creoles is linked to Portuguese exploration, and the kidnapping and confinement of African populations from the 15<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

## 2. Social and historic context

The islands of São Tomé and Príncipe were probably discovered in the early 1470s, while the discovery of Annobón occurred later (Caideira 2015: 68). The first attempt to settle on the island of São Tomé was made in 1485, but successful settlement took place only in 1493 (Hagemeijer & Zamora 2016: 195). São Tomé was first populated by enslaved people, mainly from the Niger Delta, and, later, primarily from Congo and Angola (Caldeira 2008, 2013: 67-72; Seibert 2013: 66-67, 2014: 46). A creole language emerged from the contact between the Portuguese and African populations in this multilingual scenario during the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries in São Tomé. During the early to mid-16<sup>th</sup> century, the speakers of this language, the Proto-Creole of the Gulf of Guinea (Bandeira 2017; Ferraz 1979; Hagemeijer 2011), were geographically separated into the other islands which contributed to the speciation that resulted in the four genetically-related languages spoken today: Lungwa Santome or Forro (ISO 639-3 code: cri), Angolar (ISO 639-3 code: aoa) and Lung'le or Principense (ISO 639-3 code: pre) in São Tomé and Príncipe, and Fa d'Ambô in Annobón, Equatorial Guinea.

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<sup>3</sup> The Annobónese Juan Tomás Ávila Laurel is one of the best known Equatoguinean writers and activists. He is portrayed in the 2019 documentary *The Writer from a Country Without Bookstores*, directed by Marc Serena.

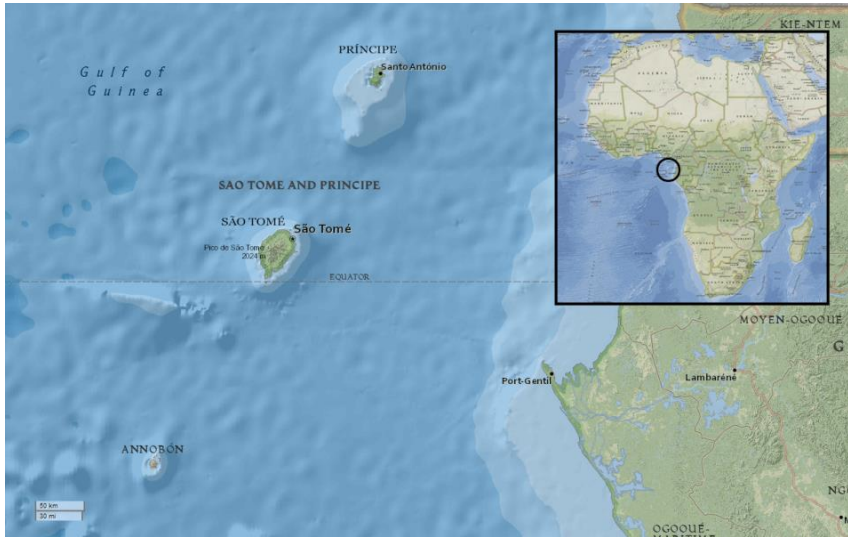


Figure 1: The Gulf of Guinea<sup>4</sup>

Ferraz (1979: 8, 11-13) considers both Edoid<sup>5</sup> and Bantu languages to be the main substrates of the Gulf of Guinea creoles, while other authors argue that the languages from the Niger Delta, particularly Edoid languages, were the main substrate, while Bantu languages, such as Kikongo and Kimbundu, played a secondary role (Hagemeyer 2011; see also Agostinho et al. 2019; Bandeira 2017; Ladhams 2012).

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<sup>4</sup> Source: modified from <https://mapmaker.nationalgeographic.org> (accessed 2021-05-15).

<sup>5</sup> Since Edoid languages were earlier classified as Kwa (versus Benue-Congo currently), some authors refer to a Kwa substrate, such as Ferraz (1979) and Hagemeyer (1999). Other languages of southern Nigeria are also cited as present in the formation of the Gulf of Guinea creoles, such as Yoruboid (Yoruba and Itsekiri) (Ladhams 2003) and Ijoid languages (Hagemeyer 2011).

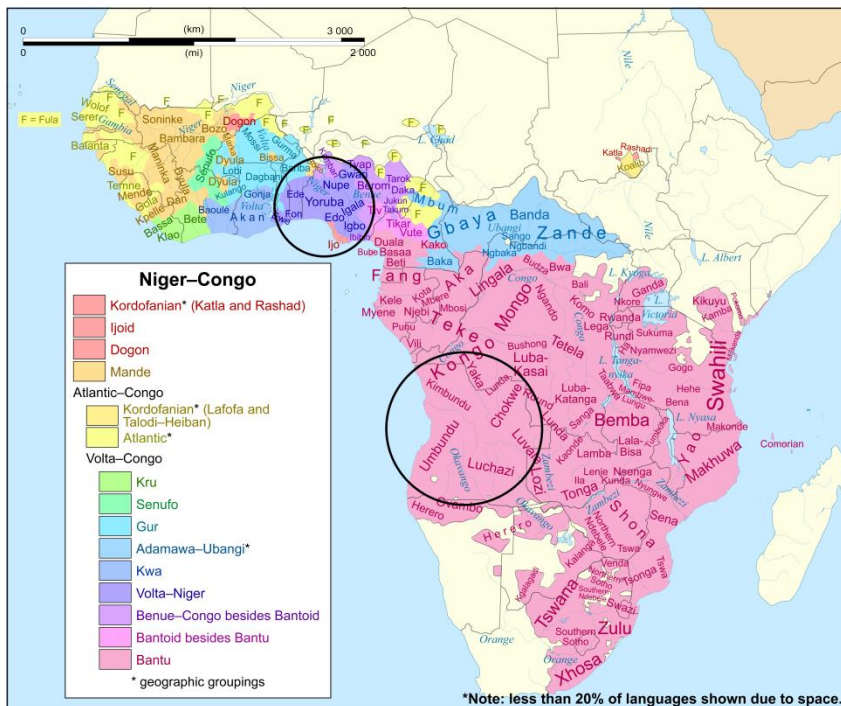


Figure 2: Volta-Niger/West-Benue Congo and Bantu regions<sup>6</sup>

Annobón was a Portuguese colony from its discovery 1778, when it was ceded to Spain by the Treaty of El Pardo. It ceased to be a Spanish colony in 1968 when it was incorporated into the independent state of Equatorial Guinea. Because of its small size of 17.5km<sup>2</sup>, Annobón was not part of the main route during the Atlantic slave trade, a fact that contributed to its intermittent colonial development. Even though the island's colonization began soon after its discovery (Araujo et al. 2013; Caldeira 2004, 2006, 2010), its small territory and localization did not support a large-scale sugar plantation economy,<sup>7</sup> unlike its neighboring islands of São Tomé and Príncipe (cf. Seibert 2013).

The island was occupied mostly by enslaved people who had previously spent time in São Tomé, bringing with them the language and culture of that

<sup>6</sup> Source: modified from [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Map\\_of\\_the\\_Niger\\_%E2%80%93\\_Congo\\_languages.svg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Map_of_the_Niger_%E2%80%93_Congo_languages.svg) (accessed 2021-05-15).

<sup>7</sup> Annobón did, however, host small-scale cotton production (Caldeira 2010).

colony (Araujo et al. 2013; Bandeira 2017). As a result, both the language and the cultural aspects of Annobón, such as oral literature traditions<sup>8</sup>, religious traditions, and gastronomy, represent the country's historical links to São Tomé and Príncipe, and the rest of the Portuguese world (Agostinho et al. 2019). Therefore, the origins and development of Fa d'Ambô, as well as the conquest of the island, are intimately linked to the Portuguese colonization movement in the area, which was fueled by the abduction and displacement of Africans for enslavement in the Gulf of Guinea and elsewhere (Agostinho et al. 2019).

### 3. Research and data

The first studies of Fa d'Ambô were made by the missionaries Vila (1891) and Barrena (1924[1957]), both from the *Congregación de los Misioneros Hijos del Inmaculado Corazón de María*. Vila (1891) is a grammar sketch, and Barrena (1924[1957]) is a grammar.<sup>9</sup> Barrena arrived as a priest in Annobón in 1892 and died in 1925, so it is safe to assume that the grammar was written between the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. I consider *Gramática Annobonesa*, a rare example of a missionary grammar of a creole<sup>10</sup>, as one of the last colonial missionary grammars<sup>11</sup> – if not the last. Granda published several papers while he was the director of the *Centro Cultural Hispano Guineano* in Malabo (1984, 1985, 1986a, 1986b), focusing mainly on lexicology and phonetics.

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<sup>8</sup> Some traditional stories are found in both Annobón and Príncipe. The crystalized formula to start a traditional story is also shared by Fa d'Ambô, Lung'Ie, and Lungwa Santome, with minor modifications.

<sup>9</sup> The latter follows the Greco-Roman model of missionary grammars (cf. Altman 2011).

<sup>10</sup> Zwartjes (2011: 13) mistakenly holds that '[i]t is significant that Portuguese and Spanish missionaries never compiled grammars or dictionaries of the varieties such as pidgins and creoles that resulted from contact with European languages: they were interested in independent "natural languages" which had not been corrupted by linguistic contact'.

<sup>11</sup> According to Zwartjes (2018: 1), missionary grammars 'were mainly written as pedagogical tools for language teaching and learning in a missionary-colonial setting. (...) These grammars are modeled according to the traditional Greco-Latin framework (...). In the New World, Asia, and elsewhere, missionaries had to find an adequate methodology in order to describe typological features they had never seen before'.



Because of its isolation and political situation, it is very difficult to do fieldwork on Annobón. In recent decades, only two fieldwork trips have been made by non-native linguists:

1. Marike Post in 1990, resulting in several papers and book chapters focusing mainly on morphosyntax (Post 1993, 1994, 1995, 1997, 1998, 2013);
2. Ana Lívía Agostinho and Alfredo Christofolletti in 2012. Part of the recorded data is available as an online searchable corpus with 132 texts (Hagemeijer et al. 2014). Published papers focus mainly on phonology and interfaces, such as Agostinho & Araujo (2021), Agostinho et al. (2019), Araujo et al. (2013), and Araujo & Agostinho (2014).

There are two recent descriptive grammars of Fa d'Ambô: Zamora Segorbe (2010) in Spanish, and Hagemeijer et al. (2020), the first grammar in English; the latter is largely based on the data of Hagemeijer et al. (2014) and Armando Zamora Segorbe's native-speaker knowledge.

Fa d'Ambô shares many cognates and grammatical features with the other Gulf of Guinea creoles because of their common origin (cf. Araujo et al. 2013; Bandeira 2017; Hagemeijer 2011; Nash et al. 2020) – see comparative wordlists in Graham & Graham (2004), and Bandeira (2017). Comparative research on Fa d'Ambô and the other Gulf of Guinea creoles can be found in Hagemeijer (2009, 2011), Ladhams (2003, 2012), Bandeira (2017), Agostinho & Araujo (2021), among others.

For an overview of the historical context of Annobón, see Araujo et al. (2013) and Hagemeijer & Zamora (2016).

#### **4. Current research**

My current research is focused on the phonology of Fa d'Ambô. I am currently investigating its word-prosodic system and its relation to other phonological phenomena, such as vowel length and the diachronic loss of liquid consonants. Following the analysis of Lung'Ie by Agostinho & Hyman (2021), and my fieldwork data (see also Agostinho & Araujo 2021), I propose that Fa d'Ambô has a restrictive privative H/Ø tone system, in which the /H/ is culminative, but non-obligatory. In Portuguese-origin words, the H tone is generally linked to the vocalic mora of the syllable that had stress in Portuguese (via Proto-Creole of the Gulf of Guinea) through diachronic stress-to-tone alignment. The African words may show a different pattern (Agostinho & Araujo 2021). The tone-bearing unit is the (vocalic) mora; Hagemeijer et al. 2020 present a H/L analysis of Fa d'Ambô, similar to

Maurer's (2009) analysis of Lung'Ie. Agostinho & Hyman (2021) provide a critical view of such an analysis of Lung'Ie. In both Lung'Ie and Fa d'Ambô, CVV and C'VV are contrastive and synchronically unpredictable, so the location of the H tone must be marked underlyingly. If a liquid in the second position of a complex onset is lost, as in (1), the result is a rising contour. On the other hand, if a liquid in the coda is lost, as in (2), the result is a falling contour. The data are very consistent for both languages, and speakers are aware of this contrast (Agostinho & Hyman 2021; Agostinho & Araujo 2021):

	Protoform	Fa d'Ambô	Lung'Ie	Phonetic output	Gloss
(1)	*ple.tu	/pɛ́ɛ.tu/	/pɛ́ɛ.tu/	[pɛ̃:tu]	'black'
(2)	*per.tu	/pɛ́ɛ.tu/	/pɛ́ɛ.tu/	[pê:tu]	'close'

Note: for protoforms see Bandeira (2017)

## 5. Links

Fa d'Ambô Corpus: <http://alfclul.clul.ul.pt/CQPweb/fadambo/>

Glottolog: <https://glottolog.org/resource/language/id/fada1250>

Ethnologue: <https://www.ethnologue.com/language/fab>

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