
Reviewed by Kofi Yakpo, The University of Hong Kong

Cameroon Pidgin English, by Miriam Ayafor and Melanie Green, is the latest and, as the subtitle ‘A comprehensive grammar’ suggests, most extensive work yet on the African English-lexifier creole language Cameroon Pidgin English (CPE). CPE is the second-largest English-lexifier contact language in the world after Nigerian Pidgin, and it belongs to a chain of closely related, mutually intelligible varieties spoken in the West African littoral zone in The Gambia (Aku), Sierra Leone (Krio), Ghana (Ghanaian Pidgin English), Equatorial Guinea (Pichi), and Nigeria (Nigerian Pidgin, also referred to as Naijá). Both authors are well placed for the task of describing CPE. A, a native speaker of CPE, has done significant work on the language (e.g. Ayafor 2008), and G is an Africanist linguist who has conducted work on Hausa (e.g. Green 1997). The linguistic examples and texts in the grammar are almost without exception extracted from a 240,000-word corpus compiled by the authors themselves, which is, to my knowledge, the largest publicly accessible corpus of any African English-lexifier contact language so far (Green, Ayafor, & Ozón 2016).

Two introductory chapters provide a state of the art and a typological and sociohistorical overview of the language. Subsequent chapters cover phonetics, phonology, and orthography (Ch. 3), the lexicon (Ch. 4), the noun phrase and pronouns (Chs. 3–6), and tense, mood, modality, aspect, and negation (Ch. 7). An overview of basic clause types (Ch. 8) is followed by a description of more complex structures, including serial verb and light verb constructions (Ch. 9) and combined clauses (Ch. 10). A final chapter (Ch. 11) deals with aspects of information structure, including topic and focus. Cameroon Pidgin English covers all of the central aspects of the language, including in-depth treatments of topics that have occupied creolists for decades, like serial verb constructions and tense and aspect. There are some aspects, however, that could have been addressed differently, and I focus here on three of these, namely the orthography, the treatment of tone, and glossing.

The often contentious nature of the graphization of oral languages has received some attention in the literature, including the specific case of creoles (see Deuber & Hinrichs 2007). CPE is no exception in this regard. Suggestions for the orthographic standardization of CPE have alternated between more etymological (hence English-oriented) and more phonemic systems (see Sala 2009 for an overview). As in other cases, the wide range of opinions within a small group of experts and the general absence of polity-driven codification are therefore at least partly responsible for the absence of a widely accepted orthography of CPE. The orthography used in this book therefore represents one of various individual graphization initiatives (see Ayafor 1996 for a precursor).

The authors state their wish to adopt a transcription system that is ‘as accessible as possible to CPE speakers’ (43). This is, however, contradicted by the opaque nature of some of the graphification choices made. Although the authors’ system employs distinctions in line with earlier phonemic approaches to graphization (e.g. de Féral 1989), it also introduces some idiosyncratic distinctions (e.g. dey /dè/ ‘3sg.sbj’ vs. de /dè/ ‘day’ vs. deiy /dè/ ‘locative copula; there’ and wey /wé/ ‘way’ vs. weiy /wé/ ‘relativizer’). In other instances, the system is (partly) etymological in relying on standard English orthographic principles for representing the distinction between the high /o/ (e.g. gote /gót/ ‘goat’, stone /stón/ ‘stone’) and the low /ɔ/ (e.g. jos /jɔs/ ‘just’). This, in turn, leads to inconsistencies between monosyllabic words, such as noe /nô/ ‘negator’ and foe /fô/ ‘associative preposition’, and polysyllabic words containing the same vowel where the spelling is phonemic, such as folo /fólò/ ‘accompany’ (which should be foeloe, if consistent) or kola /kólà/ ‘kola nut’ (which should be koela). Further complications are introduced by the use of graphemic

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distinctions where their phonemic reality is questionable (e.g. *doo* /dó/ ‘door’, which could simply be *do* because the lengthening of the final vowel generally occurs in CPE in utterance-final, coda-less words). The overall result is a somewhat counterintuitive system that has no correlate in the academic or the vernacular graphization practices of CPE’s sister languages in West Africa.

By contrast, Krio, the only African English-lexifier creole (AEC) to have an officially recognized orthography, has a largely phonemic script (Coomber 1992), based on the *Practical orthography of African languages* (International African Institute 1930). The Krio system retains the two IPA-based graphemes <e> and <o> in order to distinguish them from <ɛ> and <ɔ>; compare *got* ‘goat’, *ston* ‘stone’, *jó* ‘just’, *no* ‘negator’, *fólo* ‘accompany’, and *domɔt* ‘door’. This system has had quite some success in Sierra Leone, and I adopted it for the graphization of Pichi (Yakpo 2009). An alternative option could have been to follow the system developed by the Naija Langwej Akademi (the Nigerian Language Academy) for Nigerian Pidgin (Ofulue & Esizimetor 2010). It eliminates the orthographic distinctions between the low vowels /ɛ/ and /ɔ/ and the high /e/ and /o/ made by some earlier orthographies and collapses them into <ɛ> and <ɔ>, respectively. Hence /kɔmɔt/ ‘go/come out’ is rendered *komot*. It is therefore somewhat of a missed opportunity that the authors did not either tap into existing efforts regarding orthography development or take long-established vernacular writing practices in Cameroon and West Africa into account (e.g. by writing the relativizer /wé/ as *wey* instead of *we* and the locative copula /dé/ as *dey* instead of *dey*).

A further feature of the Naija Langwej Akademi orthography is that it makes use of a single acute accent to distinguish tonal minimal pairs like *dè/dé* ‘imperfective marker’ vs. *de/dé* ‘day’ and *Naijá*/Naijá/*’Niger’ vs. *Naijá*/Naijá/*’Nigeria, Nigerian Pidgin’. This leads to a second problematic aspect. A more extensive treatment of tone would have been desirable. Some of the literature on tone in creole languages is reviewed (40–41), but *en gros*, the suprasegmental system of CPE is not given its due place. Tone is not marked on CPE words throughout the book, and the authors address ‘stress and tone’ on only three pages (39–42), referring instead to an ongoing investigation whose preliminary results ‘could be indicative of a partial tone system’ (42). This is too tentative a statement given the quite extensive treatment that the tone systems of related AECs in Africa (e.g. Berry 1971, Faraclas 1985) and the Caribbean (e.g. Good 2004) have received in the last decades. These studies have concluded that many AECs have lexical tone systems with at least two phonemic tones and morphological uses of tone.

Due to the important role of tone in CPE, the lack of its treatment leads to inaccuracies in the grammatical analysis, for example, when it is stated that ‘the formal distinction between subject (nominative) and object (accusative) personal pronouns is only evident in the first person singular and in the third person singular and plural’ (108). As a matter of fact, the segmentally identical personal pronouns constitute tonal minimal pairs, that is, /yú/ ‘2sg.subj’ vs. /yú/ ‘2sg.obj’, /wik/ ‘1pl.sbj’ vs. /wí/ ‘1pl.obj’. The same holds for the distinction between the segmentally identical possessive and object pronouns /mí/ ‘1sg.poss’ and /mí/ ‘1sg.obj’, which are both rendered as *mí* in this book. The lack of a treatment of grammatical tone also obscures the difference between (a) (reduplicative) compounding and (b) repetition. This distinction is made prosodically in CPE and its sister languages in West Africa, and it has an areal distribution extending to noncreole languages of West Africa (Yakpo 2012). While (a) involves tonal derivation and is therefore a morphological, word-forming process, (b) involves syntactic concatenation and does not lead to tonal changes in repeated words (an observation also made in Sala 2009:16). The differences between these morphologically and semantically distinct processes are not addressed, and (reduplicative) compounds and repetitions are both written with a hyphen, conveying the impression that both form prosodic and morphological words. An example is the reduplicative compound *waka-waka* /wákà-wákà/ ‘travel (around) constantly’ (the lexical H tone of the first element (the dependent component) is replaced by an L) vs. the repetition *sumo-sumo* [sûmô sûmô] ‘very small’ (both iterations retain their LH lexical tone pattern). Addressing these differences may appear pedantic, but in the context of debates about creole typology, these complex uses of morphological tone serve as an important reminder that descriptions of creole languages like CPE need to be as detailed and typologically informed as possible, in order to provide nuanced perspectives in a debate characterized by many generalizations.
It also is a bit unfortunate that the authors did not opt for using the Leipzig glossing rules (https://www.eva.mpg.de/lingua/resources/glossing-rules.php). The book therefore contains numerous idiosyncratic function labels like ‘pr’ instead of ‘PFV’ for ‘perfective’, or inconsistent labeling like a ‘1s.sbj’ vs. ‘wi’ ‘1pl.sbj’, where the Leipzig rules suggest ‘1sg.sbj’ and ‘1pl.sbj’, respectively. Further, the authors sometimes use different labels for multifunctional forms. This leads to the impression of a corresponding formal differentiation. An example is the person form *mi/*mi/, which is glossed as ‘1s.foc’ when focused, and as ‘1s.obj’ when found in the object position. A final point is technical: free translations in English are not provided below each CPE sentence in the text collection (Ch. 12), but rather are grouped into a separate paragraph. This makes the texts at the end of the book difficult to navigate, particularly because neither the CPE examples nor their translations are numbered.

The critical points raised above may matter disproportionately to linguists like me, who are involved in research on the English-lexifier creoles of West Africa. But they pale in comparison with the many merits of this work. This grammar continues a tradition of descriptive work on Cameroon Pidgin English that culminated in a number of important academic (e.g. Schneider 1966, Todd 1969) and pedagogical works (e.g. Bellama, Nkele, & Yudom 1983) that are either somewhat dated today or more limited in scope (e.g. Nkengasong 2016). With two hundred and sixty-two pages of grammar and another sixteen pages of excellent texts, this book is indeed the most comprehensive treatment of the language. The core grammar sections of this book contain a wealth of information that creolists, contact linguists, and linguists working on African languages and English will be able to make ample use of. Ch. 7 (‘Tense, mood, modality, aspect and negation’), for example, contains a detailed table with all combinatorial possibilities of the tense-mood-aspect markers of CPE, and it contextualizes their use by providing many interesting example sentences. This book and the corpus on which it is based therefore constitute an important advance for the description and documentation of African (contact) languages.

REFERENCES


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Language contact and change in Mesoamerica and beyond (hereafter LCCMB) presents selected contributions from the 2013 workshop on ‘Amerindian Languages in Contact Situations: Spanish-American Perspectives’, held at the International Conference on Historical Linguistics, and from the special session on ‘Language Contact in Mesoamerica’ at the meeting of the Society for the Study of the Indigenous Languages of the Americas, also in 2013. The book addresses the relative lack of publications focusing on language contact in an area of extreme linguistic diversity. It does not aim for completeness but offers detailed examples of contact situations in Mesoamerica and nearby areas, highlighting the effect of different types of language contact on language change. LCCMB presents a range of hypotheses, research methods, and linguistic patterns that will be useful to others researching language change and language contact.

The papers that were selected represent distinct academic traditions that do not usually interact—for example, Spanish dialectology, Amerindian linguistics, and sociolinguistics. As a result, the volume provides a more integrated look at language contact and change, which includes the influence of Indigenous languages on Spanish, the influence of Spanish on Indigenous languages, and the influence of Indigenous languages on each other. The data used to support claims of language contact and resulting language change include colonial-era documents that supply examples of older features of currently spoken languages, descriptions of languages that are no longer spoken, and descriptions of currently spoken languages for which there is no earlier documentation. The uneven availability of data for each language makes it necessary to implement unique research strategies to support claims about language contact.

Several chapters use loanwords from Spanish into Indigenous languages to identify the Spanish varieties that served as the source languages for the loans and to establish the time frame of contact. Borrowing can take place over long periods of time in a complex and layered exchange, resulting in distinctive patterns of language change. The research presented here takes into account the sociolinguistic and historical factors that influence particular types of language contact and change.

In their introductory chapter, ‘Language contact in Mesoamerica and beyond’, two of the editors, Karen Dakin and Natalie Operstein, place the volume in historical and theoretical context with respect to the role language contact plays in language change. The volume is dedicated to Claudia Parodi, the third editor, and honors her passion and enthusiasm for the project even...