

REVIEWS

The emergence of hybrid grammars: Language contact and change. By ENOCH OLADÉ ABOH. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015. Pp. xiv, 346. ISBN 9780521769983. \$110 (Hb).

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This book is an important new contribution to the study of creole grammars and language change in situations of language contact, which, the author argues (in the wake of Mufwene 2008), actually characterizes any process of language acquisition, hence any event of language change. Enoch Oladé Aboh is a professor of linguistics at the University of Amsterdam and a native speaker of Gungbe. A weaves together the results of fifteen years of work on the morphosyntax of Gbe languages and three Atlantic creoles (Haitian, Sranan, and Saramaccan) and the findings of his more recent research on the history of Western Africa during the slave-trade period. The preface is written by Salikoko Mufwene, whose biological approach to language genesis and evolution is acknowledged by A as a major source of inspiration for his own thinking. Another central building block of A's work is the MINIMALIST program, as developed by, for example, Noam Chomsky (1995), Richard Kayne (1994), Luigi Rizzi (1997), and Guglielmo Cinque (2004), whose framework allows him to decompose the workings of language change and formalize his syntactic analyses in light of language comparison.

The strength of this book lies in the detailed linguistic and historical evidence upon which A builds his theory of creole genesis. His linguistic research has led him to observe various noteworthy points of convergence between Gbe grammars and the grammars of Sranan, Saramaccan, and Haitian. But the assumption that Gbe, among the various language groups that must have been spoken by the African slaves deported to America, had a major impact on creole genesis in Haiti and Suriname could not be upheld without serious historical support. This is provided in detail in Ch. 2, an Africa-oriented complement to Chaudenson's (2001, 2003) seminal research on the linguistic history of French slave plantation colonies. Having established on historical grounds that Gbe languages are indeed likely to have been sufficiently represented among the slaves of Suriname and Haiti during the plantation period to have had an impact on the emerging creoles, A had to try to work out the precise way in which Gbe and European grammars may have interacted to give birth to creole grammars. This linguistic component of his research is carried out within a new theoretical framework combining the key ingredients of Mufwene's biological approach to language evolution with the central assets of minimalist syntax.

The book is divided into eight chapters. Ch. 1, the introduction, lays out A's leading ideas about creole genesis and language change through hybridization and outlines the structure of the demonstration to follow. Ch. 2, 'The agents of creole formation: Geopolitics and cultural aspects of the Slave Coast', explores the geopolitics of the Slave Coast of Western Africa between the fourteenth and eighteenth centuries, and more specifically during the period of the transatlantic slave trade (sixteenth to eighteenth centuries). A argues, based on a body of research on African cultural and economic history, that the Gbe-speaking Aja people were crucially instrumental in the creation of Haitian and Surinamese creoles. The Gbe-speaking Kingdom of Allada developed between the fourteenth and eighteenth centuries across a vast area comprising all of the major ports of the Slave Coast and spreading northward from the Bight of Benin, and it drew most of its great economic wealth from a highly structured international slave trade. Slaves would often be people captured in wars fought by the king of Allada against his (also Gbe-speaking) rival vassals, and sometimes people condemned for debts or common-law crimes. These are but selected fragments of the abundant evidence provided by A in support of his assumption that Gbe speakers, although not the only language community among the African slaves deported to the Americas, were a sufficiently numerous and homogeneous group in the colonies—both culturally and linguistically—for their grammars to have impacted the development of the emerging creoles

during the linguistically crucial plantation phase. This assumption clearly runs against the common view that the African languages present in the slave colonies were too many and diverse to allow intercommunication, and therefore ceased to be used from the beginning.

Ch. 3, 'The emergence of creoles: A review of some current hypotheses', provides some new conceptual and empirical counterevidence to the four main available theories of creole genesis, which I do not review here for lack of space: Robert Chaudenson's (2001, 2003) so-called 'superstrativist' approach, Claire Lefebvre's (1998) relexification theory, Derek Bickerton's (1981) bioprogram theory, and Ingo Plag's (2008a,b, 2009a,b) interlanguage theory. The common denominator in the four theories under scrutiny is the idea—discussed throughout this book—that creoles resulted from the slaves' deficient or incomplete second language acquisition, due to their specific external conditions (a linguistically heterogeneous slave population and restricted access to the European language). Having convincingly shown that this vision of things cannot be upheld, A moves on to propose an alternative theory of creole genesis and language change in general.

In Ch. 4, 'Competition and selection', the author presents his own view of creole genesis based on Mufwene's biological theory of language evolution, which assumes that language change always arises from language learners recombining features drawn from the linguistic FEATURE POOL provided by the idiolectal varieties of their environment. Under this view, ANY language change occurs in a language contact situation and involves the recombination of properties originating from different idiolects, hence hybridization, but the hybrid character of the resulting language variety is all the more perceptible when the recombined properties come from typologically and/or genetically diverse sources—as is the case for creole languages. With this general framework in mind, and in light of both the historical data presented in Ch. 2 and his linguistic analysis of creole grammars, A revisits current assumptions about the likely content of the linguistic feature pool of the slave plantation colonies, arguing that it must have comprised (i) a European koine (combining nonstandard idiolectal features of the lexifier language), (ii) an African koine (combining features from the various African languages spoken on the plantations, with Gbe standing out as a salient language group), and (iii) a new plantation contact variety (the emerging creole) resulting from MUTUAL LANGUAGE LEARNING between the speakers of (i) and (ii). Here is a small sample of A's documented claims: African languages were indeed spoken on the plantations; many inhabitants of the colonies must have been (i)/(ii)-bilinguals; the contact language—creole—was spoken (hence 'created') not only by the slaves (as classically assumed), but also by the European masters for their own purposes (better management, religious indoctrination, etc.).

A then proceeds to build up a formal linguistic model of language change combining Mufwene's competition-and-selection theory with a minimalist approach focusing on I-languages, rather than E-languages. From an I-language (mental internal grammar) viewpoint, a new (idiolectal) grammar emerges through the creation of new lexical or functional items, each of which is made up of three sets of features—phonological, morphosyntactic, and semantic. A crucial idea is that the feature-recombination process leading to language change may affect these three types of features independently—thus a Saramaccan verb may combine phonological features from both English and Gbe, morphosyntactic features from English, and semantic features from Gbe. Another important idea is that some components of grammar are more vulnerable to feature recombination—typically those involving interfaces such as the determiner and complementizer systems linking phrase structure to 'discourse'—while other components pertaining to 'core' grammar (e.g. X-bar structure, predication structure) are less vulnerable to change.

Chs. 5 ('The D-system'), 6 ('The emergence of the clause periphery'), and 7 ('The emergence of serial verb constructions') draw material from A's previously published syntactic works on Haitian, Sranan, and Saramaccan in order to bring empirical support to his theory of language change. For each of the three aspects of morphosyntax under scrutiny, the creole grammars appear as NEW grammars, distinct from both English/French and Gbe. Regarding noun phrases, it is argued that the creoles held on to the specificity feature of Gbe, but used different morphosyntactic strategies to encode it (Gbe-like in Haiti, English-like in Suriname). Regarding the clause periphery, two main topics are discussed in detail: the functional marker *fu* of Sranan and Saramaccan, and the predicate-focus constructions present in the three creoles, whose properties are

argued to derive from a subtle recombination of European and Gbe features. Regarding serial constructions, A discards their common description as typologically exceptional and proposes to analyze them as instances of a clause-union structure also attested in European languages (in, for example, causative constructions), combining a functional, auxiliary-type V1 and a lexical VP2.

Ch. 8 ('Conclusions') summarizes some salient results of A's investigation. This is a book written with passion and humor, fed by many years of research on Gbe and creole grammars, full of thought-provoking ideas based on lots of empirical material, both historical and linguistic. It should be read by anyone working on language change and/or creole morphosyntax and genesis. I conclude with some random questions for future research. (1) Isn't the ambivalent development of Haitian *yo* as third-person plural pronoun and plural determiner reminiscent of that of, for example, Latin *illos* (Portuguese *os*, French *les*, etc.)? (2) Since the European languages spoken on the plantations were obviously informal, can the absence of formal-register European properties in creole grammars (e.g. French coordinated bare nouns; Ch. 5) legitimately be regarded as empirically relevant? Some informal superstratic properties might, by contrast, deserve further probing (e.g. the grammar of *là* in informal French). (3) Can the analysis of the Haitian determiner *LA* be regarded as complete without seriously acknowledging the properties of its Mauritian analogue, whose semantics seems just as 'specific' as that of both Caribbean-creole *LA* and informal-French *-là* (cf. Guillemin 2011, Alleesaib 2012), although the grammar of Indian-Ocean creoles is unlikely to have been influenced by Gbe (cf. Chaudenson 2007)? (4) From the point of view of grammatical economy, shouldn't we assume that language learning is ALWAYS PERFECT, rather than ALWAYS IMPERFECT (313)? (5) The assumption that universal grammar (UG) should contain a set of universal semantic features such as SPECIFICITY or (IN)DEFINITENESS runs against the Sapir-Whorf claim that conceptual categories are an effect of linguistic forms rather than encoded by linguistic forms and might lead to inconsistency within the minimalist perspective itself. Can we reasonably regard such complex notions as specificity and (in)definiteness to be FEATURES provided by UG, whatever UG might be?

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