

Since the scope of the book is vast, readers should heed K's advice about what is needed to work through it. But linguists should also be encouraged to tackle it as a way of learning about a lot of material that is inherently fascinating and might give them totally new perspectives on what they do for a living. In short, the book really delivers on its promise, and presents topics old and new that lend themselves very well to thinking mathematically about language.

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**A grammar of Saramaccan Creole.** By JOHN C. MCWHORTER and JEFF GOOD. (Mouton grammar library 56.) Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton, 2012. Pp. xi, 246. ISBN 9783110276435. \$210 (Hb).

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De Gruyter Mouton must be praised for the series of excellent grammars, which was started almost thirty years ago. Almost sixty grammars have been published, and this grammar of Saramaccan Creole is the least voluminous. All other grammars cover twice to almost four times as many pages. Does that mean that the description of Saramaccan requires fewer pages? And is this a significant observation in the light of creole studies?

Saramaccan is an English-lexifier creole spoken by some 50,000 people, most of whom live in Suriname, but a significant number have also settled in neighboring French Guyana since the 1980s, and some families are in the Netherlands and the US. Saramaccan is spoken by descendants of maroons whose communities in interior Suriname were formed between the 1690s, when the first slaves escaped and settled in the rainforest, and 1762, when the maroons agreed not to accept any more refugees in a peace treaty with the Dutch. The language also shows quite a bit of impact from Portuguese in the lexicon, as some escaped slaves came from plantations run by Portuguese-speaking Sephardic Jews. Saramaccan is the creole language that developed with the least influence from the lexifier, and therefore it may shed light on language creation more than any other new language, as it developed in the absence of a model or target language. Fewer than a few thousand roots from English, Portuguese, and African languages were available to create a

full-fledged grammar, and virtually all grammatical markers coexist with their lexical sources, providing a window on grammaticalization research.

Not surprisingly, this creole has received a lot of attention from linguists, and not only from specialized creolists. Saramaccan is the creole that differs most from its lexifier. Most of the lexicon is from English, but very little of English structure has been inherited, perhaps only the position of nominal modifiers relative to the noun. Saramaccan has been variously hailed as the 'deepest', the most 'radical', and the most 'African' of all creoles. In addition, Saramaccan also played a role in the discussion of whether creole grammars are less complex than noncreole grammars—a debate that was fueled by John McWhorter's 2001 claim that 'the world's simplest grammars are creole grammars', in a target article bearing that name in *Linguistic Typology*.

Some twenty-five years ago I introduced McWhorter to a Saramaccan speaker in Amsterdam—I think that was his first field experience with the language—and since then McWhorter has been working on Saramaccan and creole studies, combining his interest with a broad knowledge of the diversity of the languages of the world. The field of creolistics and knowledge of Saramaccan have increased dramatically in the past quarter of a century, not least because of the work of the two authors of the grammar and perhaps a dozen additional linguists who have worked on this language.

McWhorter is now one of the foremost thinkers about the typology and origin of creoles. Good has extensive field experience with West African languages, mostly Bantoid, and is also a respected phonologist and typologist. In addition, he has written extensively about language documentation. In short, they are an ideal team for a description of Saramaccan.

The book consists of a five-page introduction on methods and consultants, and it sketches the historical background of the language. There are seventeen chapters covering the description itself, and these are followed by a brief word list inspired by the Swadesh 100 list, two texts covering just over six pages, four pages of references, and a useful nine-page index of grammatical phenomena discussed in the grammar. The grammar is extremely rich in example sentences, over 1,000.

The three chapters on phonology and morpho(phono)logy are mostly the work of Good, and the chapters on syntax and lexicon mostly McWhorter's. One striking feature of this grammar is that all of the information is gathered from exiled speakers, apparently residing in the Netherlands, the San Francisco Bay area (both authors have spent time at Berkeley), and New York State (where both authors reside now). Purist fieldworkers may frown upon this practice, desiring that fieldworkers must do their work in the community interacting with the speakers. The exile situation generates some examples where speakers mention Frank Sinatra songs, driving cars, prices in dollars, or watching movies more than hunting wild pigs, riverine travel, or folk tales.

The field methods used are not described in detail. It covers in any case the recording of narratives and folktales, but primarily translations of (English?) sentences and other types of elicitation. One of the techniques to get speakers to produce certain constructions is to describe a background situation and try to get Saramaccans to produce a sentence spontaneously with the pertinent construction. For instance, in order to elicit serial verb constructions encoding an 'ablative', one can ask, 'Your brother has swallowed a mouse with a string attached to it, and then you yank on the string and pull the mouse out of him. How would you say what you did?' (xvi).

The grammar is divided into seventeen chapters, some of them covering areas found in all reference grammars, such as the noun phrase (Ch. 4), personal pronouns (Ch. 5), adjectives (Ch. 6), coordination and subordination (Ch. 9), passive and imperative (Ch. 10), questions (Ch. 11), adverbial modification (Ch. 14), and numerals and other time expressions (Ch. 16). Others are more specific to Saramaccan (and perhaps other creoles as well)—for instance, core predicate modifiers, negators, tense, aspect, and modals (Ch. 7), verb serialization (Ch. 8), nonverbal predication and *be*-verbs (Ch. 12), position, direction, and time (Ch. 13), and information structure (Ch. 15). There is also a brief chapter on lexical variation (Ch. 17). The first three chapters cover phonology: segmental phonology, including phonotactics (Ch. 1), prosodic phonology (Ch. 2), and morphology and morphophonemics (Ch. 3).

Some people may insist that monolingual speakers are to be preferred in fieldwork (to the extent that they can be found) and not speakers residing outside the community, but this has not prevented the authors from producing an excellent grammar. It is informed by previous work on the language, as they integrate the work of other scholars and sometimes correct it, and the book also points to a number of structures and patterns that were never described or analyzed before, including information structure, pragmatic functions, and perhaps the most detailed description of the phonological system of any creole language.

The facts of Saramaccan go against the oft-repeated claim that creoles are languages without morphology. Strikingly, none of the English and Portuguese inflectional and derivational affixes have made it into Saramaccan—in that sense there is 100% loss of lexifier morphology. There is indeed not very much morphology in the language, but there is some, and all morphological patterns appear to be innovations. This includes compounding patterns, which deviate significantly from English in that the possibilities of word formation are quite different beyond an observation that compounds are right-headed in both languages. Morphology is otherwise limited to reduplication with several functions (often patterned on African models), two nominalizers, some inflected prepositions (not called that, but very similar to what one finds in Breton, for instance), and some cliticized object pronouns, and there is a merger of pronouns with negative markers and a few others. Some other researchers have proposed that the preverbal tense-mood-aspect (TMA) markers can also be interpreted as preverbal prefixes, but this suggestion is not taken up by the authors in the morphology section. In the pertinent chapter on TMA, however, they call them clitics and auxiliaries.

The three chapters on phonology show how complex the sound system is, as it combines aspects of accent systems of the European languages with those of tonal systems of African languages, producing an intricate mixture of interacting influences. The segmental phonology is perhaps average, leaning toward the complex side from a crosslinguistic perspective. The language has labial-velars, prenasalized stops, and implosives (as allophones), reminiscent of West African languages. The authors are honest and regularly admit that they have not been able to disentangle all phonological details in depth, but the chapters are clearly a huge step forward in the description of Saramaccan. The combination of tonal morphology, changeable and unchangeable tones, the three (or more?) lexical strata, tonal and nontonal words, pitch replacing stress, tone sandhi skipping words, and prosodic patterns of different kinds is indeed a challenge.

Some decades ago the creolist Derek Bickerton surmised that all claims made by creolists can be contradicted by the author's own examples—his first law of creolistics. The description of the grammar of Saramaccan given in this book is richly illustrated with over 1,000 glossed and translated example sentences and phrases. This corpus enables the reader to check the authors' claims immediately. From another perspective, however, if all of the examples had been left out, the descriptive narrative would be reduced to approximately half its size. Are just over 100 pages of prose enough to describe Saramaccan in full?

This question brings us back to the question posed at the beginning of this review: are creoles less complex than noncreoles? When people objected to his claim that creole grammars are simpler, John McWhorter repeatedly defended the high quality of creole grammarians while noting that descriptive grammars of creoles tend to be less sizable than those of noncreoles. The question arises: do creole grammars require less prose than grammars of noncreole languages in order to describe, as fully as possible, all of the grammatical structures, rules, and paradigms—and exceptions? At first glance, this grammar of Saramaccan would seem to indicate that the answer to that question is yes, since the entire grammatical system is covered in a mere 246 pages. In contrast, the five most recent grammars published in the Mouton grammar library contain between 400 and 827 pages. But it is also the case that the fullest published descriptions of creoles that I am familiar with include grammars like Nicholas Quint's (2008) grammar of Capeverdean Portuguese creole (436 pages), Ineke Wellens's (2005) grammar of Nubi Arabic (460 pages), George and Mary Hutter's (1994) grammar of Saramaccan's sister language Ndyuka (656 pages), and Silvia Kouwenberg's (1993) grammar of Berbice Dutch (693 pages). Of course, such quantitative

data in the form of page numbers cannot be directly compared, in that some grammars also contain dictionaries and (perhaps many) texts; and such matters as density of style, amount of detail, publishers' constraints, and page layout play a role. On closer inspection it appears that the font and line spacing of the book under review mislead us: the letters in the book are very small, compared with those used in other Mouton grammars.

In short, descriptions of creole grammars—including this one—do not necessarily seem to be particularly brief. This grammar contains new details and observations on almost every page, even for readers who have worked on the language. It also combines features from structuralist traditions with more functionalist approaches: for instance, in the chapter on information structure, the authors describe how pragmatic functions like emphasis, focus, and new information are marked in the grammar. Saramaccan uses adverbs, particles, and positioning of elements as strategies. Especially striking and innovative are the many facts about exceptions to rules. For example, third-person object clitics may merge with some vowel-final verbs, but not with others (95–96).

The authors wisely stay away from discussions about the nature of creoles in this book, since such discussions belong elsewhere and not in a description. They do not take a stance in theoretical debates on some topics like verb serialization and verb movement.

The authors should be praised for their achievement, especially taking into account their fieldwork with exiled speakers. The only major drawback of the book is the price. Libraries should of course order it, but few linguists may be able afford it for their private libraries.

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**The sonority controversy.** Ed. by STEVE PARKER. (Phonology and phonetics 18.) Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton, 2012. Pp. 487. ISBN 9783110261516. \$154 (Hb).

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*The sonority controversy* is a collection of twelve articles, each touching on sonority in some way. While a few of the articles use sonority simply as a background to explore other issues, most examine issues that have been central to the discussion of sonority, or to the types of phenomena that sonority has been used to address, over the last several years.

Sonority is typically taken to be a scalar feature ordering the various types of segments with respect to loudness or intensity. Vowels are the most sonorous segments, and stops are the least sonorous, with glides, liquids, nasals, and fricatives falling in between.

- (1) Sonority scale: vowels > glides > liquids > nasals > fricatives > stops

Sonority has been employed most frequently in the analysis of restrictions on segment sequences within the syllable, being incorporated into two principles: the sonority sequencing principle