ENGLISH-BASED ATLANTIC CREOLES

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Abstract: The socio-historical realities of creole-speaking territories are deeply entwined producing at the same time, some distinct linguistic realities. The present study will attempt to give a broad panoply of the linguistic phenomena that have shaped the vernaculars of some of the British-ruled territories. We will focus on spelling, lexical and morphosyntactic similarities in four varieties and examine to what extent speakers of other varieties of English can access written texts without having been formally trained to read and understand related varieties.

Key words: Caribbean, Americas, creoles, orthography, intercomprehension.

Resumo: As realidades sócio-históricas desses territórios estão profundamente entrelaçadas produzindo, ao mesmo tempo, algumas realidades linguísticas distintas. O presente estudo tentará dar uma ampla panóplia dos fenômenos lingüísticos que moldaram os vernáculos de alguns dos territórios Inglês-governados. Vamos nos concentrar na ortografia, as semelhanças léxicais e morfossintáticas em quatro variedades e estudar em que medida os falantes de outras variedades de Inglês podem acessar textos escritos sem terem sido formalmente treinados para ler e entender variedades relacionadas..

Palavras-chave: Caribe, Américas, crioulos, ortografia, intercompreensão.

I. INTRODUCTION

The linguistic profile of the Caribbean islands cannot be established without reference to European presence. Before Europeans started their conquest of the west, the territories stretching from the Guianas in the south, through the Caribbean archipelago and arching north-westward to Belize were settled by groups of Indians. It is believed that the origins of these Indians can be traced back to those who settled the Amazonian regions. As they sought to extend their activities of exchange and fishing, they settled throughout the Caribbean territories. Travel journals attributed to Christopher Columbus, refer to the Indians whom he met on Hispaniola in 1492 (Hulme & Whitehead 1992). As it were, writers made a distinction between the "mild" Arawakan

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peoples and the "barbarous and warlike" Carib (Edwards 2005 [1810], Vol. 1. 70; 33 respectively). The Indians were often seen as a hindrance to the expansion of the

Spanish conquest. In fact, their extermination was so massive that Las Casas, the Bishop of Chiapas in Guatemala, spoke out against the barbarity of the Spanish towards the Indians (Las Casas 1552).

As far back as the 16th century, there were already attempts to teach the Indians European religion and although some of this was done through their native languages, it was also viewed as necessary that the languages of the newcomers be understood by the natives. With specific reference to the territories we have selected for the present research, it must be noted that the assimilation and evangelisation of the natives was to be via the English tongue. More concretely, when the British acquired these English-speaking Atlantic territories, the assimilation and de-indigenisation process took on religious, political and cultural overtones.

The acquisition of the territories depended heavily on the economic interest they presented for the slave trade which resulted in the purchase of millions of Africans for cheap labour in the Americas. To ensure the durability of the system, African slaves were expected to understand the language of their masters. They were made to understand that their new environment was going to shape their future and that what had been left behind was forever lost. In addition, abandoning their language was seen as vital in order to embrace one which was necessary and desirable. On their arrival in the late 15th and early 16th centuries, the English did not succeed in enslaving what was left of the Indian population in the West Indies as the Spanish did. In fact, when the English were confronted with the presence of the Island Carib on the territories that were granted to the British Crown toward 1672 particularly Dominica and St Vincent, they could not settle there as the Island Carib were viewed as a fierce nation. As a result, these islands, along with Tobago and St Lucia, were declared neutral by the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle (Edwards 2005 [1810], Vol. 1: 410).

St Vincent and Dominica remained islands of refuge for these Indians until 1763, when they were ceded to Great Britain with the signing of the Treaty of Paris (*ibid*.: 411). The situation that existed on St Vincent and the Grenadines was even more unique in that it was the only territory where the Island Carib had established any concrete links with the African newcomers. What is singular about St Vincent is that the Island Carib, who had succeeded in having the French, through General de Poincy, swear solemnly that their people would be left in peace to live on St Vincent and Dominica, accepted and welcomed runaway and shipwrecked slaves throughout the 17th and 18th centuries. The cohabitation gave rise to the Garifuna population: a designation which is said to echo the name the Island Carib used to refer to themselves *calipuna*.[1]

The Garifuna spoke a variety of the Island Carib's Arawakan / Karina language. In 1797, the massive deportation of the culture bearers of the Garifuna nation resulted in

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[1] The Island Carib spoke a language resembling that spoken by the mainland Galibi (LaBorde 1674 *in* Hulme &Whitehead 1992: 139). This was a language that combined Karina lexemes and Arawak grammatical morphemes (Taylor 1977: 98 *fn* 4). In that language, the consonants *k*, *l* and *p* assimilated to the *g*, *r* and *f* respectively.

the extinction of the Garifuna language on St Vincent and the Grenadines, although varieties of Garifuna are thriving in parts of Belize Guatemala, Nicaragua and Honduras.[2] The St Vincent situation would have meant that the pockets of Garifuna who escaped deportation were also assimilated and brought to adopt English language and customs, much in the way African slaves had to adapt the masters' language for their own survival.

Throughout the English-speaking Caribbean, no African languages *per se* have survived, only remnants in aspects of grammatical structure, morpho-phonology and the lexicon. Common to all these territories, however, is a variety of English: today, English is the official language and in most cases, the sole one, with no other language being given the status of national or folkloric language save in the case of Dominica and St Lucia, which acknowledge their French creole past and Trinidad, which recognises the linguistic heritage brought by the massive importation of East Indians as indentured servants towards the middle of the 19th century. Varieties of English spoken by the British who were in contact with the slave populations alimented the new world varieties of English spoken then. These varieties now share varying degrees of affinity with English. In fact, even when there is very little affinity, it can be noted that there have been varying degrees of reanalysis and restructuring of lexical features from English which have grammaticalised independently of the superstrate and adstrate languages. Whether the shared affinities of Creoles in the English-speaking Caribbean are a result of direct heritage or a result of language universals is yet to be fully explored.

II. ORTHOGRAPHIES

Creoles languages generally and English lexified ones in particular are not normally the object of standardisation. This may be because they are relatively young languages. Some creoles have tended to attract more regional and wider attention than others. The Jamaican language is the object of much attention in the region for the simple reason that Jamaica exports its music well with a substantial part of the lyrics written and performed in a variety of Jamaican patwa. This does a lot to export lexical forms as well as pronunciation. With respect to spelling, Caribbean forms are less unified, one reason being that the territories do not export printed material in the creoles as much as through oral media. The other reason, which is probably more salient (correct) than the first is that the territories do not all have standard orthographies and therefore do not rely on the press as a means of representing the language. In the absence of a standardised orthography, lay people generally transcribe the creole using their better judgement. More often than not, this better judgement means calquing English orthography and insisting on etymological rather than phonemic writing systems which, in some cases, do not turn out to be feasibly. Etymological spellings have the advantage of drawing

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[2] The Garifuna were defeated by the British and the remaining 2248 who identified, or were identified, as Garifuna deported to Roatán, off Honduras (Gonzales 1988: 21).

parallels between creole words and their putative English sources, thus reassuring potential readers who are already versed in English spelling conventions. On the other hand, they tell us nothing about the other side of the story, since what may be widely considered English etymon is sometimes not. In fact, using English orthography tends to give the false impression that a word may be of English origin when in actual fact it is not. A case in point is the term Nancy, which is used throughout the Caribbean. This word derives from *Anànse* < Akan 'folklore character' (Christaller 1933: 330). In the same vein, what is transcribed variably as *jumbie*, or *zombie* across the Caribbean are in fact derived from *nsumbi* < Tsogo, a Bantu language meaning 'evil spirit' (Chatelain & Summers 1893: 538). As Romaine (2007: 695) expounds, in adopting etymological orthographies, one fails to create *Abstand* 'distance' from the putative lexifier. She quotes Cassidy (1993: 139) to bring home the point that creating distance from the lexifier is all the more desirable when the creole differs phonemically (*in* Romaine 2007: 695):

It should be taught and learned as a system of its own. There is no learning advantage in having it reveal its etymological relationship to the European or other lexifier. Paramount should be a phonemically accurate, consistent and autonomous system […]. Etymology is of no interest or value to creole speakers; the spelling of the word should correspond to the way it sounds. This is both more accurate and more learnable.

Winer (1990: 263) however argues for an orthographic system for the English-lexified creole of Trinidad that takes historical or etymological ties between English words and Trinidad Creole into consideration, a modified English spelling in places where the creole exhibits salient, idiosyncratic features but also a phonemic system that takes into account the lack of historical and etymological ties to English.

Eye dialect and moreso, phonemic spelling may not reassure those who are untrained to read this system. In fact, although the proportions of creole speakers may be large, the percentage of people used to seeing the creole written is in no way high. Creole speakers have been schooled in English. Spelling conventions taught are English. The competent English reader feels distraught before a creole text although Hellinger (1987: 67) strongly advocates that:

A genuinely creole orthography will strengthen the structural and psychological identity of the creole; it may in fact initiate or support a recreolization process, it will provide a source for higher prestige and may therefore facilitate native speakers' identification with the creole language and culture.

In some cases, competing orthographies exist. In Jamaica, the Cassidy writing system originally designed by Frederic Cassidy and Robert Le Page in 1967 was reworked for the Cassidy proposal in 1978. This orthography exists alongside the system used by the Jamaican Language Unit, which is actually a modified version of Cassidy's own spelling system and which is dubbed the Cassidy-JLU orthography (2001).

One area which is interesting for comparison is Bible translations. In the Atlantic territories, there is heightened awareness for creoles. In places, this has given rise to New Testament translation projects. The Cassidy-JLU orthography is used for Jamaica. The Summer Institute of Linguistics undertook such a project based on the orthography system proposed for Belize in 1994 *How fi rite Bileez Kriol* by the Belize Creole Orthography Project. Other New Testament or Bible translation projects have been undertaken for Caribbean creoles.

III. INTERCOMPREHENSION ACROSS ENGLISH AND ENGLISH-LEXIFIED CREOLES

In this section, we examine some features of the creoles and implications for cross linguistic understanding. This approach has a very modest motive as it focusses mainly on presenting some writing texts that allow us to reflect on the question to what extent people are able to use the knowledge of their own language to understand a text in a language which can be seen as genetically related. We will limit our texts to four varieties for which it was possible to find the same text with a written translation, the first two verses of Matthew, Chapter 2. For ease of comparison, we will provide a sentence/clause by sentence/clause presentation, with the Standard English version on the first row.

III.1 The varieties

The Gullah variety, also referred to as Sea Island Creole is a nonstandard variety of English which is spoken by descendants of slaves in Southern Carolina and Georgia. It is said to owe many of its features to the standard and nonstandard dialects of the various English administrators and indentured servants, slaves redirected from other Caribbean colonies, particularly Barbados in the 17th century and African substrates languages used by the slaves (Turner 1949, Hancock 1980, Pargman 2004).

The Sranan variety, also known as Taki-Taki, draws much of its lexicon from English, but a substantial number of features are derived from Dutch. In creolistics, it is generally referred to as a radical creole. It is spoken in the Guianas, primarily Surinam and is said to have developed on plantations as well as in maroon settlements during first the English occupation of Suriname and then Dutch possession (Arends 1995, Winford 2000).

San Andrés Creole is also an English-based creole, spoken in the archipelago of San Andrés, Old Providence and Santa Catalina, departments of Colombia off Nicaragua. Holm (1978) analyses this creole as one that was initially brought to the islands by speakers of Jamaican creole well into the 18th century but also slaves from other Caribbean territories who accompanied their Scottish and Irish colonists.

Jamaican Creole, also called patwa by Jamaicans themselves is undoubtedly the most widely known variety of Anglophone Atlantic, for reasons exposed above.

III.2. Comparative translations

A number of remarks can be made, but we will limit these to general observations about linguistic phenomena.

The scripture title itself offers for a very interesting perspective on how creoles specify nouns. The English version has overt article whereas the Jamaican, Sranan and Gullah varieties exhibit a definite article (*di, den, de*). The San Andrés version displays the plural indefinite article *som* < 'some'. From all appearances, this derives from English *some*, whose grammatical function is generally to leave nouns unspecified, since no definite reference is intended. What is remarkable here is that in the varieties that have opted for the use of the definite article, one understands that semantics overrides grammar since 'the Wise Men' have unique reference in biblical history and can therefore appear with what English usually uses to mark unique references (the). We wonder to what extent people who are competent in either English, Jamaican, Gullah or Sranan will demonstrate receptive competence when confronted with the San Andrés version.

The degree of understanding will no doubt be conditioned by the way the language configures specific or nonspecific reference throughout the text. When we observe the remainder of the scripture, it becomes clear that there are intricacies in the use of definite, indefinite overt markers or the overall omission of a determiner. Where Standard English uses 'Herod the King', we find multiple formulas in the creoles: from indefinite and definite *a* and *e* in Jamaican and Sranan respectively, to a zero marker *King* in Gullah and even a vocative-like (proper noun) *King Herod* in San Andrés Creole and *kownu Herodes* in Sranan. These require no article whatsoever for the simple reason that they identify a unique reference which is easily identifiable.

The degree of identifiability seems to be what conditions the omission of the article in the Gullah version as well because here, the reader also has the proper noun *Herod* preceding *been King*. The use of the indefinite article in the Jamaican version is noteworthy. What follows the noun *a king* (Jamaican) is a defining clause, which specifies location *iina Judiya* 'in Judea'. Readers who are familiar with English may be misguided by the Jamaican *a*. In fact, this short extract is witness to the polysemous nature of the particle which, instead of meaning 'a' as in 'one' can be used to mark definiteness, topicalisation *a Erad* 'it was Herod' or direction *a Jeruusilem* 'to Jerusalem'. Elsewhere, when combined with verbs, it can mark progressive aspect *a aks* 'asking'.

Matthew Chapter 2, 1-2. (The King James Version is used for the English text)

English	Wise Men from the East
Jamaican[3]	*Di Waiz Man dem*
Sranan[4]	**Den koniman di kon luku Yesus**
Gullah[5]	De Man Dem Fom de East Come fa Woshup Jedus
SAC[6]	Som waiz man fahn di iis kom vizit bieby Jesus

English	Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judæa
Jamaican	Jiizas did baan iina Betliyem, wan toun iina Judiya.
Sranan	Yesus gebore ini a foto Betlehem na ini a distrikti Yudea.
Gullah	Now Jedus been bon een Betlem town, een Judea
SAC	Lietaraan afta Jesus wehn baan iina Bethlehem

English	*in the days of Herod the king, behold,*
Jamaican	*Dem taim de, a Erad did a king iina Judiya. Nou,*
Sranan	Ini a ten dati kownu Herodes ben e rigeri Israelkondre.
Gullah	jurin de same time wen Herod been king. Atta Jedus been bon,
SAC	di siem taim wen King Herod yuuztu ruul deh,

English	*there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem,*
Jamaican	*iina dem siem taim de, som waiz man fram di Iis said did kom a Jeruusilem*
Sranan	Ini a srefi pisten dati koniman di ben libi na a sei pe son e opo, kon na Yerusalem
Gullah	some wise man dem dat study bout de staa dem come ta Jerusalem fom weh dey been een de east
SAC	som waiz man fahn di iis weh stody di staar dem wehn kom tu Jerusalem

English	*saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews?*
Jamaican	*an a aks: "We di pikni de we baan di ada die, we fi kom ton king fi di Juu piipl dem?*
Sranan	Dan den aksi den sma taki: "Pe a Kownu fu den Dyusma de, di gebore?
Gullah	An dey aks say, "Weh de chile da, wa bon fa be de Jew people king?
SAC	deh seh, "Weh di wan wehn baan fi bii di Jew dehn king?

English	For we have seen his star in the east,
Jamaican	*Wi si im staar iina di Iis, we shuo se im baan,*
Sranan	Bika wi si wan spesrutu stari na a sei pe son e opo di e sori tak' A gebore.

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[3] Di Jamiekan Nyuu Testiment. 2012. The Bible Society of the West Indies.. http://www.biblesociety.org.uk press/uploads/978056402064-Jamiekan-NT_08280647_09122708.pdf Retrieved 17 May 2013.

[4] The Bible in Sranan http://worldbibles.org/language_detail/eng/srn/Sranan. Retrieved 17 May 2013.

[5] The electronic Gullah Bible. http://www.gullahbible.com/e-GullahNT/index.htm..Retrieved 17 May 2013.

[6] SAC= San Andrés Creole. The Bible in Islander Creole English. http://worldbibles.org/language_detail/fra/icr/ Islander+Creole+English. Retrieved 17 May 2013.

Gullah	*We beena see de staa wa tell bout um een de east,*
SAC	*Wii si ihn staar riez op iina di skai tu di iis,*

English	and are come to worship him.
Jamaican	an wi kom fi shuo im nof rispek."
Sranan	*Dat' meki wi kon fu anbegi En."*
Gullah	an we come fa woshup um op."
SAC	so wi kom fi waaship im."

The use of definite as against indefinite articles seems to be uniformly shared among all varieties except for Sranan with reference to 'there came wise men from the east'. We observe that all the varieties use the overt plural indefinite *som* or *some*, where Sranan resorts to an unmarked noun. Again, the reader ought not let herself be misguided by the presence of *dati*, which can elsewhere be translated as the (definite) demonstrative 'that'. In actual fact, *ini a srefi pisten dati* is a locution meaning 'in the meanwhile'. The choice of definite possessive *im* in Jamaican and *ihn* in San Andrés Creole mirrors the English 'his star'. This transparency is slightly clouded in Gullah which opts for the definite article *de* but virtually tainted in the Sranan variety which resorts to the indefinite article *wan* < 'one'. By far the most transparent use of articles in the creole texts is with reference to 'the King of the Jews'. The definite article is used in all the varieties.

Some lexical items deserve our attention. We will concentrate on what we reckon to be key content words whose understanding is vital to the overall understanding of the text. These key words are 'Wise Men', 'born', 'king', 'east', 'star' and 'worship'. The following figure is intended to facilitate comparison across the varieties.

English	Jamaican	Sranan	Gullah	SAC
Wise Men	Waiz Man	koniman	di Man Dem	waiz man
born	baan	gebore	bon	baan
king	king	kownu	king	King
east	Iis said	sei pe son e opo	east	iis
star	staar	spesrutu stari	staa	staar
worship	shuo __ nof rispek	anbegi	woshup	waaship

This table reveals that English and all the creoles save Sranan share a common vocabulary. As we have already pointed out, Sranan owes some of its lexicon to Dutch and it is remarkable that in such a short text, there should be such a heavy presence of words not with English but Dutch etymon. We suggest the following Dutch roots for these words are *gebore* < geboren; *kownu* < koning; and *anbegi* <aanbidden. *Koniman* does not seem to find its source in Dutch. It might be a restructured form of *cunning* <Eng. with the productive suffix *man* that may have entered the language through contact with English. We do not suppose that *koniman* is a specific reference to the Wise Men since it can also surface elsewhere to refer to "ordinary people" as in the example below:

Hertoch, na koniman.
Hertoch is an intelligent man.   (Winford & Migge 2008: 702)

According to the Sranan dictionary[7], *spesrutu* means 'special' or 'specific'. At first glance it seems not to share anything more than the first syllable *spes* with either English 'special' or Dutch 'speciaal'. The clause *sei pe son e opo* analysable as 'side where the sun rises' may not be grasped straightaway by the novice. The reader who is aware that Sranan favours consonant-vowel syllable structures over vowel-consonant ones to the point of adding on extra vowels to obtain the canonical pattern[8] may be able to associate *opo* with 'up' and by extension 'rise'. The Jamaican sequence *shuo im nof rispek* seems to set itself apart from the Gullah and San Andrés varieties that both exhibit a relatively transparent form of 'worship' depending on their phonetic realisations. The reader may quickly draw the parallel between 'show him enough respect' and 'worship'.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

Speakers of one of the creoles we have made reference may understand any of the others with varying degrees. One aspect that impedes mutual understanding is the choice of orthography. As we have seen from the orthographic choices made in these creoles, the Gullah spellings present a closer match with standard varieties of English. One needs to keep in mind that Gullah speakers may have much more everyday contact with other varieties of English which are closer to General American. This explanation may prove to be insufficient but we hasten to note that scholars have often observed that the Gullah variety is decreolising (Jones-Jackson 1984, Mufwene 1991), *i.e.* developing features that seem to assimilate into features of other American Englishes. On the other extreme is Sranan, whose spelling shows a stark difference with the other creole varieties and even more distance from the Standard English forms. We have already made mention of the radical nature of this creole with regards inherent structures, pronunciation and the lexicon. Furthermore, Sranan does not come into daily contact with English, since the English population left that territory with many of their slaves between 1668 and 1680 (Arends 1995: 236). Consequently, non Sranan speakers, who are otherwise competent in English, may have greater difficulty understanding this text than they would the others. As for the San Andrés Creole and Jamaican, the shared grammatical (*iina*, *wi kom*), lexical (taim, baan) and phonological features (*wi/wii si im/ihn staar*) allow for receptive competence although a feature like *wehn* that marks past tense in San Andrés Creole is not transparent to the Jamaican who uses *did* in the same context. The common Jamaican, San Andrés and ultimately Gullah features

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[7] http://www-01.sil.org/americas/suriname/sranan/English/SrananEngDictIndex.html. Retrieved 17 May 2013.
[8] This phenomenon becomes palpable in a form like *meki* <'make' pronounced /meik/ in English and which appears in this text as well *dat' meki wi kon fu anbegi En* literally 'that makes us come to worship him'.

appear to us to be sufficient to facilitate access to one variety or the other despite not having formally learnt these languages.

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