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Preface

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IT IS INDEED a pleasure to have been invited to edit and introduce these papers by Richard Allsopp, the undisputed originator of the very useful and theoretically welcome term, *Afrogenesis*, in the Society for Caribbean Linguistics (SCL) *Occasional Papers* series in which they're deservedly being reprinted. In response to Allsopp's observations in the "Afrogenesis of Caribbean Creole Proverbs" paper (hereafter, "Proverbs"), I should note that I was in fact present at the inaugural 1976 meeting of the SCL where he presented the "Case for Afrogenesis" (hereafter "Afrogenesis"), and I was indeed "much younger" then (as was he, p. 37). I had first encountered Allsopp more than ten years earlier, when he was headmaster at Queen's College, the secondary school I attended in Georgetown, Guyana.² At the time, I had only a vague awareness that he had done his MA thesis on pronominal variation in our native Guyanese Creole (known locally as "Creolese") in 1958, when I was in primary school. But I would come to peruse and refer to that groundbreaking work very closely later on, when I turned to the study of Guyanese pronouns in my own (1979) dissertation, with new data, methods, and theoretical concerns. So we go back a long way, Richard and I, and I've long been interested in and inspired by his work.

I'd like to begin with a few remarks about the 1976 Afrogenesis paper in which Allsopp coined the term *Afrogenesis*, before I turn to the 2000 Proverbs paper in which he elaborated on the relevance of the term to the study of Caribbean proverbs. To begin with, Afrogenesis, lexically modelled on *monogenesis* and *polygenesis*, the major competing models of creole genesis in the 1960s and 1970s, was a welcome term and concept because it offered Africanist and by extension, substratist hypotheses an equal place at the theoretical table at which issues of creole genesis were being vigorously argued and discussed. It also located African influence at the very beginning (genesis) of New World creoles, and by extension, even further back, to the preceding historical movements and cultural

¹ At the time, I was a lecturer at the University of Guyana, where the first meeting of the Society for Caribbean Linguistics was held.

² See my tribute to Allsopp in the *Kyk-Over-Al* festschrift for him (#48, 1998: 45-60), edited by Ian Robertson, another Guyanese linguist—now Dean of the Faculty of Humanities and Education at The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine—who had "Sopp" as his Headmaster at Queen's College.

contacts between African peoples that must have taken place to produce the "conceptual uniformity" that Allsopp (in his Afrogenesis paper, p. 24) and others would later discern.

One aspect of the 1976 Afrogenesis paper that was striking at the time, and especially appropriate for the inaugural meeting of the SCL, was its explicitly comparative character: Allsopp cited examples and scholarship, not only from different English-based creoles (Guyanese, Jamaican, Surinamese), but also from French, Spanish, Portuguese and Dutch Caribbean varieties as well, and from several African sources. (ibid.) This invaluable comparative perspective is reflected elsewhere in Allsopp's work—in his 1996 *Dictionary of Caribbean English Usage* (DCEU), for instance, and in the work of his wife Jeannette Allsopp too—in her French and Spanish supplement to the DCEU, and in her 2003 multilingual dictionary.

Allsopp emphasised in the Afrogenesis paper the importance of "African calquing from African sources" (ibid.) in Caribbean Creole formation, citing as his first example the common lexico-semantic structure evident in the use of *eye-water* for 'tears' in Guyana and Jamaica, and its parallels in French Guianese *dileau-oueye* and various African languages (e.g., Mandingo *na giyo* 'eye water'). Now it is certainly possible that other peoples and languages could have come up with a similar metaphor for 'tears' (the extent to which this is true is a project worth investigation). But when the metaphor turns up repeatedly in African languages, as well as in the creoles of African-descended peoples throughout the Caribbean and New World, it seems churlish (and intellectually indefensible) to deny a historical connection.

In a paper first published in the same year as Allsopp's, my wife Angela and I (Rickford and Rickford 1976) made a similar argument, identifying Caribbean and American compounds *cut-eye* and *suck teeth* as possible Africanisms. We also suggested in that paper that calques or loan translations like these are likely to have survived in larger numbers in modern creoles than direct loans (like *nyam* 'eat') because they could "pass" as English (or other European language) words, although they were actually masked Africanisms in New World guise. My guess is that calques,³ like convergences between English and African forms, will continue to be important for research on Afrogenesis.

Let me turn now to the more recent Proverbs paper, in which Allsopp takes up in more detail the third area (proverbs) in which he had

argued in 1976 that Afrogenesis was evident.⁴ In the Afrogenesis paper, he had provided examples from ten African and Caribbean or American locales of the proverb: "(When) pickney can't get mammy, he suck granny." In the Proverbs paper, he notes the existence of twenty-two correlates to the proverb "*One finger can't ketch louse*" in languages from thirteen African states and twelve Caribbean territories. He also draws our attention to anglophone/francophone variants of "After one time is another time" in Guyana, Trinidad, St. Lucia, Dominica, Haiti, French Guiana, and Benin. The examples themselves convincingly support his conclusion that:

there could be one and only one reason for the existence of these indisputable correlates ... namely that there was an underlying common African way of putting things, "a broadly pervasive expression of life-view" ... (see p. 38).

The case is perhaps even stronger for proverbs than it is for lexical compounds, because proverbial expressions are longer and more complex in their lexical and morphosyntactic composition. The chances that geographically separate populations could independently come up with the same conceptualisation and encoding are thus slimmer, and the likelihood that they represent common inheritance or diffusion from a common source is correspondingly stronger.

Two points remain to be made about proverbs, specifically. The first is that minor lexical variations may be even more widespread than Allsopp suggests. For instance, he attributes the proverb "*After a time is another time*" to Guyana, "*After one time is two time*" to St. Lucia, and "*After one time is a next time*" to Grenada. But I have heard all three variants from Guyanese, and in this respect Guyana is probably like Trinidad, to which he attributes all of the variants (p. 43). Explicit study of intra- as well as inter-territorial variation is worth pursuing. And how far lexical variation can go and still allow preservation/recognition of a proverb as the "same" proverb is also worth consideration. It's evident from the example of "*One finger can't ketch louse*" that the tiny insect referred to in the object NP can take many forms (*louse*, *flea*, *redbug*, and so on), depending, perhaps on what's locally relevant or salient. And I've heard at least one variant of the verb (*kill* instead of *ketch*). But apparently the subject NP (*one finger*) is less subject to variation—crucial to the essential concept that cooperation between at least two related units (in this case parts of the human hand/body, and by extension, people

³ As Allsopp notes in a new postscript to his Afrogenesis paper, he later expressed a preference (1996b) for the term *systemic transfer* instead of *calquing* (see footnote 17, p. 30). One is reminded of Alleyne's (1971) preference for the term *continuities* rather than loans when referring to Africanisms found in the languages of African-derived Caribbean peoples.

⁴ The first area was lexical calquing of the *eye-water* type. The second was syntactic phenomena like predicate clefting or front focusing, as in a *fraikin dem bin fraikin*. The argumentation for this second type struck me as less convincing than the others, because the discussion was briefer and the African sources limited to one (Ci-Nyanja), from an area (Zambia-Malawi) relatively uninvolved in the Caribbean slave trade. Moreover, English extraction/clefting also involves fronting, albeit without copying ("Frightened—that's what they were.")

and other entities) is essential for the completion of some tasks. One thinks immediately of the parallel proverb, "One *han* 'kyan clap" ('One hand can't clap'), where both the specific NP and the verb seem to resist variation.

A related question is this: how could these African conceptualisations have been retained with such relative faithfulness over such vast expanses of time and place? We are probably all familiar with the childhood game in which one transmits a message to someone in a circle, and he or she whispers it in the ear of the person next to them, and so on. Invariably, by the time the message has gone around the entire circle, it emerges as something significantly different from the original. Perhaps the ability of proverbs to escape this fate lies in part in their pithy and indeed often poetic phrasing, alliteration, balance and other elements that make poetry and short verse easy to memorise and retain all play a role. It's important to remember too that proverbs are (or in some cases used to be) repeated over and over in everyday life, in the context of moral education, self-philosophising, the offering of solace or comfort to others, and so on. They represent nuggets of folk wisdom and experience. While one should not put too fine a point on it (for proverbs are sometimes used for sheer entertainment), the repetitions of proverbs and the *grovtos* of some of the contexts in which they are heard perhaps contribute to their memorisation and transmission.

Which brings me to ask as well whether proverb use, in the Caribbean at least, is as vital or widespread as it formerly was. Certainly each of us knows one or two individuals (like legendary Guyanese folklorist Wordsworth McAndrew) who seem to possess an almost infinite store of proverbs and who are able to deploy them rapidly and propitiously in conversation on virtually any topic. But the rich store of proverbs in such sources as Speirs (1902) or even Abrams (1970) could perhaps not be collected today, and frequent proverb users like McAndrew seem the exception rather than the norm, at least in urban if not in rural areas. Again, empirical study is in order, for if proverb use in the Caribbean meets its demise, with it would go one of the richest sources of Africanisms (and inherited folk-wisdom) that Allsopp has identified.

While the African origin of many Caribbean proverbs is indisputable, Allsopp's larger claim that they "provide sufficient evidence that *Afrogenesis* is the explanation of the origin of all West-African creoles" (p. 45) may be greeted with greater scepticism, if it is intended to include all the (distinctive) features of these languages' phonology, morphosyntax and lexico-semantics. Certainly, Bickerton's bioprogramme hypothesis, which especially provokes Allsopp's ire (p. 39 and elsewhere) has few if any serious followers today apart from Bickerton himself.⁵ But alternative

monogenetic, polygenetic, superstrate and other theories (e.g., Muftwene 1996) continue to have their adherents, and some will no doubt be found attractive for specific features or subsets of features.

I do share Allsopp's astonishment that the Proto-Indo-European ancestry of Indo-European languages is "established as unquestionable fact" (p. 42), while the African element in Caribbean creoles and other New World Black varieties is denied and their development attributed largely or entirely to European influences. In this connection, Allsopp finds it distressing that "distinguished French creolists" insist "that all Atlantic creoles come basically from the French of France" (p. 44). But a similar viewpoint is current among those who work on anglophone varieties too—witness the title of Shana Poplack's (2000) book: *The English History of African American English* (emphasis added), and the generally favourable reviews the book has received (e.g., Hazen 2002).⁶ Allsopp is right that "the tide may be turning" (p. 44), however. In addition to the Parkvall (1999) article that he cites, there is also Parkvall's even more substantive (2000) book, and works by Alleyne (1988), Boretzky (1983), Holm (2000, 113–19, 137–70, 188–236), McWhorter (1996, 1999), Warner-Lewis (2003) and others who document more significant African influences in the formation of Caribbean creole language and culture than Bickerton and linguists of the 1970s ever conceded.

At the same time, I do not share Allsopp's view that "admission of *Afrogenesis* will come upon us *inevitably* as time goes by" (p. 45, emphasis added). On the contrary, it will take more of the careful, even painstaking investigation of linguistic parallels between Caribbean and African languages that Allsopp, Parkvall, and predecessors like Turner (1949) did. And with only a few exceptions, I do not see creolists who work on the Caribbean going about the arduous but necessary task of studying African languages for this important historical-comparative project. This is something that has to change.

I also don't share what I infer to be Allsopp's view that subscription to a synchronic continuum model for territories like Jamaica, Trinidad and Guyana commits one to the belief that basilectal or deep Creole speakers must have been "taught by Whites" to "graduate" to mesolectal and acrolectal varieties (p. 42). The more customary assumption is that Creole speakers themselves, where sufficient opportunity and motivation were present, developed intermediate varieties, to the extent that such varieties were not themselves in existence from earlier periods (Alleyne 1971). In any case, I for one (see Rickford 1987) see the continuum as a convenient synchronic model of creole language variation in some parts of the Atlantic and Pacific, without entailing any of the diachronic "baggage" that is often placed on it.

⁵ See Sebba (1997, 176–182), Roberts (2005) and Veenstra (forthcoming).

⁶ But for more critical responses, see McWhorter (2000), Surcliffe (2005) and Rickford (2006).

Having tussled with my former (Head) teacher in the preceding two paragraphs (as a well-taught student should), I wish to close with a(nother) note of admiration and agreement. My admiration is for the vigour and conviction with which Allsopp writes, and for the sweetness and originality that his word choice and phrasing often display, for example:

"I find the situation wholly unacceptable ..." (p. 37)

"I stand by every word of my 1976 'Afrogenesis' paper."
(ibid.)

"These suggested, though I did not put it that way at that time, a 'nuclear African thing' that inspirationally prevailed over enslavement, to express itself still in our day, in our time, on our Caribbean tongues, in a medium which they inherited from what our forebears had invented ..." (p. 38)

"Proverbs are the *orature* of a people." (p. 46)

My closing agreement (and the reader will note many other points of agreement in this commentary) is about the value of us, as scholars, reaching out more substantially to teachers and the masses of the Caribbean, both to learn, and also to share what we have learned. I have one especially positive experience on this score to report, although, like everyone else, I need to do more (see Rickford 1997). In 1975, we held a "Festival of Guyanese Words" in Georgetown, at the University of Guyana, open to the public. At that forum, students and faculty from the university (and Allsopp himself, as visiting guest speaker from The University of the West Indies, Cave Hill) shared our findings about Guyanese lexical items with rice farmers, taxi-drivers and other non-academic members of the Guyanese community who came out for the day-long Festival (with meals and refreshments) in droves. As the transcripts of the discussion after each paper show (see Rickford 1978), we gained as much from these interactions as we gave (if not more), and linguists and non-linguists came away from the experience invigorated and refreshed.

That, in conclusion, must be my assessment of what it has been like to read and respond to the linguistic oeuvre that Richard Allsopp has put together over the past fifty years—from studies of pronominal and verb-tense variation to lexicography to theories of Afrogenesis and parenimology and parenimology. I have come away intellectually re-energised and recharged, and I invite others to read Allsopp's work and reap its benefits.

John Rickford
July 2006

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