

Comparative Afro-American: An historical-comparative study of some Afro-American dialects in the New World. By MERVYN ALLEYNE. Ann Arbor: Karoma, 1980. Two maps. Pp. xii, 252. Cloth \$8.50, paper \$6.50.

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Alleyne's long-awaited book is a creole-continuum study with a difference: the focus is not on the lects within a single country or community, but on the Caribbean region as a whole; the English-based creole varieties within each country provide the reference points (along with West Africa) for a fascinating comparative study. The varieties range from the conservative Sraname creoles (Ndjuka, Saramaccan, and Sranan) to the decreolized varieties of Black English

(BE) in North America. Such varieties are usually discussed in terms of their 'Creole-ness'; but *A* takes issue with traditional theorizing about them as creole languages, and compares them instead in terms of their 'African-ness', i.e. the extent to which they represent 'different degrees of transmission of West African elements' (181). The result is a study which is not only descriptive and comparative, but also theoretical, challenging in particular some of the central claims and assumptions in pidgin/creole studies.

Following a brief foreword by Ian Hancock, *A*'s 'Introduction' (1–26) reviews interpretations of Black language and culture in the New World, points out some of the linguistic commonalities among Afro-American communities, and sets out the case for seeking the source of these commonalities in an African substrate. The deficit/difference discussion sounds dated, including references from the late 60's and early 70's; but the issues themselves are real enough (cf. Smitherman 1981 on the recent Ann Arbor court case involving BE). The list of similarities between Afro-American varieties of different lexical bases (11–13) is excellent, and likely to be much used. I have only a few quibbles about it, e.g. the fact that it lists 'no case' for the pronominal systems, whereas basilectal varieties of both Guyanese and Gullah maintain an object/non-object distinction in the 3rd person, marked by *am–um* vs. *i* (Bickerton 1973, Rickford 1979, Nichols 1982).

Chap. 1 briefly introduces 'The comparative method' (27–34). As Traugott 1977 and others have argued, pidgins and creoles call into question many of the assumptions of genetic linguistics. *A* does not emphasize this point (but cf. 20–21), perhaps because to do so might jeopardize his enterprise; but he does argue against examining sound-correspondences between the Afro-American varieties and English, stating that this will show only the common origin of their respective lexicons. Instead, he proposes to examine phonological, syntactic, and lexico-semantic data from the modern Afro-American dialects, in order to 'reconstruct proto-forms and the historical processes which resulted in the contemporary structures' (32). One slightly confusing feature of the resulting reconstructions is that they are not to be interpreted in the usual way—as representing a common ancestor spoken in one place—but rather as representing a common set of structural features underlying the various West African pidgins involved in the slave trade. This is difficult to remember in the light of frequent references to 'Proto-Afro-American' in subsequent chapters. Note also that the rejected interpretation is what Hancock 1969 had suggested, hypothesizing that an English-derived proto-pidgin had developed on the Guinea coast from the early 16th century.

Chap. 2 begins to introduce the data directly, as *A* examines 'Comparative phonology' (35–76). The encounter will be particularly refreshing to readers familiar only with BE or the mesolectal Caribbean varieties. Here one discovers that the CV syllable forms attested only in historical texts for some varieties (e.g. *disse* 'this', *cawra* 'call' in 18th century Black American speech) are the current norm in varieties like Saramaccan (*fendi* 'find', *lôsu* 'lose'). On the evidence of such examples, which reflect the restructuring of English words accompanying their importation into Afro-American, *A* pieces together an in-

trigging picture of the phonological structure of the earliest Afro-American dialects. It includes a vowel harmony system similar to that of Yoruba, distinctive use of tone, and coarticulated and prenasalized stops (Saramaccan *gbóto* 'boat', *ndéti* 'night'). A's tendency, not quite in accord with conventional applications of the comparative method, is to reconstruct for the original system what is most deviant from English, rather than what is most shared among the Afro-American 'daughter' languages. However, as if answering the inevitable charge that he is creating an idealized historical basilect which could not possibly have been a reality for all the different Africans involved in the slave trade, A suggests (75) that 'in neither lexicon, phonology nor syntax was the Proto-Afro-American [sic] dialect stable, uniform, or durable.'

In Chap. 3, 'Comparative syntax' (77-107), A reviews the verb phrase, the noun phrase, topicalization (Jamaican *A big im big* 'He's really big', lit. 'It is big he's big'), and a few morphological processes. His general conclusion is that the Afro-American dialects show greater uniformity in syntax than in phonology, and that it is at the syntactic level that these dialects demonstrate their distinctiveness and uniqueness' (105). A offers some original analyses in this chapter (e.g. the derivation of the Sranan attributive *I hebi* 'You are heavy' by passive conversion from the indefinite active *Dem hebi i* 'They have made you heavy'); however, at several points I disagreed with his analysis, or wished further clarification. For instance, A seems to disagree with Bickerton's well-known 1975 analysis of the interaction between stativity and tense/aspect marking in Guyanese and other creoles (see fn. 40, p. 227); but he does not give us the direct and fully-argued critique which the stated disagreement seems to require. (Gibson 1982 is said to provide such a critique.)

In A's Chap. 4, 'Comparative lexicosemantics' (108-19), I like his discussion of the ways in which 'in the developing slave language, certain common, typologically distinctive semantic structures emerge which are not English (or Portuguese, Dutch) derived' (113). One example is the tendency to label objects in terms of an association between two primary named objects (Jamaican *ay wata* 'tears', lit. 'eye water'; Saramaccan *agó fiuu* 'heel', lit. 'knot foot'; *agó fiuu woyo* 'ankle', lit. 'knot foot eye'). A does not note that most of these compounds involve body parts, as do their West African models (cf. Rickford & Rickford 1976); but in fn. 52, he makes the intriguing observation that the semantic composition in these lexical items parallels the phenomenon of verb serialization in syntax (e.g. *kya kom* 'bring', lit. 'carry come'). He makes a similar observation about the relation between the 'fusion of semantic opposites' (as in Sranan *leni* 'lend, borrow', Krio *wer* 'wear, put on', which I think might be better described as involving 'fusion of causative actions and result') and the syntactic pattern of passive conversion (*Dem hebi i* and *I hebi*, as cited above). These are arguments for a degree of relatedness between lexicon and syntax—a holistic approach to the expression of meaning in language—which goes beyond what is normally postulated in linguistics, and which suggests much further research.

Chap. 5, 'Creole language studies' (120-35), takes issue with notions about the genesis of creole languages. A's primary dispute is with the idea that pidgins

and creoles arose through deliberate simplification on the part of European speakers (the unfortunately considers only those with European-derived lexicons).

A's main and most convincing argument is on p. 127:

'There is no reason to suppose that European colonists or traders or sailors would have created a form of speech containing distinctive tone, CV syllable structure ... serial verbs, and an aspectually marked verb phrase which makes distinctions unknown in most European languages.'

Agreeing with A on this point, however, one would still have no basis for rejecting the concept of a class of languages called pidgins and creoles, or for denying membership in that class to the languages which A calls 'Afro-American'. One of the defining characteristics of the class (admittedly not stressed so often by many scholars) is admixture or convergence in the context of inter-group use (Hymes 1971b:71, 84), particularly of the type where several languages of the socio-politically 'lower' groups leave their mark primarily in the form of substratal grammatical influence (Whinnom 1971). This seems to be precisely what A himself advocates for the history of Afro-American (135).

As for simplification more generally, it is common enough in second language acquisition (Schumann 1978, Meisel 1983), and clearly does not require deliberate action on the part of the 'upper' L2 speakers. (Incidentally, Meisel includes the most thorough discussion of the complexities involved in speaking of 'simplification' which I have yet seen.) I agree with A that this process is invoked too often, with no reference to admixture of L1 influence, in discussions of pidginization and creolization; I have also been struck by his point that the existence of an earlier, even more simplified 'pidgin' stage for the Caribbean creoles has been more often assumed than demonstrated (cf. Lawton 1971). But our response to the latter point should not be to rule out the possibility altogether, but to do the necessary documentary research. For instance, Boldingbrooke 1807 contains the following quote from a Black woman working in a White household in Guyana at the end of the 18th century:

'Him all good: Missee good, Missee Charline good, Missee Sophie good, and Neger happy.'

We might wish to refer the final vowel in *Missee* to West African syllable structure (but of course *Missey* is an English diminutive too, and could result from general syllable structure simplification); in any case, it could be argued that the absence of a singular/plural distinction and the absence of case-marking in the 3rd person (*him* used here for plural, elsewhere in Boldingbrooke for singular) represent simplification with respect to 18th century English. Furthermore, modern Guyanese Creole, compared to this, seems to display complication in outer form (a singular/plural distinction marked by *itam* vs. *dem*, and the *itam* case distinction discussed earlier).

In this chapter, A also raises questions about 'language universals' explanations for the development of creoles, particularly as these were first advocated in Bickerton 1974. His point that the phonology of Afro-American is better accounted for by substratal theory is well taken; but I would have liked to see A respond to the more fully developed form of the universals theory in Bickerton 1981, which itself contains criticisms (pp. 48-51) of 'substratomania'.

Chap. 6, 'The African base' (136-80), identifies the main African language groups (Mande and Kwa) involved in the development of Afro-American, lists some of their typological characteristics, and compares them with features in Afro-American. I find the data in this chapter frequently eye-opening (who ever thought of the first syllable of *Anansi*, the folklore spider, as a noun classifier?) A's assessments of African persistence are often quite judicious and 'non-maniac' (e.g. on p. 158, with respect to noun classifiers). His point is well-made that West African languages contain plausible models for more features of the Caribbean creoles than are normally recognized. But the argument that this particular African language or group was necessarily the source of this particular Afro-American feature frequently seems to require more doc-

umentation or argument. Thus Huttar 1981, after a detailed examination of serial verb constructions (SVC's) in Ndjuka, and in a number of West African and other languages, concludes: 'statements identifying the source of SVC's with a specific language family of West Africa, e.g. Kwa, should be regarded with some skepticism until data from a wider sampling of languages are considered.'

In Chap. 7 (181-218), the 'intermediate varieties' of Afro-American (including BE and the Caribbean mesolects) are considered. One of the primary arguments of this chapter is well known from Alleyne 1971: that the variation represented by these intermediate varieties must have been present from the beginning of contact between Europeans and Africans. This is not in itself incompatible with a theory of decreolization, as A seems to argue; it only indicates that the latter must provide for quantitative as well as qualitative developments. A himself seems to recognize this on p. 190, and it is explicitly provided for in the models of decreolization proposed in Rickford 1983.

A's account of the different possible sociocultural distinctions among the slave population which might have affected the level of the continuum at which they typically performed (183-6) is fascinating, requiring now only the support of textual documentation. The analysis of the synchronic variation in BE and other varieties includes some interesting arguments for reversing the direction of certain rules, e.g. consonant cluster simplification and copula deletion, to reflect the more likely diachronic development (cf. Stewart 1969). But at several points, data or analyses included in prior works within the 'variationist' framework are either not cited by A, or not sufficiently considered. Thus his discussion of consonant cluster simplification in BE fails to mention Fasold 1972; this is one of the most careful discussions of the subject, and includes a systematic discussion of some of the differences between prior analyses by Labov and Wolfram which A treats as synonymous.

A brief 'Conclusion' (219-22) provides a succinct summary of A's claim that the development of Afro-American involved processes which are normal in language shift (gradual decay of L1, gradual adoption of L2). He argues that the language shifts undergone by Africans in the slave trade differ from more general cases of language shift in some ways, including the fact that close contact with the new language is excluded for the majority of the L1 speakers (cf. Whinnom, making the same point about pidginization). But it would have been nice to see explicit comparison with other instances of language shift and language death; cf. Weinreich (1953:106-9), Dressler & Wodak-Leodolter 1977, Gal 1979, and Dorian 1981 (the last is admittedly too recent to have been considered).

On the whole, this is a stimulating book, in which one is likely to encounter original data and analysis as well as controversial theorizing. The very fact that thought-provoking books like this one and Bickerton 1981 are coming off the press (both, interestingly enough, from Karoma), is an indication that pidgin/creole studies are alive and well.

Since I have said so much in a positive vein, a few general criticisms may be permitted. One concerns A's failure at several points to cite works which seem directly relevant to the data or analysis under discussion; some examples have been noted above. Another is his failure to reconcile the differential ordering of the Afro-American varieties from one scale to another; e.g. with respect to labial fricatives, Stranan and Ndjuka appear most African (61); but

with respect to the preservation of a West African verb phrase, Saramaccan and Guyanese lead the list (162). The fluctuation also occurs with individual outputs in a single community; but in both cases, it remains a challenge to our claim to arrive at ranked VARIETIES rather than merely VARIANTS (cf. Rickford 1980).¹

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¹ The book sorely needs an index of forms and topics, the absence of which I frequently found frustrating. Omissions and typographical errors are at a minimum. They include: absence of 'no' before 'need' on p. 38, para. 2, l. 5, where the argument seems to require it; similarly on p. 125, where 'not' seems required after 'not only' in para. 2, l. 3; 'evaluation' should be 'evolution' on p. 124, para. 2, l. 2; *nyama* should be *nyam* on p. 193, para. 2, l. 2 up; *gru* needs to be inserted at the end of l. 5 up on p. 205; and '1978' should be '1778' in fn. 87, p. 233.

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[Received 20 August 1982.]