
Of late John Benjamins has presented previously published themed issues from certain of their journals as books in their own right, and this is one such example of this laudable strategy. The seven papers herein (and the introduction by the editors, 1-18) were previously published as Studies in Language 33:2 in 2009, and the papers themselves were originally presented at the Annual Meeting of the Society for Pidgin and Creole Languages in Albuquerque, New Mexico, in January 2006.

The introduction largely serves to profile the papers included but also discusses the position of prosodic factors in creolistics, and the agglomeration of phenomena which the editors describe and take together as grammaticalisation, reanalysis and relexification, which they subsume under the pleasing abbreviation GRR. The range of languages profiled is large; the creoloid Singapore English is the subject of Bao Zhiming’s paper (79-106) on the use of one in Singlish and the influence which the Mandarin particle de (which is used to create adjectives, possessives and for the purposes of relativisation) has had on its spread and use, and Chinese Englishes are also the topic of Matthews’ and Yip’s paper. Meanwhile the bulk of creoles surveyed are Atlantic: Saramaccan, Sranan, Trinidadian Creole English, Papiamentu and Jamaican Creole and Haitian. The remaining papers cluster in pairs: Lefebvre and Bruyn on the one hand, and Bao Zhiming and Matthews and Yip on the other.

The concentration is on grammaticalisation and other forms of structural change (rather than on change in lexicon from earlier to later stages of attestation in creoles), and on prosodic (especially tonal) issues. The latter topic is dealt with in three papers, which share a fair deal of common ground and which will therefore be dealt with first. They start with a long one of forty pages by Shelome Gooden, Kathy-Ann Drayton and Mary Beckman (137-176), which uses primary instrumental data to contrast intonational patterns in Trinidadian Creole English and Jamaican Creole, which are generally assumed to have ‘hybrid’ prosodic systems (following a distinction between ‘stress’ languages and ‘pitch-accent’ languages), and which raises the question of what may constitute a tone language and how best we may investigate the history of prosodic patterns (the authors suggest the comparison of variation in prosodic patterns within modern varieties). This is an excellent paper, rich in diagrams, and I only wish there had been provided a URL link which we readers could follow in order to hear the examples from the two prosodic systems for ourselves. This is followed by a much shorter paper, namely Yolanda Rivera-Castillo’s examination of tone in Papiamentu and that language’s status as a tone-restricted language (177-202), and by Jeff Good’s long study of prosodic features in the mixed lexicon in Saramaccan (203-236), which Good shows to involve the development of a tonal language with an accentual lexicon which derives mostly from English and Portuguese.

Claire Lefebvre (19-52) discusses the role of GRR in the development of Haitian from French lexicon as this had been shaped by the substrate influence of Gbe languages, especially Fongbe. Her paper is rich in exemplification from Fongbe and French, but her overall claim that grammaticalisation (and one may add reanalysis) is less significant in the development creole languages than relexification or relabeling of substrate semantic categories with superstrate labels is may be disputed. The processes which have given rise to the structures of one creole language may well have occurred less frequently, have developed later, and/or may have applied in different structural domains in one creole from the ways in which they have developed in others. A combination of the fruits of investigation of the modern creole and philological study of
earlier records of the language would enable us to establish the truth of the matter more clearly. What we need is a historical grammar of, let us say, Haitian Creole, drawing on precisely such data. But it is certainly true that students of stable mixed languages could read Lefebvre’s work on relexification and learn a great deal from it.

Adrienne Bruyn (53-78) discusses various kinds of grammaticalisation found in earlier and more modern records of Sranan. We are fortunate to have extensive records of Sranan stretching over more than 200 years, such that we can trace the growth and spread of various instances of grammaticalisation, which is itself an umbrella term for different kinds of technique, including contact-induced grammatical change, but also ‘apparent’ grammaticalisation (this is structural change which looks like grammaticalisation but which may not be so) and polysemy-copying. What comes through in Bruyn’s study of the use of wan ‘one’ in 20,000-word corpora from the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries (op. cit. p. 61) is how similar the distribution of the uses are across the centuries.

Stephen Matthews and Virginia Yip (103-135) draw upon data from large ongoing corpora discussion of the roles of bilingual first language acquisition, replica grammaticalisation and contact-induced grammaticalisation in the usage of give as a means of expressing passivisation and already as an aspectual marker among children in Singapore (growing up bilingual in Hokkien and English) and in Hong Kong (using English and Cantonese). Give is an instance of replica grammaticalisation because both Cantonese and this form of Hong Kong English are developing its use as a passiviser at the same time, rather than speakers employing a technique which had already been long established in the substrate language.

The standard of proofreading is generally high, though on p. 18 ‘Elizabeth’ Selkirk should be Elisabeth and on p. 16 ‘Frederick’ Cassidy should be Frederic. I also noted ‘creoles lexicon’ on p. 44.

In short, the book covers quite a bit of ground without compromising the limitations stated in the subtitle. It is full of interesting items (Gooden et al and Good’s papers are especially strong), though one may wonder in this climate how widely it will be read as a book, given that Studies in Language is a journal which features in a number of electronic journal bundles and the contents of its specialist issues may be more easily accessed that way. Still, anything which brings descriptive creolistic linguistics into the linguistic mainstream, and which shows that these languages are as worthy of study and esteem as any others – which this volume does, quietly but triumphantly – must be applauded. I am delighted to do so.

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