Angela Bartens and Philip Baker, eds.


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From its very title, this volume promises to be an original collection of chapters that account for African-influenced words and calques in Creole languages. *Black through white*, was actually borrowed from Professor D. Dalby’s 1969 Hans Wolf Memorial (Indiana University) lecture: *Black through White: Patterns of Communication in Africa and the New World*. The term ‘transplanted European languages’ is used loosely, such that the reader is free to interpret it broadly. In fact, only the introduction, which hints at ‘overseas varieties of European languages’ and Bartens’ Chapter 4 make use of the designation.

In their two-paged introduction, the editors outline a highly ambitious project with a threefold aim: expand our knowledge about how putative and confirmed Africanisms relate to selected semantic domains in the languages studied; examine the connection between proportions of slaves, their linguistic origins and the proportion of Africanisms that have survived; investigate what the distribution of word classes and proportions of Africanisms therein tell us about the contact situations that gave rise to the varieties.

Fourteen chapters of four to 18 pages follow, nine of which have appended word lists of four to 12 pages. Three of the articles are co-authored with one of the editors. The eight-paged index serves as a general thematic, names and languages index. What the volume lacks is an introduction that satisfactorily expounds the subtitle and announces the goal of each chapter. I will briefly summarise what, from my understanding, each chapter sets out to achieve.

In Chapter 1, Nicolas Quint analyses 70 Africanisms that are attested in the Santiago variety of Cape Verdean Portuguese-based Creole (CV). Quint makes use of historical data to show that the African influence came directly from the continent, that a multitude of contenders vied, and that only two language families (Manding and Atlantic) left significant contributions. Quint laments the scarcity of documentation and draws our attention to the likelihood of inaccuracies when tracing African etyma. Notwithstanding this caveat, the author ventures to categorise the variety as an Afro-Portuguese language, based on the observation that there are 300 potential African-based candidates, chiefly Manding. The author uses a remarkable comparison between the core/periphery in a variety of Occitan and that of CV to demonstrate what he calls infiltration from outside (French into Occitan) and infiltration from inside (resulting in Portuguese constituting the core of CV). The author
suggests that retention of Portuguese and African words was conditioned by frequency of usage and acculturation and that, towards the end of the slave trade, the transmission of African words into the core lexicon became more common. The author extends the investigation to morphology since he intends to show that morphology and semantics have relied heavily on Africanisms. In essence, what is African-derived is not so much CV’s lexicon than its internal structure.

In Chapter 2 John Ladham provides a background to the intense debate on article agglutination and the discrepant interpretations of data previously pointed out by Baker (1984), Grant (1995), Parkvall (2002) and Chaudenson (2003). This comprehensive introduction, which focusses primarily on French creoles, sets the pace for establishing possible links between African substrata and article agglutination in Portuguese-based creoles, particularly in the Gulf of Guinea. The article falls within the precepts of the perfect ‘black through white’. One expects to find Africanisms in these creoles and one does, chiefly in the Principe variety, which has more items fitting the category. I commend the author for taking the pain to show, through the brief account of trading procedures and practices in the defined zone, how these Africanisms are a result of Edo input.

There are a few shortcomings in this contribution. Firstly, the data provided in Figures 1 and 3, which the author announces as being identical, are in fact discordant. Likewise, it is not clear how the figure in square brackets for ‘other input’ in Principe changes from 0% to 4% in Table 6. Finally, in Appendix 1, I question whether words with initial /i/ can qualify as candidates for article agglutination. One would expect to find some explanation for the change from Portuguese ‘o dente’ or ‘a cinza’ to ‘idintxi’ and ‘ixize’ respectively in Principe. Is it vowel harmony, hinted at in footnote 17?

Angela Bartens’ chapter decries the unreliability of inventories of African words in Spanish and Portuguese varieties and suggests that one way of improving the quality of future studies is collaborative work between Africanists and Romanists. The author conjectures that the common core of Africanisms shared by Latin American Spanish and Brazilian Portuguese can be attributed to the fact that the Spanish depended on the Portuguese to supply slaves, chiefly from Bantu-speaking zones. From the author’s vantage point, Kimbundu was a stronger contender than Kikongo since the former may have served as a lingua franca in parts of Brazil around the 17th century. The author examines instances of innovation but also retention of Africanisms, which, oddly enough, she likens to conservatism, then illustrates that a large proportion of Africanisms retained in Brazilian Portuguese are of Bantu origin, with a portion of others identified as originating in Yoruba-dominant religions.
Following Alleyne, (1971: 176) she purports that these Africanisms occupy semantic fields relating to private domains.

John Lipski’s short contribution presents solid socio-demographical facts that elucidate why, despite appearances, Africanisms have been attested in Bolivia. Until the 17th century, the area was the landing territory for relatively small importations of *bozales*. The author purports that much of Afro-Bolivian Spanish is restructured Spanish and offers convincing evidence to illustrate this. He provides a handful of putative Africanisms that have survived restructuration. In the light of the socio-historical facts presented, this is a good example of how enclaves can contribute to language vitality in such contexts.

Chapters 5 and 6 (Philip Baker), 8 (Joseph Farquharson & Philip Baker), 9 (Angela Bartens & Joseph Farquharson and 10 (Philip Baker) all make extensive use of Baker’s (1982) semantic domains in an attempt to facilitate readability and comparability of the findings.

Chapter 5 examines the African languages that have contributed to Mauritius Creole lexicon. Faithful to the clarity of exposition we have come to associate with this researcher in socio-historical and linguistic matters, he presents socio-historical and demographic data in an effort to clarify what follows. He reminds us that by the 18th century, Mauritius was peopled by speakers of French, Wolof, Mande, Bantu, West Atlantic, Malagasy as well as by workers from Mozambique, India and Indonesia. The inclusion of Malagasy as an African language allows the author to provide unspun data. The findings are neatly summarised under Table 2, in which the author illustrates that despite putative numerical dominance of Mande speakers from 1730-35, their linguistic impact on Mauritius Creole was minor and that Malagasy and Bantu contribute equally except for one case, where Bantu tips the balance once words relating to flora are excluded. While the attempt to quantify the African contribution to creoles is commendable, these figures must be weighed with caution. Sometimes we are looking at miniscule values transformed into percentages, thus magnifying the proportion of Africanisms. For instance, no semantic category is listed as containing more than 28 items: in the domain of people, the 20.5 value listed for Bantu represents 73%. Conversely, the values could be as small as 3 items: in the domain of beliefs and customs the 1.5 value for Malagasy represents 50%.

In Chapter 6, using the semantic categories framework, Baker catalogues Africanisms in Haitian Creole and Lesser Antillian French. The author includes in this group, varieties of French spoken on St Lucia, Dominica, Grenada and the Grenadines. It remains obscure which Grenadines islands are targeted. Based on first-hand knowledge, I cannot affirm the existence of any native variety of French or French Creole on the Grenadines of St Vincent. That being
said, the contribution offers a worthwhile comparison of Africanisms attested in Haitian and Antillian French. Unfortunately, the author is confronted with the problem of scarcity of documentation, which makes cross referencing virtually impossible.

In other respects, I am not in total agreement with the exclusion, albeit temporary, of the BELIEFS AND CUSTOMS domain on the grounds that including the category renders the basis for comparison less representative. The high number of lexemes retained in this category speaks volumes about syncretic, pre-abolition practices. Separating linguistic phenomenon from culture or spirituality for that matter is problematic, since they impacted significantly on the language. Some 175 of the 308 entries are glossed in French only, which implies that one would have to be versed in French to fully exploit the catalogue of entries.

Chapter 8 focusses on Jamaican Creole. From the onset, the authors underscore the difficulty in determining not only the proportion of speakers of African languages that peopled the territories, but also how they correlate with proportions of the Africanisms identified. It is made clear how heavily the socio-historical backdrop impacted on the linguistic landscape: minimal contact between maroons and other speakers of African languages and the diversity of linguistic origins of slaves shipped from the African coast after being captured from inland territories. Although the authors admit that the slaves' origins are not certified in 30% of the overall embarkations, an attempt is made to analyse available data. For instance, Table 2 presents some intriguing findings: the Kwa language group is heavily represented among the slave population in 17th and 18th century Jamaica. While the lexical contribution also reflects this penchant, the authors recommend this be taken with caution pending research that may identify other contributing languages and ultimately tip the balance away from Kwa and Bantu.

An excessive amount of cross references to Farquharson's (2011) PhD thesis gives the impression that elements in the chapter will become less nebulous only upon reading the thesis. In the meantime, one can conclude that Kwa is the source for the majority of Africanisms across the 12 semantic categories. The authors consider this to be specific to Jamaican. The Kwa contribution also overrides the other language families with respect to the proportion of elements within the various word classes, with Bantu in second position. Both language families have contributed extensively in the noun class. This is probably the main take-home message, given that no salient conclusions can be drawn due to the inadequacy of historical data.

In Chapter 9, using a word list 119 strong, Angela Bartens and Joseph Farquharson adopt a comparative approach for their examination of
African-derived lexical retentions in six Western Caribbean English-based Creoles (WCECs). Like the other contributions, this one underscores the laborious task of tracing Africanisms. The seven-paged socio-historical introduction provides valuable data as it paints the background against which Africanisms survived. An interesting finding is that the majority of Africanisms retained are in the FLORA-related domain. This is expected, conjecture the authors, due to the agrarian preoccupation of communities at the time when African influence was recorded. The methodology is also sound: the authors are mindful of presenting only items that are indubitably African. Moreover, the authors rely on original data to trace African etymologies with a view to eliminating inaccuracies that were transmitted in previous works. The procedure itself is all but baffling and the tables provided contribute to the strength of the chapter. For instance, Table 1 suggests that the lexical items of African origin shared by WCECs with Jamaican were diffused from Jamaica. Socio-historical evidence supports this claim. One damper is that the authors’ claim weakens slightly when they state, with the same stroke of the pen, that this would exclude the Bahamas, where 32 of the 37 Africanisms are shared with Jamaican. Another damper is that, while the calculation of affinities is explicit, the authors replace 107, the number of shared items, by 106. The figure obtained is however correct: the calculation involves 107 and not 106.

The final chapter that uses Baker's semantic domains framework is Chapter 10. Here, Baker makes a worthwhile attempt to determine the proportions of speakers of African languages. One would expect that documentation would be readily available for St Kitts, it being the first British and French colony in the Atlantic. Attempts are also made to correlate the proportion of Africanisms to that of Africans brought to the territory. There is relatively complete data provided for Jamaica, although this is not initially within the scope of this chapter. Nonetheless, it is a good basis for ‘comparison’ with the contribution of Africanisms to St Kitts. In actual fact, no data on arrivals are provided for St Kitts, due to the difficulties outlined by the author, yet it is assumed that the Atlantic, Bantu, Mande contributions are higher than expected given the number of slaves speaking these languages.

The analysis by semantic area and origin does not reveal the specialisation of any one language family in any semantic category. This is in contrast with findings for Haitian, where the BELIEFS AND COSTUMES domain is Kwa-dominated and for Western Caribbean varieties, where the FLORA category is also Kwa-dominated. It would have been interesting to have the raw data showing which items are common to Jamaica and St Kitts, so that when we are told in Table 4 that there are 11 Africanisms in non-content word classes in both varieties, it would have been useful to know if these 11 items are related.
From an organisational standpoint, what this chapter lacks is signposts that tell us in which direction we are headed. In part 3, the author embarks on a comparison between Jamaican and Kittitian Creoles in Table 2 and ultimately with Antillian Creole in Table 4 without any previous announcement. Generally, signposting leaves a lot to be desired in most of the contributions.

I now return to the chapters that do not fall within Baker’s framework. Silvia Kouwenberg’s Chapter 7 examines the extinct Berbice Dutch. Unlike the other varieties, Berbice Dutch has a sole African contributor, Eastern Ijo, with some input from Guyanese English-based Creole. For a number of reasons, Kouwenberg calls Berbice Dutch an atypical creole. In addition to it having a sole African lexifier, Ijo contributed to the formation of core words rather than peripheral ones, contrary to what Quint established for CV. Ijo words also combined with Dutch to form the basis of Berbice Dutch, again unlike what is generally observed in Caribbean creoles. Although Dutch was found in peripheral semantic domains, it stretched across a variety of word classes. This is also atypical of creoles. The appendices to this chapter are treasurable. They provide an exhaustive list of items of substrate Eastern Ijo origin, which no other contribution proposes.

In Chapter 11, George Huttar relies mainly on data from Ndyuka, and sporadically on Saramaccan, in an attempt to provide answers to questions that should enhance our understanding about creolisation in general. Huttar adopts a speculative approach concerning (a) the semantic domains which attracted the most substrate lexemes; (b) whether the claim holds that specific items tend to have substrate-influenced lexemes whereas generic items have superstrate-influenced ones, especially when one attempts to establish the proportion of substrate influence within specified semantic domains; (c) if indeed nouns tend to have a larger distribution of substrate items than other word classes across creoles and (d) the connection between the proportions of specific language families in words across a given semantic domain.

It is regrettable that Huttar’s predictions are not analysed in Baker’s findings in Chapter 14. Evidence provided for Berbice Dutch run counter to these speculations. Kouwenberg also advocates against extending generalisation to other creoles, by showing that the Dutch and African components do not confirm to the general rule regarding the proportion of European, Amerindian and African etyma we expect in the creole, depending on semantic domains. Huttar accounts for potential discordances by stating that these lie in the difference between the social histories of the creole societies. Regarding the second point, it may not be reasonable to apply this principle to creoles in general. Huttar cites data provided by Frake (1971) for Zamboangueño that show dissimilar outcomes, given that both superstrate and substrate contribute alternately in superordinate and subordinate terms. One cannot generalise across creoles on
the third point either, since the data provided by Kouwenberg for Berbice Dutch invalidate this principle. The Eastern Ijo input is heftier in verbs than in noun.

Michael Parkvall and Philip Baker’s Chapter 12 rings like an awareness chapter. It provides more than 200 well-researched entries of potential calques. The authors rightfully sound a word of caution that labelling items calques is not a straightforward matter. Admittedly, the authors could not list every territory where these terms are attested since they compile their repertoire based on published works. The entries in French and Portuguese are a welcome addition. These will facilitate research for those interested in data from various varieties. The list can, however, be fine-tuned. For instance, given that present-day carnival celebrations start well before the morning called ‘3uvƐ’; the term now refers to the day-break carnival celebrations the morning after Dimanche Gras, rather than to the morning marking the start of carnival per se.

Anthony Grant’s Chapter 13 seems to be the odd one out; in any case, it comes across as a last minute addition to the volume. The only obvious attempt to deal with Africanisms appears out of nowhere in the author’s conclusion, where the distributions of Africanisms and Americanisms in four creoles are compared. All in all, the paper breaks the thematic unity established in the volume. Its inclusion seems unjustified even more so considering that the editors have made no attempt to justify its insertion. The summary of results manifestly omits any reference to Grant’s well-articulated findings. The author rightly points out that although some items like mauby were unfamiliar to Europeans, this did not hinder diffusion beyond Amerindian borders. The mauby referred to by Carmichael in the case of St Vincent, where a relatively heavy Carib presence was recorded until the 18th century, is not related to sweet potato extract, as is implied by the author, but to a drink made from the bark of the rhamnaceous family of trees. Supposing Carmichael’s depiction was accurate, the drink cannot be assimilated to the alcoholic mabi beverage. In Carmichael’s time Vincentian mobee / mauby referred to a bitter drink (Carmichael 1834: 288).

In Chapter 14, Philip Baker provides a welcome synthesis of the work but concentrates essentially on comparing Africanisms in the varieties studied. Baker echoes the findings of individual authors, to the effect that the inadequate nature of research to date prevents us from drawing informed conclusions about the African contribution to creole lexica.

On the whole the volume could have benefitted from another round of copy-editing and proofreading. There are over 30 disturbing cases of typos, approximate syntax, missing words or letters and inaccurate referencing. These slow down the reader and take away from the fluidity of otherwise beautifully articulated material in some cases. There are a number of photographs
that stand as orphans in the book: there is no obvious link with the subject matter of the chapters they are incorporated in. Despite these and other shortcomings addressed above, this is by far the most comprehensive contribution to the study of substrate influence on the lexica of creole and European varieties in the territories under investigation. It joins with Mufwene’s (1993) and Parkvall’s (2000) contributions in leaving a groundwork of key elements to explore and expand on. A decent number of varieties are investigated, representing Portuguese-based (6), English-based (4), French-based (3), Spanish-based (2), Spanish-Portuguese-based (1) and Dutch-based (1) varieties. It is also refreshing to have data on varieties on and in proximity of the African continent. This adds to the authenticity of the contributions and the far-reaching implications of the findings, namely that, given the present state of research and investigation, none of the varieties can be said to have weighty numbers of Africanisms making up their lexica.

A crucial question arising from this book is how to accurately gauge the influence of African languages spoken natively by those who were directly involved in the creation of creoles. This echoes sentiments expressed by Kouwenberg in this volume, to the effect that tracing similarities and differences between earlier and present varieties is not a straightforward task. It does seem gratuitous to me to look towards 20th and 21st century African etyma to account for creole lexica, which equates to giving priority to the underlying assumption that African substrata remained static throughout the centuries. In the same vein, we must be careful not to level what seems like novel, non-European items to substrate contribution. What may seem like calques may turn out to be chance resemblance, instances of innovation, compound word formation with a heavy mix of creativity and semantic stretching. This is probably what is happening in cases like sky juice, attested in Jamaican and which Vincentians refer to as ‘snow cone’. Incidentally, ‘sky juice’ meaning ‘plain water’ is also attested in Malay English and in British slang to mean ‘dampness on, or of, a playing field or a court’ (Patridge 1937). The only thing Jamaica and Malaysia have in common is that they were both subjects of the British Empire.

References


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