Book Reviews

Isabelle Buchstaller, Anders Holmberg and Mohammed Almoaily


In Creole studies, the European-centric focus on contact languages that rose in the historical context of European colonization, above all in the Caribbean, is still widespread but attempts are now being made to widen the perspective. The recently published Atlas of Pidgin and Creole Language Structures (APiCS, Michaelis, Maurer, Haspelmath, Huber 2013) focuses on a majority of Europe-lexified contact languages (57 languages) but what is new is the inclusion of several less-studied non-Indo-European based pidgin and creole languages (7 African, 7 Asian and 1 Australian).

The programmatic title of the last published volume “Pidgins and Creoles beyond Africa-Europe Encounters” in the Benjamins series “Creole Language Library”, that focuses on some typologically and geographically diverse pidgins, is a good illustration of the growing consciousness that the European-centric view is quite restrictive and biased. The book contains six articles, an introduction by the editors, as well as an area, language and subject index.

In their four-paged introduction, the editors of the volume, Isabelle Buchstaller, Anders Holmberg and Mohammed Almoaily outline the necessity for more work on non-Indo-European contact varieties and the difficulties of gathering data on these varieties. The project of the six articles in the volume is to give a platform to the history, genesis, and typology of some non-European based contact languages. The publication is the result of a two-day “Workshop on Non-European Pidgin and Creole Languages” organized at the University of Newcastle in 2010.

The two first chapters deal with the reconstruction of extinct varieties formerly spoken in the Pacific from scant historical data from the 18th and 19th century. Emanuel J. Drechsel’s paper “Ethnohistory of speaking. Maritime Polynesian Pidgin in a trilogy of historical-sociolinguistic attestations” focuses mainly on methodological issues involved in researching extinct languages. Three historical sources that belong to different genres giving linguistic and sociolinguistic information on Maritime Polynesian Pidgin are questioned in view of a reconstruction of some phonological, morpho-syntactic, lexical and sociolinguistic aspects of the variety: observations on and recordings of “Tahitian” by Johann Reinhold Forster and his son Georg Forster as part of James Cook’s second voyage to the Pacific in 1773; Spanish-British verbal exchanges, including four questions, in “Hawaiian” with the Tahitian servant-sailor Matatore in Mexico in 1790; and conversations in “Maori” by Chief Moehanga as recorded by the British military surgeon John Savage on their
voyage to England in 1805. Drechsel states that in spite of the different names these colonial observers give to the varieties they report on, we are actually dealing with closely related varieties of Maritime Polynesian Pidgin with features that confirm grammatical patterns and linguistic usages already described for Pidgin Hawaiian and Pidgin Maori. Drechsel points out that the analyzed corpora constitute philological and sociohistorical pillars for a fairly stable indigenous pidgin that survived in some areas of the Pacific until the end of the nineteenth or even the twentieth century.

In the second paper “The ‘language of Tobi’ as presented in Horace Holden’s Narrative: Evidence for restructuring and lexical mixture in a Nuclear Micronesian-based pidgin”, Anthony P. Grant gives evidence for the existence of a Micronesian pidgin on Tobi island (western Carolines in the northern Pacific) in the nineteenth century, illustrated by the materials (vocabulary list and sentences) collected and published in 1836 by Horace Holden, an American sailor held in captivity on the island of Tobi. Most of the vocabulary of ‘the language of Tobi’ can be traced to the modern variety Tobian, a Western Chuukic language with some elements from Malay, Palauan and maybe Spanish. Interestingly, the morphosyntactic features are not consistent with modern Tobian.

Mohammad Almoaily’s paper “Language variation in Gulf Pidgin Arabic” is a synchronic corpus-based study on Gulf Pidgin Arabic (GPA), an Arabic-based contact variety used in several countries of the Arabian Gulf for communication between native speakers of Golf Arabic and Asian workers with several linguistic backgrounds and for an in-group variety between those same Asian workers. The paper presents a methodologically fine-grained empirical study with GPA speakers in Saudi Arabia examining the impact of the informants’ L1 (Bengali, Punjabi, two Indo-Aryen languages and Malayalam, a Dravidian language) and their length of stay in Saudi Arabia. The study is based on five morpho-syntactic features of GPA: free vs. bound object or possessive pronouns; absence vs. presence of the Arabic definite marker al-; presence vs. absence of Arabic conjunction markers aw and wa; presence vs. absence of the GPA copula fi; presence vs. absence of agreement in the VP and the ADJP. It’s to be expected that GPA learners would use features similar to the ones found in their L1 and that learners who have lived longer in the Gulf would have shifted towards Gulf Arabic. Interestingly, the majority of these hypotheses must be rejected: a significant correlation between the informants’ L1 and their GPA speech was found only in one feature, conjunction. A shift to the lexifier language Gulf Arabic is observed in this particular feature whereas for the other features learners either fossilize or shift towards a GPA norm.

The most-studied contact situations leading to the emergence of pidgins and creoles in e.g. the Caribbean deal with a European lexifier and African
substrate languages. Rajend Mesthrie’s study “How non-Indo-European is Fanakalo pidgin? Selected understudied structures in a Bantu-lexified pidgin with Germanic substrates” raises a most interesting question as to whether a reversal of the social relations with Europeans as “imperfect learners” and Africans as “superstrate” speakers results in a typological reversal too. Fanakalo, a southern African pidgin that has emerged in the first half of the 19th century is clearly lexified by a non-Indo-European language, Zulu (Bantu) with a certain amount of content words from English or Africaans. Mesthrie compares several structural features of Fanakalo with those of Atlantic Creoles and concludes that Fanakalo shows the opposite of features associated with Atlantic restructured varieties. Its grammar resembles more a basic English (e.g. word order) than a basic form of the “superstrate”. However, Mesthrie points out complexities in aspect and relative clause formation that are unlike English.

Kofi Yapko and Pieter Muysken’s paper “Language change in a multiple contact setting: The case of Sarnami (Suriname)” deals with Sarnami (Surinamese Hindustani), a language spoken in Suriname by slightly less than 30,000 speakers, descendants of indentured laborers who were transplanted there in the late 19th and early 20th century. Sarnami results from a koineization in Suriname of several closely related Indo-Aryen languages (Bhojpuri, Magahi, Maithili from the Bihari subgroup, as well as Awadhi, Bray and Kannauiji, which belong to the varieties of the eastern reaches of the Hindi-Urdu continuum), a “superstrate” influence from the colonial language Dutch and an adstrate influence from the Surinamese national vernacular Sranan. The authors point out that Sarnami cannot be considered a creole language in the traditional sense and is certainly not a pidgin. Their study is based on recent field work in Suriname. After an overview of Suriname as “a unique laboratory of language contact” where about twenty typologically different languages coexist, the authors focus on Sarnami. First they discuss koineization, the process which gave birth to Sarnami as an independent language, and then address contemporary contact induced change in the grammar of Sarnami. Finally, they conclude that the language appears to be converging towards Dutch and Sranan in the domain of clausal word order (sov to svo).

The last paper “Pidgin verbs: infinitives or imperatives?” by Kees Versteegh assumes that in the context of early pidginization, commands, usually expressed by an imperative, are frequent. Evidence from Arabic-based pidgins (Bongor Arabic, Juba Arabic, Pidgin Madame, Gulf Pidgin Arabic), from Ki-Nubi, from Arabic foreigner-directed and foreigner speech, and from first language acquisition shows that the source of most verbs in these varieties is

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1 Note that in the book, in line with most anglophone publications on Creole languages, the term “superstrate” is used in a sense different from its original use in Romance linguistics.
the Arabic morphological imperative. In the L1 and L2 acquisition of other languages, e.g. most European languages, the first verb forms used by the learners appear to be derived from infinitives. However, Versteegh shows convincingly how the analogy with Arabic suggests that the infinitive as a main source for initial verb formation derives from its function as a directive in those languages.

This is a valuable collection of articles that covers diachronic and synchronic aspects from a broad variety of non-European based pidgins spoken all over the world: the two extinct Pacific varieties Maritime Polynesian Pidgin and the language of Tobi, a pidgin based on Tobian (Western Chuukic); Gulf Pidgin Arabic based on Arabic and spoken in the Gulf states; several other Arabic-based pidgins; Fanakalo, a Bantu-based pidgin with Germanic substrates spoken in South Africa and Sarnami, a contact variety resulting from the koineization of Indo-Aryen languages in contact with several languages including Sranan and Dutch. Five of the six contributions are empirical case studies based on corpora collected by their authors; only Versteegh’s contribution draws its data from extant literature. All examples are glossed in English and even a reader not familiar with the varieties can follow the authors’ arguments.

The contributions are heterogeneous in using different methodological approaches to analyze various sociohistorical/sociolinguistic settings and to describe structural features of the varieties dealt with. Only Mesthrie’s paper attempts to theorize the concept of pidgin languages.

It is undeniably a very interesting and most valuable book for researchers and students of language contact because it broadens the restricted focus on European-based contact varieties.

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References
