
In the ongoing debate on whether creoles form a typological class, a frequently maintained argument is that most creoles are still so poorly documented that any attempt at typifying them as a separate class based on linguistic criteria is destined to be flawed. In a recent paper presented at the 9th Creolistics Workshop in Aarhus (11-13 April), however, John McWhorter received plaudits as he objected that, in fact, the number and quality of newly appearing creole grammars is quite encouraging and fully warrants the recent increase of typological research into creole languages. Such optimism is nourished, not in a small way, by the descriptive endeavors of scholars such as Philippe Maurer (PM) whose latest work (hereafter FPCBT) offers a detailed description of the Portuguese-based Creole formerly spoken on Java. FPCBT appears two years after PM’s groundbreaking Principense (Maurer 2009) grammar, which “ranks among the very best descriptive studies of any Iberian-Romance-based Creole” according to Quint (2011: 411) and succeeded in placing “one of the so far least well known creole languages (…) among the best known ones” according to Kihm (2010: 3). The value of FPCBT cannot easily be overstated either, as it rescues the closely-related, by now extinct Portuguese-based Creole (PC) of Batavia (present-day Jakarta) and Tugu (also on Java) from oblivion and makes an enormous amount of data on the language available to the scientific community. It is the latest addition to an oeuvre that already includes landmark grammars of Papiamentu (Maurer 1988) and Angolar (Maurer 1995).

Batavia PC was “a flourishing language during the 17th century, but the decline started in the second half of the 18th century, being progressively replaced by Malay” (p. 5). For the purpose of the book, PM treats Batavia PC and Tugu PC as two distinct languages, although recognizing that the latter is an offshoot of the former: “between 1660 and 1670, about 150 members of the Portuguese community of Batavia moved to the isolated rural area of Tugu” (p. 5). The Tugu variety was never spoken by more than a few hundred native speakers, but owing to its isolation managed to survive well into the 1970s (p. 5).

The aim of the book is to provide a “systematic analysis” (p. 3) of all the material available on the two varieties: following a brief Introduction (1-6), the book provides a clearly organized grammar (Chapters 2-5), a glossed and translated presentation of all available Batavia and Tugu PC texts (Chapter 6) as well as two word lists (Batavia and Tugu PC - English and vice-versa) (Chapters 7, 8). Although a considerable part of PM’s corpus stems from Schuchardt’s (1891) pioneering work on Batavia and Tugu PC, FPCBT is an invaluable addition to Schuchardt (1891) for several reasons: first, Schuchardt (1891) did not provide English translations of the creole texts; secondly, Schuchardt (1891) does not contain systematic grammatical analyses; thirdly, a collection of materials as well-organized and user-friendly as this one would be welcome for any creole (or non-creole for that matter); fourthly, PM’s corpus includes material post-dating Schuchardt (1891). To be precise, PM’s corpus consists of four subcorpora:

- a ca. 130-paged Batavia PC document with wordlists, short sentences and texts drawn up by a Dutch priest in 1780 (contained in Schuchardt 1891);
- several Tugu PC songs and texts all dating back to the 1880s (contained in Schuchardt 1891);
• a Tugu PC word list including grammatical indications from the year 1937 produced by a Dutch priest;
• a lullaby and some simple sentences in Tugu PC drawn up by Wallace in 1978.

The Introduction (Chapter 1) presents a brief socio-historical background. Chapter 2 (pp. 7-18) then deals with phonology. It is complicated enough to provide a phonological description of an extinct language and not made any easier by the fact that the available texts show inconsistent spelling and lack indications on pronunciation (p. 8), but PM clearly makes the best of the materials at his disposal. On a side note: the absence of the phoneme /ʃ/ in Batavia and Tugu PC cannot, as PM postulates (p. 14), be ascribed to this phoneme’s absence in Old (15th and 16th century) Portuguese, since it was in fact part of the Old Portuguese phonemic inventory (Teyssier 1983: 45).

Chapter 3 (pp. 19-110) offers a description of the morphosyntax. The chapter, recognizable in structure to readers familiar with PM’s Angolar and Principence grammars, deals in great detail with the noun phrase, the verb phrase, simple sentences and complex sentences respectively. To illustrate features, PM draws abundantly on each of the four subcorpora. On the downside, this causes an over-illustration of certain features, such as the ten examples offered to illustrate that Batavia and Tugu PC possess intranstive, mono- and ditransitive verbs (p. 65). On the upside, by exhaustively exploiting his corpus PM succeeds in offering an excellent overview of both diatopic (Batavia vs. Tugu) and diachronic (from ca. 1780 to ca. 1980) variation. (Note that some of the variation found in the corpus can of course reflect L1 interference of the authors).

In Chapter 4 (pp. 111-116), PM presents a brief analysis of word formation (reduplication, derivation and compounding). As expected, Batavia and Tugu PC have borrowed a few derivational morphemes from Malay, their principal contact language. Perhaps more surprising is that Batavia and Tugu PC contain no less than 10 Portuguese-derived derivational affixes, at least half of which is productive (including the past participle ending -du and gerundive -ndo). This is surprising since the available historical documentation suggests that Batavia and Tugu PC were cut off from Portuguese after the arrival of the Dutch on Java in the early 17th century. Either we should be sceptic of these historical data, or we might speculate that (some of) the morphemes may already have been productive in Papia Kristang (the predecessor of Batavia PC, see further below), or both.

Chapter 5 (pp. 117-126) is an assessment of Malay, Javanese, Dutch and Indo-Portuguese influence on Batavia and Tugu PC. It provides an excellent overview of foreign (particularly Malay) influences on the creoles, at all levels of the grammar. A minor point of criticism is that it remains unclear what is meant by “Indo-Portuguese”—an Indian, non-creolized variety of Portuguese or (one of) the Indo-Portuguese Creoles?—and how and when it could exert influence on Batavia and Tugu PC.

Following the grammatical descriptions of Chapters 2-5, Chapter 6 (pp. 127-194) presents all the texts from PM’s corpus systematically glossed and translated into English (in addition to Dutch and Malay, which most originals are translated in). Apart from one text provided in Appendix II of the book (see further below) and some unreadable material deliberately left out by PM, Chapter 6 brings together all Batavia and Tugu PC texts hitherto discovered.

Two extensive word lists (Batavia and Tugu PC to English, and vice-versa) are provided in Chapters 7 and 8 (pp. 195-328). The fact that PM provides etyma for over 90% of the