



## Review Articles

# Simplicity and Complexity in Creoles and Pidgins: What's the Metric?

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*Simplicity and Complexity in Creoles and Pidgins*. Ed. by Nicholas Faraclas and Thomas B. Klein. London (UK) and Colombo (Sri Lanka): Battlebridge Publications. 2009. Pp. 220. Paper. US\$64.89.

### Abstract

This review article is a response to the way the editors of and contributors to *Simplicity and Complexity in Creoles and Pidgins* respond to McWhorter's (2001) claim that creoles have the world's simplest grammars. Although I agree with the contributors that creoles are not as simple as they may look to some, I express several concerns about the ways they (fail to) raise and/or address some fundamental issues regarding the subject matter. These include discussing what the notions SIMPLICITY and COMPLEXITY really mean as they are applied to languages and whether linguistics has yet developed the necessary metric(s) for assessing complexity without biasing the issues in favor of or against particular types of languages. My arguments are intended to prompt linguists to think harder over how we can contribute to the scholarship on complexity as related to emergence, thinking of languages as emergent multi-modular phenomena, internally and externally interactive, always in the state of flux, and in search of (transient) equilibrium.

### Keywords

complexity; simplicity; simplification; marked(ness); ecology; evolution

This book was intended to be a companion to another one titled *Complex Processes in New Languages*, ed. by Enoch Aboh and Norval Smith, published the same year at John Benjamins. They are both the outcomes of a workshop held at University of Giesen in 2006, at which the participants were apparently invited to address John McWhorter's (2001) claim that "The world's simplest grammars are creole grammars." The event in itself is an interesting phenomenon, particularly since a special issue of the *Linguistic Typology* 5

(2001) had already been devoted to the controversial claim, showing generally that linguists' reactions depend largely on whether or not they assume that creoles emerged from erstwhile pidgins, thus on whether or not they assumed discontinuity from the lexifier to the creole. They also reflect whether or not it is assumed that a grammar consists only of sounds, morphemes, and, to some extent, grammatical rules but does not include the computational mechanisms that enable speakers to infer the meanings of utterances. Even syntax has often been overlooked, because, as observed by DeGraff and Aboh (to appear), the number of rules one posits in this domain depends largely on the particular framework one adopts.

DeGraff (2001) distinguished himself from the vast majority of the contributors to the *Linguistic Typology* issue by pointing out how rich the morphology of Haitian Creole still is compared to French, even if one must disregard the free markers that are used in lieu of inflections. He correctly dubbed this particular approach to complexity "bit complexity," consisting of just counting the number of units and rules that a system consists of. (See also DeGraff 2009.)

The Aboh and Smith (2009) volume focused on the contributions of the lexifier and the substrate languages to morphosyntax of various creoles and expanded pidgins, including also Asian varieties not lexified by European languages. In my postscript in the volume, I especially expressed my disappointment with the fact that only the editors' Introduction really discusses complexity, though the other chapters provide a lot of information that dispute McWhorter's claim. The present volume, *Simplicity and Complexity in Creoles and Pidgins*, focuses on synchronic aspects of creoles and pidgins, with half the chapters on phonetic and phonological aspects of these language varieties. Though the contributions could have been edited more rigorously, they all still discuss "bit complexity," focusing on whether creoles' and pidgins' systems contain fewer units and rules than their source languages. The last chapter, by Kofi Yapko, on Pichi, *aka* Fernandino and Fernando Po Krio (on Bioko Island, Equatorial Guinea), raises an interesting issue, that of whether a creole that is in contact with a superstrate other than its lexifier and borrows from it increases in structural complexity. Overall, they show that it is difficult to sustain McWhorter's claim, especially when one agrees with me that the morphosyntactic restructuring that accounts for the divergence of creoles and expanded pidgins from their lexifiers is not so much simplification as it involves typological realignment, i.e., a shift from one structural type to another on various parameters, as noted earlier by Posner (1985). As suggested above, grammar does not consist only of morphology but also of syntax and indeed semantic interpretation rules, which have sorely been overlooked in McWhorter's claim. There's thus an interactional aspect of complexity, arising

from the interfacing of different modules in the architecture of a language, that is still missing from these discussions, including the present volume (Mufwene 2009).

*Simplicity and Complexity in Creoles and Pidgins* (SCCP) consists of a brief “Introduction” by the editors (pp. 1-3) and 10 unnumbered chapters grouped into two parts:

Part I: Phonology

- “Phonological complexity in pidgins,” by Peter Bakker, 7-27;
- “Suprasegmentals and the myth of the simplicity continuum from ‘pidgin’, to ‘creole’, to ‘natural languages’,” by Nicholas Faraclas, 29-47;
- “Measuring phonological complexity in creole: Focus on Gullah and Geechee,” by Thomas B. Klein, 49-66;
- “Neither simpler nor more complex: Optimality and creole grammars,” by Eric Russell Webb, 67-80;
- “Creole consonant inventories: How simple?” by Christian Uffmann, 81-106.

Part II: Morphosyntax

- “Is serialization simple? Evidence from Chinese Pidgin English,” by Geneviève Escure, 109-123;
- “Admixture, structural transmission, simplicity and creolization,” by Anthony B. Grant, 125-152;
- “On *-self* and reflexivity in English-lexified pidgins and creoles,” by Paula Prescod, 153-174;
- “The morphology of Chabacano: Its complexity in comparative perspective,” by Patrick O. Steinkrüger, 175-182;
- “Complexity revised: Pichi (Equatorial Guinea) and Spanish in contact,” by Kofi Yakpo, 184-216.

“Index,” 217-220.

The unanimous conclusion of the contributions to Part I is that the phonological systems of creoles and pidgins, especially their phonetic inventories, fall in the average compared to other languages; they do not appear to be drastically impoverished compared to their source languages nor simpler than many other languages. Peter Bakker sets the tone with his broad chapter, which perhaps can also constitute a partial excuse for the editors’ very short Introduction, as the latter provides little information about the substance of the book. In the style of typologists, Bakker surveys information about the phonetic inventories of several creoles and pidgins, showing that overall they are not significantly smaller than those of their lexifiers, though they tend to get rid of marked sounds. A nagging issue arising from this chapter is that we

are not told why or when a sound is considered marked, thus by what metric the valuation is made. Although this may not appear critical in a book whose focus is synchrony rather than the genesis of the relevant language varieties, it is indeed also the fact that their emergence is contact-based that brings up the question.

Since it is “bit complexity” that is assumed in this chapter, I wonder whether the so-called “prenasalized consonants”—as opposed to two-sound sequences of a (syllabic) nasal and a consonant—should count as simplex or composite units. As a speaker of Bantu languages that use them, I think they are regular consonant clusters which differ from similar NC combinations in European languages by their syllabification conventions: in Bantu and other such languages the nasal forms a syllable with the following consonant and therefore can appear in word-initial position, whereas in European languages the nasal forms a syllable with the preceding vowel, possibly nasalizing the vowel, and cannot occur in word-initial position. Prenasalization may thus be considered a phonological phenomenon, conditioned by its position within a word, rather than a phonemic one, which would increase the phonemic inventory of a language. This reinterpretation of facts may thus bear on how one assesses the complexity of the phonemic inventory of a language in comparison with another.

There also arises the question of whether one can get an accurate measure of the complexity of the phonemic system of a language without taking into account phonological rules/constraints that apply, including those that bear on syllabic sequences within a word. Nonetheless, this is the kind of study that, regardless of the sketchy and meager information it provides on each of the languages discussed, lays the groundwork for a comparison of creoles and pidgins world-wide to double-check whether they are not more related to their lexifiers than they constitute together a particular type of languages.

Equally interesting is Faraclas’ discussion, in the next chapter, of prosodic features of “Afro-Caribbean English-lexifier creoles” (ACELC), which he claims “resemble much more those [i.e., tone patterns?] found along the west coast of Africa than those found in other regions where tone systems are commonly encountered, such as East Asia and Mesoamerica” (29–30). One has to ask why the comparison with languages that were not part of the encounters that produced ACELCs, when what matters is really the languages that were involved in the relevant contacts. I also deplore the absence of information that may link specific ACELCs to particular language groups, typological or genetic, on the West African coast. Such information might help us verify whether the tonal patterns are retentions from specific language groups,

simple physical reinterpretations of stress as tones (see below), or innovations that incorporate materials from both the lexifier and some substrate languages, as has been debated about morphosyntactic features. Because, African American vernacular English is included in the discussion, may I point out that African Americans have a hard time interpreting “Nigerian English” (generally used for English from any part of West(ern) Africa) largely because of important differences in prosodic features? There are also noticeable prosodic differences between, say, Jamaican Creole and Nigerian Pidgin English (NPE), which are probably attributable largely to variation in how the plantations were peopled.

Faraclas will get by because, to be sure, he speaks of “the reinterpretation of stress in European superstrate languages in terms of tone and stress systems that typify African substrate languages [which] often leads to greater complexity than that found in either the superstrate or the substrate languages” (29). However, all depends on whether, in the first place, we agree with this characterization. Although prosodic features of ACELCs are noticeably different from those of English varieties spoken by descendants of Europeans in North America, American Southern English is prosodically akin to AAVE, with which it shares origins on the cotton and tobacco plantations of the American Southeast (Bailey and Thomas 1998, Mufwene 2000, 2001).

There also arises the question of whether there is sufficient evidence to characterize the ACELCs as tonal languages, other than the fact that they are associated primarily with descendants of Africans. Although NPE may be, which is well justified by the West African ecology of its evolution, is this necessarily true of Jamaican Creole. I am no expert on this, but as a native speaker of tonal languages, my impression is that Papiamentu is perhaps the only Caribbean creole that I know that sounds like a tonal language. The first time I set foot on Curaçao and heard Papiamentu all around me, I could not resist telling my host that I was reminded of the prosodies of particular languages I was familiar with back home. But then, when it comes to linguistic systems, one may also say that, like beauty, what is claimed “lies in the eyes of the beholder” (Mufwene 2005, 2008).

The above reservations notwithstanding, Faraclas draws attention to the fact that prosodic features are equally relevant to discussions of complexity, though he does not articulate explicitly what are the factors or features he used to measure complexity. The backbone of his chapter seems to lie in contrasts such as *go* uttered with a high tone in NPE to mean ‘go’ and *go* produced with a low tone before a main verb to express future. This is an opposition that Gullah captures in pronouncing the vowel of main-verb *go* just like in Southern English with a weak diphthong [o<sup>w</sup>] or a lengthened monophthong [o:]

but that of the second with a schwa, which is often reduced to a mere [g] in fast speech. The fact that Gullah does not even resort to the same strategy as NPE pokes a hole in Faraclas' sweeping generalizations about the ACELCs.

Another observation that is central in his claims is the fact that AAVE distinguishes prosodically between, for instance, the past participle *been* produced with the typical stress of other American English varieties and the "Perfect/Durative" *been* (more commonly known in the AAVE literature as "remote phase *been/bin*"), pronounced, to my knowledge, with a heavy stressed and longer vowel. The question is whether this prosodic contrast is a tonal one or one that is more adequately described in the way I just did. Thus, what is particularly West African about it? Ironically, "remote phase" *been* is not that rare in White nonstandard or even colloquial English. It is unlike the ANTERIOR *bin* attested in Atlantic English creoles. In a somewhat different vein, I am generally intrigued by what appears to be a conflation of tone and intonation in this chapter, which are distinguished from each other even in studies of African tonal languages. For instance, I speak Bantu languages, Kiyansi and Kikongo-Kituba in particular, which have high and low tones (also falling and rising tones in Kiyansi) but require no rising intonation at the end of YES/NO questions introduced with the special marker *nki*.

In his chapter, Thomas Klein takes the reader to what I suggested was missing from Peter Bakker's study: the significance of phonology in measures of complexity. He also addresses the question of prenasalized consonants, which I don't think occur in Gullah anyway. Characterizing them as "biphonemic" (51),<sup>1</sup> he excludes them from his count. And he is equally correct in excluding labio-velar stops from Gullah's phonemic inventory (52); they are not produced as such, based on Turner's own analysis. To my knowledge, Gullah's segmental phonemic inventory is very similar to that American Southern English, with the difference that it contains a bilabial fricative, [β],

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<sup>1</sup> I argued in Mufwene (1986) that the reduction of "prenasalized stops" in African "basket names" in Gullah to simple oral stops was an indication that the names had been introduced to Gullah later than Turner (1949) had hypothesized. Along with the decoupling of labio-velar stops into consonant clusters, the process suggested the influence of a fundamentally English phonology in the pronunciation of names of African origin. This is so similar to the mispronunciation of African names today by Americans, including African Americans, for instance, with my daughter's first name *Ntazyel* pronounced as [natazye:l] by her teachers rather than as [n<sup>h</sup>tazye:l], with prenasalization. Americans have had a hard time pronouncing the names *Nkruma* (a Ghanaian leader assassinated in the early 1960s) and *Gbagbo* (the former president of Côte d'Ivoire now being tried at the Hague).

an apparent legacy of Irish in the plantation setting of the emergence of this creole,<sup>2</sup> which alternates with /v/ and /w/ in words such as *very* and *well*.

Klein subscribes to the same measure of complexity as Bakker, after Maddieson (1984): the larger the number of individual phonemes, the more complex the phonemic system is. Thus, with 33 phonemes by his count (not much fewer than its English lexifier), Gullah falls in the average among the world's languages (54). Unlike Bakker, however, Klein also examines combinatorial possibilities, which are not different from those of its English lexifier. There are random consonant cluster reductions but these may be associated with particular idiolects in particular speech events. On the other hand, Klein's analysis suffers from relying heavily and rather uncritically on data collected by other scholars, not on his own field data. He does not question the accuracy of the transcriptions, such as whether they might reproduce some stereotypes associated with a basilectal speech putatively uniform from the Caribbean to North America.

Klein also discusses "Aphesis and syllabification" (55-57), the former of which identifies word-initial syllable reductions in items such as *appear* > *'pear* and *potato* > *'tato*. A brief comparison with American Southern English would have revealed that the phenomenon is no more "creole" than the usage of the pronoun *yall* [2PL] is in Gullah. In any case, his conclusion is that "The size of the total [of Gullah's] phoneme inventory (...) may be characterized as typical or average when compared to non-creole languages of the world" (64). Also its "core syllable template (C)(C)V(C) (...) is on the upper end of the typological middle by the measures employed in recent typological world on the syllable" (64). Whoever may want to explain this state of affairs by invoking decreolization should know that I have found no historical data in support of this hypothesis (Mufwene 1994).

In the next chapter, Eric Russell Webb applies Optimality Theory to "French Lexifier Creoles (FLC)," in order "to argue against the notion that creoles – or any language for that matter – can be seen as grammatically simpler or more complex" (67). For instance, discussing the distribution of /R/ in French and in Haitian Creole (HC), he points out that one may reach contradictory conclusions: since the distribution of this phoneme has a constraint in FLCs that prevents it from occurring after an obstruent, one may conclude, from "a purely computational standpoint, based on derivational rule ordering, [that] Haitian might be considered more complex than French, the grammar of

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<sup>2</sup> This sound was not retained in Caribbean English creoles, where *vexed* in the sense of 'angry' is pronounced as [beks]. This is again an indication that Gullah's phonology is overall closer to that of its English lexifier than those of its Caribbean creole kin.

which contains no labialization rule.” On the other hand, if one considers the number of “underlying features [that] are needed to fully account for the system,” French “might be considered paradigmatically more complex,” while Haitian is only “syntagmatically more complex” (70-71). The question is thus whether one can assess the complexity of language relative to another or others based on surface characteristics only.

As sensible as Webb’s conclusion sounds, one must bear in mind that it is based on an assumption that one may disagree with, viz., the same constraints apply universally in all languages, however vacuous their application may be, which generally makes it impossible to determine whether one language is simpler than others. I don’t think the author would make a case against McWhorter’s (2001) claim about the simplicity of creoles if he did not select data that clearly demonstrate that a system must be considered holistically in such comparisons. Both the physical and abstract aspects of a language must count, as they are both part of the system that enables speakers to communicate.

Christian Uffmann focuses his chapter on the question of how consonants from the languages in contact are selected into, or out of, the emergent creoles’ systems (81). He suggests that in a creole one cannot expect to find segments such as ejectives, which were not attested in any of the languages in contact, although they occur in some of the world’s languages (82). Indeed, as I suggested above and have pointed out in several essays, the only ecology that bears on the selection of features into, or out of, the emergent creoles, in determining markedness values, is that of the languages in contact, not the whole universe of the world’s languages that typology-minded linguists like to invoke. Those statistics about the distribution of particular parametric options around the world mean nothing, especially those born by languages to which the creators of creoles had no access. Such languages did not constitute an option for them (e.g., Mufwene 1991, 2001, 2003). After all, creoles are not languages created *ex nihilo*, nor were they ever planned by a language architect with foresight for the rightly disputed simplest system that would presumably be suitable for the relevant language contacts and competitions.

Uffmann may also be justified in disputing “The reverse hypothesis (...) that creoles keep only those contrasts which are common across the substrate languages [as] probably too strong” (86), though he does not say who holds this position. The view presupposes that speakers of all the relevant substrate languages were present at the strategic moment (whichever it may have been) when creoles putatively emerged (abruptly?). As we have increasingly been learning about the sociohistorical ecologies of the emergence of various creoles, which appears to have been gradual, such a population-wide evolution



of colonial languages, influenced simultaneously, at a particular phase of the development of a colony, by all the languages associated with the different slaves, was apparently never the case. The scenario would not even apply to pidgins, especially if one factors in the role of interpreters, including the indigenous grumetes.

To start with, in the case of creoles, the financial capitals of the plantation owners, which accumulated only gradually, did not allow the kind of “overnight” socioeconomic development the mistaken scenario conjures up. Thus, just as regarding the new vernaculars’ grammars, one must factor in the founder effect of those who shifted the earliest to the European language, without overlooking the consequence of the specific pattern of population growth and a host of other factors, in trying to account for the evolution of creoles’ phonemic systems. These considerations may help explain why Gullah, for instance, has the bilabial fricative [β] (contrary to Uffmann’s claim on p. 87 that it is not attested in creoles!) and the schwa in its system, whereas, to my knowledge, other Atlantic creoles lack these sounds. They are not commonly attested among the substrate languages of Atlantic and Indian Ocean creoles. Also, the vocalic systems of French creoles, for instance, suggest a certain amount of conservatism from their 17<sup>th</sup>- and 18<sup>th</sup>-century French lexifiers, starting with the pronunciation of the first personal singular pronoun *mwe*. Pronunciations in English creoles of words such as *gyaal* ‘girl’, *gwot* ‘goat’, and *bya* ‘bear’ do not reflect exclusive African substrate influence either. As a matter of fact, the stopping of /θ, ð/ in English creoles reflects variation in the lexifier itself. So does the confusion of *it* and *hit*-like sequences in their realizations (as recognized by the author himself on p. 98), though we cannot deny the role of partial congruence between the lexifier and substrate languages.

Such examples, illustrating Uffmann’s discussion on p. 87, underscore again the uselessness of invoking a universal, rather than an ecology-specific, scale of markedness to account for the selection of particular variants into, or out of, creoles. It is also doubtful that some sort of “substrate leveling” (89) occurs (presumably on the model of koinéization?). This is largely the consequence of the founder principle (Mufwene 1996, 2001b), following from the fact that the different ethnolinguistic groups that came in contact did not all arrive at the same time, notwithstanding the fact that they didn’t all reach critical mass (at the same time). It is thus not surprising that, like Gullah with the bilabial fricative, Saramaccan allegedly has labiovelar stops (90), which, incidentally, are rare among the Bantu languages, as well as prenasalized stops (93).<sup>3</sup> The

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<sup>3</sup> In this particular case too, one must wonder how carefully the editors were engaged in editing the book when there are contradictions regarding facts (not analyses!) that could have been

chapter generally suffers from not illustrating, in actual words, the phonemes that require the most discussion, especially the labiovelar stops and prenasalized consonants in Saramaccan. The paper is in a way not so falsifiable: Take Uffmann's word for it.

Opening the book's second part, on morphosyntax, Geneviève Escure tackles the important question for whether forming complex sentences by serializing verbs is a simpler strategy than subordination, whereby a complement or adjunct clause is introduced by a complementizer, a conjunction, or a preposition, or is bounded by some nominalizing device and can be case-marked.<sup>4</sup> Among the many criteria used to address the question of morphosyntactic simplicity/complexity, assuming the scale on a continuum model, are the following which I find questionable: whether a language has "no definite or indefinite article" and whether a language capitalizes on "parataxis (no complex embedding)" (111). These raise, among others, the following issues: 1) can a language express the DEFINITE/INDEFINITE distinction only by means of an article? 2) Are serial verb constructions (SVC) and parataxis the same syntactic phenomenon? 3) Is serialization mutually exclusive with embedding? I detect some Eurocentrism in the formulation of such criteria, which is underscored by the following claim: "In serial structures, verbs replace prepositions" (111, my emphasis).

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avoided: Huffmann claims that "complex 10-vowel Akan-type systems are not found in basilectal creoles" (89), while, Thomas Klein, one of the editors, reports that Gullah has 12 "phonemic vowels" (52, 54). There are similar apparent contradictions in the rest of the chapter, where the author corrects, later, stronger claims made earlier. The editors could have encouraged him to rewrite the essay more rigorously.

<sup>4</sup> From the very beginning the reader will undoubtedly share my state of confusion in reading:

Over the past century, there has been widespread agreement among linguists that "the grammars of pidgins are characteristically less complex than the grammars of their source languages" (...) and that both are simpler than other languages (109).

One only has to guess that the antecedents of "both" must be "creoles and pidgins," probably thanks to the invocation of "source languages." One must wait until p. 110 to see this guess confirmed, when they read:

(...) pidgins are structurally simple, while creoles are more complex than pidgins. Creoles in turn, are often thought to be less complex than so-called natural languages.

Poor editing seems to explain this kind of opening for a chapter, just like the formulation of some of the questions addressed in the essay seem to corroborate. This happens easily when editors don't challenge contributors to an anthology to produce their very best and are too eager to assemble papers that seem to support some positions they all share.

To me, the claim suggests that a Preposition + Complement construction must be considered as the default in relation to an SVC. Thus, one misses the fundamental significance of typology as concerned with unbiased variation in different morphosyntactic strategies that the world's languages select to package information and how they can vary even in the selection or ranking of semantic contents that are expressed. For instance, in the Jamaican Creole (JC) construction *Jan swim kras di riba* 'John swam across the river', the equal prominence given to the components SWIM and CROSS is not matched by the French translation *Jean a traversé la rivière en nageant*, in which SWIM is actually subordinated to CROSS. The English translation is yet another strategy in which swimming remains the main activity and the activity of crossing is expressed as an accomplishment, in a prepositional adjunct. Comparing the JC and English expressions, one may as well claim, in another biased way, that the English preposition "replaces" the serial verb! This is of course one of the distractions that we can do without in approaching morphosyntactic simplicity/complexity comparatively, from the point of view of how different languages manage to package information in communication.<sup>5</sup> And a critical issue here that the author fails to raise is how one must articulate the metric that can be used to assess which typological option is simpler, or less complex, than another. Will the next question be: Which language is more evolved than which one(s)? Is this an option worth exploring? Perhaps, but whoever subscribes to it should explain what justifies it from an evolutionary perspective.

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<sup>5</sup> Another distraction for whoever knows a little more about European trade with the Chinese is Escure's claim that Chinese Pidgin English, the empirical focus of her discussion, is a relexified Portuguese pidgin that may have been spoken in the Canton area before the English engaged in trade with the Chinese in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In the first place, there are few attestations of Portuguese pidgins in history, though they engaged in trade along the African and Asian coasts over a century before they faced the competition of the English, the French, and the Dutch, who wanted to participate in the colonial ventures, which until then had been the monopoly of the Iberians alone. They proceeded by interpreters, especially permanent residents of the factories on the coast, the people often called *lançados*, and the indigenous *grumetes*, who also served as go-betweens, notwithstanding individuals from both trading groups who had really learned each other's language under conditions that are not so mysterious now: some Natives were taken to Europe and learned the host population's language by immersion; and some Europeans were often left behind in the "discovered" lands, for various reasons, and they learned the relevant indigenous languages also by immersion. The former, who were brought back home on one of the next voyages (in sign of good faith to the non-European kings), or the latter acted as interpreters. Another important reason in the case of China, is that the Chinese did not trade with Europeans who did not use interpreters appointed by the court, even if European traders could speak Chinese and/or if the interpreter was not deemed competent enough by a particular trader (van Dyke 2011).

More important in this chapter by Escure is whether SVCs as used in Chinese Pidgin English (CPE), very much on the model of Cantonese, are simpler than the corresponding subordinate constructions, complements or adjuncts, in English. The criterion used is that of semantic transparency, with Escure raising the critical question of whether CPE's SVCs are always more transparent, as some of them cannot even be translated faithfully into English (121). According to her,

Cantonese and CPE long paratactic strings of lexical items in serial verb constructions can display complicated patterns of argument realization, which may be difficult to process, especially when one argument has more than one semantic role in a sentence (121).

Thus, verb serialization can in some cases be “opaque and therefore ‘complex’” (*ibid.*). However, there are many languages that have complex morphology (i.e., crowded with several affixes) but are very transparent, such as polysynthetic and agglutinating languages. If opacity is really the measure of complexity, these languages must be simpler. This unanticipated conclusion of Escure's argument brings up the question of whether the different criteria used for assessing morphosyntactic complexity/simplicity may yield contradictory conclusions and raise more issues about the usefulness or wisdom of this research agenda. It would have been helpful if Escure had developed and clarified her argument in this particular case, even for a sympathetic reader like me who does not think that creoles and pidgins are simple languages, let alone the simplest ones in the world.

I am confused by Escure's conclusions. She states on p. 121 that “CPE could nonetheless be said to be ‘simpler’ than its source languages in its presentation of arguments and its usage of primarily short sentences.” However, on p. 122, she closes the chapter as follows: “CPE serialization is characterized in some ways by a high degree of semantic transparency, which is not necessarily tantamount to grammatical ‘simplicity’, and certainly not to inadequacy.” She may have preferred to have a cake and eat it too, though a more charitable reader may conclude that she has quite a nuanced position on the subject matter.

Anthony Grant starts his chapter with an important distinction between “transfer of pattern” and “transfer of fabric” (126), with the latter term meaning transfer of morphemes from one language to another. He uses three criteria for assessing morphosyntactic simplicity: 1) whether or not allomorphy is reduced in the language; 2) whether or not the function word is extended from other extant material in the language (apparently by grammaticization); and 3) “zero-marking,” i.e., not having a morpheme for a feature that is

expressed morphologically in another language (128). He also introduces a notion of “UNMIXED” CREOLE to characterize varieties such as Mauritian Creole, which include no word from outside the lexifier to translate “the Swadesh 207-item list” (131). However, unlike the previous chapters, he focuses more on what kinds of creoles tend to maintain some complexity: these are the mixed ones, which have usually transferred fabrics and/or patterns from languages other than their primary lexifiers, such as Mindanao Creole Spanish and Berbice Dutch. The former is especially noteworthy because it has a pronominal system with an EXCLUSIVE/INCLUSIVE distinction in the first person plural (143) and distinctions according to “ascending degrees of familiarity and politeness” in the address-term system (144), just like in the Austronesian languages of the Philippines.

Nonetheless, the four “mixed creoles” which Grant examined (Mindanao Spanish Creole, Berbice Dutch, Angolar, and Saramaccan, pp. 137–138) are said to all exhibit some simplification in relation to their source languages, consistent with the criteria enumerated above, and owing especially to putatively the earlier pidgin stage that preceded creolization. The complexity highlighted by his study is allegedly a consequence of “reconstruction,” which “is the critical element in structural creolization [whatever this means!] and which therefore defines creoles as a distinct class of languages” (145). Although this claim sounds logical (and convincing?), Grant does not provide the historical scenario of population contacts grounded within particular emergent economic ecologies that can back up his hypothesis or can dispute the gradualist hypothesis of the emergence of creoles by basilectalization, which is also consistent with the retention of morphemes from the lexifier, the grammaticization of lexical materials from the same language, and patterns and materials selected from the other languages (Chaudenson 2001, DeGraff 2001ff, Mufwene 1996ff, among others), what has been identified as substrate influence. Grant also claims:

Nobody could examine the diachronic evidence thoroughly and then not believe that creoles derive from pidgins which underwent rapid grammatical expansion, generally resulting in morphological systems which are quite different from those employed likewise in their lexifiers in regard to the categories expressed and the means by which these are expressed (146–147).

Unfortunately that diachronic evidence has been presented nowhere in the chapter; nor have the data that are supposed to demonstrate “morphological systems which are quite different from those employed likewise in their lexifiers.” Doesn’t Grant contradict himself here? Also, is it “morphological systems” that expanded (toward simplification?) or particular lexical items or

morphemes that were recruited for new grammatical functions (consistent with grammaticization hypotheses or his own “element extension,” p. 128)? One wonders how carefully the book was edited.

The next chapter, by Paula Prescod, appears to be interesting more for the facts and analyses presented in the last 2/3 of it than for the confusion in the first, which is an editorial embarrassment. The reasons for this negative assessment are the following: 1) it is not clear from the citations at the outset what position the author wants to defend; 2) some examples, such as (14), do not illustrate the analysis in the preceding paragraph; and, quite critically, 3) the author does not make a distinction between, on the one hand, reflexive constructions, in which no reflexive pronoun need be used, and, on the other, those constructions in which a reflexive pronoun is actually used. The distinction is typologically important, because it makes it possible to determine whether or not a language has a morpheme or more that is/are exclusively dedicated for the reflexive function, as in the Bantu languages (and to some extent in French), or resorts to an otherwise independent strategy that fundamentally has a different function, like in English, as Prescod’s own diachronic documentation reveals. More confusion arises from the fact that no clear distinction is made between those cases where *-SELF* in English and the “English-lexified Atlantic creoles” (ELAC) is used emphatically and those in which it conveys a REFLEXIVE meaning.

Interestingly, while Prescod gives an informative documentation of the evolution of *-self* constructions from Old English to Modern English, including emphatic uses in subject function, one is confused again in the comparative part of the account, where French *même* is equated with *self* (160–161). This equation is correct if *self* is analyzed as primarily an emphatic marker, in which case there is nothing “intriguing” about the usage of *même* “to intensify subjects” (161); otherwise it is misguided if *self* is analyzed as primarily a reflexive marker, as suggested by the title of the chapter and the rest of the discussion.

Prescod does a much better job in showing how the multifunctionality of *self* in English, used as a noun modifier or in a compound construction with a personal pronoun (features which illustrate layering during its grammaticization into a reflexive marker), provided ELACs with the input for the development of their various innovative uses of the same morpheme. These include: 1) the reciprocal function in Krio, NPE, Sranan, and Ndjuka; 2) the “additive/ inclusive” function, interpretable as ‘too’, in Krio and NPE; 3) the “possessive” function, meaning ‘own’ (as in *your own house*), in Sranan and Ndjuka; and, among others, 4) a “negative polarity item” meaning ‘even’ or ‘at all’ in Ghanaian Pidgin English, Krio, and Tobagoan (162–167). It appears that these divergences from the grammar of *self* in English do not at all suggest

simplification in ELACs, even when one takes into account the fact that *self* in the relevant creoles and pidgins no longer agrees in number with the pronoun or noun it combines with, following a combinatorial system more consistent with that of some nonstandard English dialects in which the pronoun is consistently in the possessive form. The only difference from these is that in ELACs possession is expressed simply by adjoining *self* to the pronominal form that would be used as such in a possessive construction, which is typically the same one that is also used in the SUBJECT function. (Thus, in Gullah, one would say *he own self*, consistent with the compound form *heself* for both the REFLEXIVE and EMPHATIC functions and the fact that it is also used as such in *he brother* ‘his brother’.) This is not exactly how Prescod states her conclusion but is quite consistent with her final observation that:

It would appear that as a result of its multifunctionality and polysemy that learners or outsiders will have more to process syntactically and semantically when they encounter the morpheme *self* in the ELACs than when they come across the morpheme in OE, MidE, or even modern Standard English (171).

In his chapter, Patrick O. Steinkrüger addresses the question of “what Chabacano can tell us about the diachrony of morphological complexity in general” (175). While the 7-page essay appears to be too short for the goal, it largely corroborates Alleyne’s (1971) position that those who made creoles were not exposed to a baby-talk devoid especially of (variation in) inflections. One finds in this Spanish-based “creole” items such as *óhos* ‘eye’ (sg), which has preserved a fossil of the Spanish nominal plural, and *dále* ‘give’ (from Spanish *da le* ‘give him/her), in which the verb and the clitic have fused into what is now a monomorphemic verb. Many similar phenomena are presented on pages 176–178, but the reader must wonder whether this entails structural complexity, since the markers are nothing more than diachronic fossils. The reader should also beware of the apparently idiosyncratic uses of the term *contact language* in this chapter, in reference to languages other than the substrate that the lexifier came in contact with (176, 178). The same is true of the term *protoform* used probably with the meaning of a form not attested in the lexifier from which modern forms of Chabacano have evolved. The author does not refer explicitly to the relevant proto-variety.<sup>6</sup> Chabacano also includes morphemes from Spanish that have been assigned new meanings/functions.

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<sup>6</sup> The editors could have certainly done a better editorial job in asking authors to clarify such uses and other statements. I am confused again by the following passage:

This classification attempts to trace the fate of morphology in the Creole in comparison with its input languages, i.e (sic) lexifier, substrate and contact languages and the rise of new



In addition, the Zamboangueno dialect has “adopted a considerable number of derivational affixes of Visayan origin,” and, “Unlike the other Iberoromance-based Creoles in Asia, Zamboangueno’s plural pronouns are mainly derived from Visayan” (178–180). I believe that, combined together, all these characteristics fit Chabacano into Grant’s category of “mixed creole.” Steinkrüger concludes on p. 181 that:

In comparison with its lexifier and substrate/adstrate languages, the morphology of Chabacano is less complex, to the extent that in Chabacano: 1) there are by far fewer morphemes (...); 2) there are fewer morphological processes (...); 3) morphemes are semantically more transparent (...); and 4) morphology is formally more regular in general.

Unfortunately, there is no discussion in the preceding sections that really prepares the reader for these conclusions. Though Steinkrüger includes the caveat that Chabacano is not completely devoid of inflections and derivations, the reader may also wonder how he supports the claim that “Chabacano can shed considerable light on the relationship between complexity and morphological change” (181). I wonder why the editors did not prevail on him to substantiate this claim and a few others that the chapter ends with.

It’s hard to resist the curiosity aroused by the last chapter, by Kofo Yakpo, as its opening paragraph includes the statement that “typically, creoles are languages in contact” (183). What is particularly relevant in this case is Pichi (apparently a modification of *Pidgin*), a variety that the author says evolved from Krio brought to Equatorial Guinea by “African settlers from Free Town” in 1827, which coexists not only with the indigenous languages but also with a new superstrate, Spanish. It is heavily influenced by the latter, from which it has borrowed heavily, at the rate of 50% of nouns, 62% of numerals, and 57% of conjunctions, among other lexical categories (p. 186). Those interested in language endangerment may wonder why Pichi has survived, as it “is relegated to the informal, the familiar, the local, to marginalized economic activities, to the in-group domain” (184). Part of the answer lies in the fact that it functions as “a badge of identity for the autochthonous population in the course of a long history of large-scale immigration to Bioko by speakers of other varieties of

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morphology in the new system. The former shows a high degree of simplification (...) and the latter the increase of complexity (...) both from a diachronic and synchronic perspective (176).

Independent of the terminological problems noted in the main text, it takes a while to tell that that the antecedent of “the former” is “the Creole” and that of “the latter” is “its input languages.”



West-African English-lexifier Creoles such as Nigerian, Cameroonian and Ghanaian Pidgin” attracted by “the burgeoning oil economy of Equatorial Guinea” (184–185). Pichi appears to be ranked higher than the more indigenous African languages, since borrowings from them are “not-nearly as visible as admixture with Spanish” (185). This is the first time such a clear ethnographic background is articulated for any creole or pidgin discussed in this volume, though some readers may wonder whether we are really dealing with “code-mixing,” as characteristic of live discourse, or some mixed grammar emerging from the contact of allegedly Krio with primarily (local varieties of) Spanish.

Overall the mixing is apparently facilitated by significant structural congruence between Pichi and Spanish, with words from the latter often integrated with their normal inflections and sometimes with the appropriate articles in the case of nouns. Emphatic pronouns are used instead of clitics, as Pichi does not have the latter. Spanish adjectives used predicatively combine with a copula, unlike Pichi adjectives. So, the mixing is typically lexical. Spanish numerals after ‘three’ and day names (except for ‘Sunday’) are reported to have substituted for Pichi words, whereas Pichi season terms persevere. Younger speakers typically name color concepts other than BLACK, WHITE, RED, and YELLOW in Spanish. Terms pertaining to “institutional socio-political domains” are also borrowed from Spanish, so are scientific terms, which appear to reflect the important position that Spanish occupies in the education system. Yakpo does not say whether there is inter-speaker variation in the mixing that may be correlated with level of education. In any case, the question arises of how all this is related to the theme of the book, viz., complexity vs. simplicity in creoles and pidgins.

Yakpo starts by noting that Pichi’s mixed suprasegmental system, with tone and stress on both the lexical and grammatical levels, suggests complexity (205). He then argues that code-mixing within the sentence spells complexity (206), which is instantiated by, for instance, the fact that Pichi and Spanish rules apply concurrently when nominal plural is doubly marked with a Spanish inflection on the Spanish noun and the post-nominal free marker *dèn*. Part of the complexity putatively also arises from constraints that prevent some combinations, such as “a numeral and a head noun from each language” and apparently the prohibition from adding plural *dèn* when the Spanish noun is used with a Spanish article, which then expresses both number and gender (206). Also, “Whenever Spanish colour-denoting adjectives are used, we encounter Spanish head nouns” (207). The same is true of combinations of numerals with nouns. We may thus ask to what extent the borrowing of nouns into Pichi is conditioned by the particular selection of adjectives and numerals

in discourse. Several other constraints are discussed on pp. 207–210. Yakpo then concludes:

With respect to Pichi, any claim of simplicity also merits thorough rethinking in the light of evidence about the complexity of code-mixed speech perception, processing and production (...) Finally, the present analysis has not touched on the complex social norms that govern the use of Pichi-Spanish code-mixing in different socio-pragmatic domains (210).

Whether or not these claims bear on McWhorter's (2001) claim that "the world's simplest grammars are creole grammars" depends significantly on whether "code-mixing," the centerpiece of Yakpo's discussion is a discourse phenomenon, thus a matter of performance, or whether it is a system phenomenon, which reflects structural changes that Krio has undergone on Bioko Island owing to its contact with Spanish. Only the latter interpretation of "code-mixing" would matter, though McWhorter may also argue that Pichi is not a prototypical creole.

Yakpo concludes the chapter, first with a discussion of various ethnographic factors that favor "code-mixing" in Pichi (210–212), which I will ignore here, and then "A final note on complexity" (212–213). In the latter discussion, the reader is told, among other things, that Pichi has alternative ways of forming complex sentences, including subordination and verb serialization; "Pichi argument structure is equally challenging in its intricacy"; "There are countless restrictions and idiosyncra[s]ies with individual verbs regarding the availability of reflexive, reciprocal, unexpressed object or dative alternatives"; and "The copula system in Pichi has three core copulas at its disposal." He concludes by noting how "extremely difficult [it is] to reconcile the facts about Pichi with the notion of simplicity."

This is how this poorly edited book ends, nonetheless, with a strong chapter that invites some rethinking about what matters, or does not, in arguing for or against McWhorter's hypothesis of creoles' structural simplicity in its strongest form. All the contributors but Anthony Grants dispute it. The book is still worth reading for its data, where this is well presented.

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