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*The Origin,
Historical Development,
and
Linguistic Properties of
Krio*

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The Origin, Historical Development, and Linguistic Properties of Krio

1. The History of Krio

Krio (the *lingua franca* of Sierra Leone) is an English-based Creole and it has been suggested that the name is derived from Yoruba *a kiriyo* (we go-about-aimlessly full/satisfied) meaning '[t]hose who habitually go about paying visits after church service', as the Krios were wont to do (Fyle & Jones 1980). Circumstances leading to the emergence of Krio are highly debatable.

One view argues that Krio emerged from Creoles of the Americas and in effect shares some linguistic similarities with other Atlantic Creoles, including Gullah. According to Opala (1987), slaves from West Africa and their descendants worked in plantations in the American South East, between North Carolina and Florida, and developed a pidgin, which later became Gullah Creole – a mixture of English and West African languages. Though its vocabulary was derived primarily from English, its structure and pronunciation (including intonation), as well as idiomatic expressions, were heavily influenced by the West African languages the slaves used as primary languages. Gullah, still used in the American South, bears some similarities to Krio (Opala 1987).

Huber (1999, 2000) proposes that Krio emerged from varieties of Creoles used by settlers – mostly freed slaves primarily from four areas – who were resettled in the Sierra Leone peninsula, including Freetown, between 1787 and 1850 (Huber 1999: 59-65; Huber 2000: 276-277). These four groups and their dates of arrival are identified as follows (Huber 1999, 2000):

The Black Poor

The Original Settlers (Black Poor) from England, numbering about 328 settlers, arrived from England in 1787. We have no records of contributions of the Black Poor to the development of present-day Krio.

The Nova Scotians

Slaves in America were promised freedom and much better living conditions in return for support for the British during the American Revolutionary War. After the war, about 3,000 slaves were relocated, in 1783, in Nova Scotia, Canada (a British colony), where they continued to endure economic hardship and epidemics (Huber 1999, 2000). In 1787, in response to their protests, the British decided to relocate them in a new colony – the Sierra Leone peninsula – in West Africa (where most slaves in the New World were originally from, prior to enslavement). In 1792, close to 2000 freed slaves were shipped to Freetown from Nova Scotia (Huber 1999: 61-62).

The Maroons from Jamaica

About 556 Jamaican Maroons, deported to Nova Scotia in 1796 after an unsuccessful revolt, were transferred to the Sierra Leone peninsula in 1800. Creoles from the West Indies, particularly the variety brought by the Jamaican Maroon settlers, are proposed by Huber (1999) to have had a significant input into what has now evolved into present-day Krio. Huber outlines a number of similarities between present-day Jamaican Creole and Krio in a variety of linguistic categories, including copula space, verb phrase, noun phrase, and lexical and functional items (Huber 1999: 108-114).

The Liberated Africans

According to Huber (1999, 2000), after the British declared slavery illegal for their subjects, their fleet patrolled the West African coast, intercepted slave ships and recaptured slaves, and released and resettled them in the Sierra Leone peninsula, and they are generally referred to as Liberated Africans (or Recaptives). These were by far the largest group and were resettled in the Sierra Leone peninsula over a period that stretched from 1808 (when Sierra Leone was declared a crown colony) to 1863. Huber (1999: 63) estimates the number of Liberated Africans resettled in the Sierra Leone peninsula during this period at about 60,000, though only about 37,000 were alive in 1840. In 1860, the Liberated Africans and their descendants totalled 38,375.

The Liberated Africans' influence on the linguistic evolution of Krio is a debated issue. Huber acknowledges their possible influence when he states that

[F]inally another major group to be considered in the development of Krio is that of the Liberated Africans, who by about 1812 outnumbered the Nova Scotians and Maroons. Judging from their enormous numerical increase over the following decades, the Recaptives could very well have dominated the linguistic scene in 19th century Sierra Leone by swamping any other variety that may have developed in the years prior to their arrival (Huber 2000: 278).

The Liberated Africans comprised mainly speakers of West African Kwa languages, including Yoruba (the most prominent), Igbo, Akan, and Gbe. According to Huber, the Liberated Africans were resettled in villages outside Freetown in the Sierra Leone peninsula, and there was little interaction between them and the rest of the settlers in Freetown between 1812 and 1830, as the communities were segregated. There was increased contact, however, in the 1830s as the Liberated Africans were increasingly employed as domestic servants in Freetown. According to Huber (1999, 2000), they originally spoke African languages only, but with improved economic status and more interaction with the Maroons and Nova Scotians, a new variety of Creole emerged that was described in transcripts written by British colonists as “gibberish” or as a “barbarous”, “defective”, and “jargon” form of English (Huber 2000: 282, 285). This variety incorporated features of the Creoles used by the Maroons and Nova Scotians, and it is reasonable to assume that the cross-linguistic influence was bi-directional, that is, the Creoles used in Freetown were in turn influenced by the variety developed by the Liberated Africans. It is, however, possible that the Liberated Africans might have developed and spoken a pidgin or early creole while in transit at the slave depots or collection points.

The language and traditions of settlers of Yoruba origins have had a strong influence on the language, social life and customs of Krio speakers in Freetown. The influence of the languages (including Yoruba) of the Liberated Africans on the grammatical development of Krio should therefore not be underestimated and should be considered at least a contributory factor in the development of the grammar of Krio (see Bradshaw 1966 for an exhaustive list of Krio lexical items borrowed or derived from Yoruba).

A contrary view of the origin of Krio is held by Hancock (1986, 1987), who maintains that the original “core” creole emerged along the Upper Guinea Coast of West Africa in the 1600s, long before the trans-Atlantic slave trade. There is evidence of British settlement in that area and there are written reports of interaction, including intermarriages, between Europeans and Africans during this period. Products of the intermarriages – referred to as Mulattos – became the first creole speakers. Creoles in the Americas partly originated from this Creole (Guinea Coast

Creole English (GCCE)), which was transmitted to the Americas by slaves transported by English and Dutch traders. Hancock suggests that the grammar of GCCE continued to be influenced by the properties of West African languages as a result of its extensive use by second-language speakers in the region. According to Hancock, present-day Krio is an offshoot of GCCE. Eyewitness recorded transcripts of GCCE in the 17th and 18th centuries illustrate similar grammatical features and lexical items between modern Krio and GCCE. The presence of these features and items in present-day Krio, Hancock maintains, is evidence that the emergence of Krio pre-dates the resettlement of freed slaves in Sierra Leone.

2. Attitudes to and Current Use of Krio

Present-day Krio now exists in a variety of forms. There is an ambivalent attitude towards Krio by native Krio speakers: It is a symbol of identity, not only for native Krios but also for Sierra Leoneans in general. However, it is also perceived as an inferior form of English and is believed to have a negative influence on the development of English. English, as the official language and medium of instruction in academic institutions, continues to hold the status of the language of prestige, sometimes resulting in the use of the acrolectal variety of Krio as a symbol of status or education. This has resulted in the co-existence of parallel forms (broad vs. Anglicized Krio) symbolising class, education, and upbringing. For example: *winda* vs. *windo* ‘window’; *bred* vs. *brəd* ‘bread’; *rɛs* vs. *rays* ‘rice’; *was an besin* (literally) ‘wash-hand basin’ vs. *siɲk* ‘sink’; *bokit* vs. *bəkət* ‘bucket’; *kaka* or *pupu* vs. *stul* ‘feces’.

Such parallel forms had their origins in colonial times when the British assumed that Krio was a distortion of English and continued to stress its importance over local languages, a trend that successful Krio families followed. Krio linguists are now trying to reverse the trend by encouraging the use of mesolectal and basilectal varieties, as a means of preserving Krio and slowing down, if not halting, the continued influence of English.

More recently, there has been influence from non-native Krio speakers as a result of its extensive use by such speakers. Because of this, other varieties of Krio are emerging, resulting in the coexistence of parallel forms. For example:

- | | | | |
|-----|--|-----|--|
| (1) | <i>Wetin yu briŋ fɔ mi?</i> (native speech)
‘What did you bring (home) for me?’ | vs. | <i>Wetin yu sɛn fɔ mi?</i> (non-native) |
| (2) | <i>Den de bil os.</i> (native)
they _{CONT} build house
‘They are building a house.’ | vs. | <i>Den de pan bil os.</i> (non-native)
they _{CONT} in-the-process-of build house |

Though some native Krio speakers, accepting change as inevitable, incorporate non-native forms into their speech; others would like to maintain the “purity” of the language and have maintained the use of the original native forms.

The official attitude to Krio used to be ambivalent. It has long been one of the languages recognized in broadcasting though its use by school children has sometimes resulted in strong disciplinary action. However, since 1977, different political regimes have contemplated using an indigenous language or indigenous languages in formal education, and Krio is one of a number of languages of Sierra Leone that is now part of the educational curriculum. This step is to be applauded and will hopefully dispel the misconceptions that Sierra Leoneans (Krios and non-Krios)

outside of linguistics have had about Krio's status as a fully fledged language, rather than it being an imperfect approximation to English. This was due in large part to the very little or no knowledge that the average inhabitant had of the linguistic properties of Krio, and the incorporation of Krio into the educational curriculum will go a long way in dispelling these misconceptions.

3. The Linguistic Properties of Krio

3.1. Vocabulary

Lexical items of English origin account for about 80% of the vocabulary of Krio (Fyle & Jones 1980:x) though a large number of words are borrowed from West African languages, particularly Yoruba, which is second only to English as the largest contributor to Krio vocabulary. While the pronunciations of English borrowings have in most cases been modified, words borrowed from African languages have generally retained the pronunciations they had in the language of origin.

Krio has a rich system of idiomatic expressions in the form of compounding, which seem to have parallels in some West African languages. For example:

(3)	IGBO:	<i>anya uku</i>	(eye + big) 'greed'
	KRIO:	<i>big yay</i>	(big + eye) 'greed'
	YORUBA:	<i>enu didu</i>	(mouth + sweet) 'persuasiveness'
	GA:	<i>na mo</i>	(sweet + mouth) 'flattery'
	TWI:	<i>ano yede</i>	(mouth + sweet) 'flattery'
	KRIO:	<i>switmot</i>	(sweet + mouth) 'persuasiveness'
	KRIO:	<i>swityay</i>	(sweet + eye) 'womanizing'
	KRIO:	<i>switpis</i>	(sweet + urine) 'diabetes'
	KIKONGO:	<i>kanga ntima</i>	(tie + heart) 'adamant'
	KRIO:	<i>tranga at</i>	(strong + heart) 'adamant'
	KRIO:	<i>big-at</i>	(big + heart) 'proud', 'stubborn'
	KRIO:	<i>bad at</i>	(bad + heart) 'envy', 'jealousy'

3.2. Pronunciation

Krio has seven pure vowels - /i, e, ε, a, ə, o, u/ and three diphthongs - /ai, au, oi/. Hence there is usually no distinction in the pronunciation of some minimal-pair English words. For example: /bit/ for English *beat* and *bit*; /pul/ for *pool* and *pull*; /kəp/ for *cup* and *cop*. Some common phonological processes applied to English borrowings include cluster reduction and weak syllable deletion.

Cluster reduction is applied to a number of words of English origin with [s+consonant] clusters. For example: *wes* 'waste'; *fas* 'fast'; *trit* 'street'; *tap* 'stop'; *tret* 'straight'; *pred* 'spread'; *pit* 'spit'; *plit* 'split'; *ton* 'stone'. Weak syllable deletion applies to words like: *bət* 'about'; *fred* 'afraid'; *blant* 'belong to'. Other processes involve segment substitution. They include (phonetic symbols are used to represent the Krio lexical items):

- (4) /ai/ /ε/:
net 'night'; *fet* 'fight'; *res* 'rice'; *blen* 'blind'.
 /oi/ /wε/:
bwel 'boil'; *pwel* 'spoil'.

- (5) /v/ /b/:
dɹɛb ‘drive; *ɛbi* ‘heavy’; *dɛbul* ‘devil’.
 /θ/ /t/:
tit ‘teeth’; *tɛŋki* ‘thanks’; *wit* ‘with’.
 /ð/ /d/:
dɛm ‘them’; *brɔda* ‘brother’.

West African influence is evident in the presence of the segments /kp/ and /gb/. For example: *kpatakpata*; ‘completely finished’; *agbo* ‘a medicinal herb’; *gbagbati* ‘a show of force’; *akpɔlɔ* ‘frog’.

Krio is a tonal language and makes contrastive use of tone in words of both African and English origins. The tonal indications follow each word in the examples below.

- | | | | | | | |
|-----|----------------|------|----------------------------|----------------|------|---|
| (6) | <i>ale</i> | (LH) | ‘go away’ | <i>ale</i> | (LL) | ‘skin-irritating herb’ |
| | <i>baba</i> | (HH) | ‘a type of drum’ | <i>baba</i> | (HL) | ‘a barber’ |
| | | | | <i>baba</i> | (LH) | ‘a young boy’ |
| | <i>gbangba</i> | (HH) | ‘a wide open public place’ | <i>gbangba</i> | (LH) | ‘a medicinal herb’ |
| | <i>pata</i> | (HH) | ‘baby panties’ | <i>pata</i> | (LH) | ‘a slap’ (N);
‘to hit with palm of hand’ (V) |
| | <i>soso</i> | (HH) | ‘only’; ‘Nothing but’ | <i>soso</i> | (HL) | ‘so-so; not too good, not too bad’ |
| | | | | <i>Soso</i> | (LH) | ‘Susu’ (language of Sierra Leone)
‘a native speaker of Susu’ |
| | <i>bebi</i> | (LH) | ‘a baby’; ‘a doll’ | <i>bebi</i> | (HL) | ‘girlfriend’
‘an attractive young woman’ |
| | <i>brɔda</i> | (HL) | ‘brother’ | <i>brɔda</i> | (LH) | ‘an elder brother or older male relative’ |
| | <i>fada</i> | (HH) | ‘God’ | <i>fada</i> | (HL) | ‘father’ |
| | | | | <i>fada</i> | (LH) | ‘a Catholic priest’ |
| | <i>kɔntri</i> | (HL) | ‘a country’ | <i>kɔntri</i> | (LH) | ‘someone hailing from the countryside’ |
| | <i>sista</i> | (HL) | ‘sister’ | <i>sista</i> | (LH) | ‘an elder sister or older female relative’ |
| | <i>skwaya</i> | (HL) | ‘a square’ (shape) | <i>skwaya</i> | (LH) | ‘a dull and inexperienced person’ |
| | <i>tɛŋki</i> | (HL) | ‘thank you’ | <i>tɛŋki</i> | (LH) | ‘gratitude’ |

3.3. Grammar

Creoles generally lack inflectional morphology. Free forms are used instead: Krio has *dɛm* (plural marker), *in* (possessive marker, used after the possessor), *bin* (anterior tense marker), *de* or *di* (continuous aspect marker), *dɔn* (perfective aspect marker), *fɔ* (modal ‘should’), and *kin* (modal ‘could’). The verb corresponding to English *to be* when used as a linking verb or copula is generally omitted. Other features include lack of inversion in questions, omission of articles except when used for semantic purposes, multiple negation, and un-marked anterior (past) tense.

Krio exhibits a number of grammatical features different from English. Some studies (Finney 2003; Nylander 1984, 1985a, 1985b; Williams 1971, 1976) have argued that some of these features may be due to the influence of West African languages.

Focused constructions

These are used to emphasize a specific part of the sentence. The focus marker in Krio *na* is identical or similar in form and function to those used in a number of West African languages in which the form *na*, *a* or *ni* is used. For example:

- (7) *na plaba den de mek.*
It-is quarrel they CONT make
'They are quarreling'
- (8) *na aki wi bin si.*
It-is Aki we ANT see
'We saw Aki'
- (9) *na udat bin kam.*
It-is who ANT come
'Who was here?'
- (10) *na gladi den gladi.*
It-is happy they happy
'They are really happy.'
- (11) Twi (Alleyne 1980)
kwadwo na o baa ha
Kwadwo it-was who came here
'It was Kwadwo who came here'
- (12) Yoruba (Holm 1988)
aso ni mo ra
cloth it-was I bought
'It was cloth that I bought'
- (13) Nupe (Allsopp 1976)
wuwu a wu wun o
kill-kill they kill + EMPHATIC TERMINAL
'He was definitely killed'

Verb Serialisation

This is one of the most distinguishing features of Krio, differentiating it from English (Finney 2003; Nylander 1984, 1985a, 1985b; Williams 1971). Such constructions generally contain one syntactic subject and a series of lexical verbs that are not linked by an overt conjunction (subordinate or coordinate) or complementizer. A lexical subject is prohibited from appearing in front of subsequent verbs in the series. In addition, one verb does not serve as an auxiliary or infinitival complement to other verbs in the series. This construction type is common in Krio and other West African languages:

- (14) *di uman kuk res sel.*
the woman cook rice sell
'The woman cooked some rice and sold it'
- (15) *i bay klos gi im pikin.*
he buy clothes give his child
'He bought some clothes for his child'

- (16) *di bɔbɔ tek di sus trowe.*
 the boy take the shoes throw-away
 'The boy threw away the shoes'
- (17) *a tek nef kɔt di bred.*
 I take knife cut the bread
 'I cut the bread with a knife'
- (18) Yoruba (George 1975)
ajao ra epa je
 Ajao bought peanuts ate
 'Ajao bought some peanuts and ate them'
- (19) Twi (Lord 1993)
y adwuma ma me
 he does-work give me
 'He works for me'
- (20) Nupe (George 1976)
tsoda gi je afunin
 Tsoda ate food full
 'Tsoda ate and he is full'
- (21) Akan (Schachter 1974)
kofi yɛɛ adwuma wieɛ
 Kofi did work finished
 'Kofi finished working'

Se as a Sentential Complementizer

Four complementizers, all obligatorily overt, can be identified in Krio, with the sentential complementizer *se* being the most controversial. One aspect of the controversy revolves around whether it functions as a verb or a complementizer. It is homophonous with the lexical verb meaning 'say' in Krio, as is the case in a number of Creoles and West African languages. For example, in the following languages, the forms after the names of each language could either mean the lexical verb *say* or constitute the complementizer, depending on the syntactic frame in which it is used: Efik *ke*, Ewe *be*, Ga *akɛ*, and Twi *se*:

- (22) *A tiŋk se dem dɔn kam.*
 I think say/that they COMP come
 'I think that they had arrived'
- (23) *I laikli se Aki win loto.*
 It (be) likely say/that Aki win lottery
 'It's likely that Abu won the lottery'
- (24) *Di rumɔ se Aki win loto na tru.*
 the rumor that Aki win lottery is truth
 'The rumor that Aki won the lottery is true'
- (25) *Wetin yu tɛl am se apin?*
 What you tell him say/that happen
 'What did you say happened?'

- (26) Jamaican Creole (Alleyne 1980)
i fieba sɛ ...
 'It seems that ...'
- (27) Jamaican Creole (Alleyne 1980)
a how sɛ yu no nuo im
 'How (is it) that you don't know him?'
- (28) Bislama (Gerry Beimers from "CreoleTalk" Internet Discussion Group)
Peter i talem long mi se hem i gat sam watu
 'Peter told me that he had some money'
- (29) Bislama (Gerry Beimers from "CreoleTalk" Internet Discussion Group)
Hem i promis se tumora
 'She promised that it will be tomorrow'
- (30) Twi (Lord 1993)
ɛyɛ nokware sɛ wɔ yare
 it-be fact that they be-ill
 'It is a fact that they are ill'
- (31) Ewe (Lord 1973)
me-di be maple awua dewo
 I-want say I-buy dress some
 'I want to buy some dresses'
- (32) Efik (Lord 1973)
enye ete ke etie imɔ nte imokut
 he say say it-seemed-to him like he-see-it
 'He said that it seemed to him that he say it'
- (33) Ga (Lord 1993)
tɛtɛ le akɛ ayi tsu nii lɛ
 Tete know say Ayi work thing the
 'Tete knows that Ayi did the work'

4. Concluding Remarks

The linguistic properties of Krio, like those of other Creoles, developed with contributions from multiple sources including natural rule creation and expansion, as well as borrowings from surrounding languages. Some of the linguistic features display universal, simplified properties typical of early language development, while other features exhibit properties similar in form and function to regional substrate languages in West Africa. These properties continue to evolve with continued input from both English the lexifier language of Krio and other West African languages.

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