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A grammar of Saramaccan creole. By John McWhorter & Jeff Good. Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter Mouton. 2012. Pp. xvii, 246. Hardback Euros 149.95 / US \$210.00 [to order electronically, visit www.degruyter.com]

Reviewed by Bettina Migge (University College Dublin)

The creoles of Suriname figure prominently in the literature on creole languages and creole genesis in particular because their emergence, development and hence their structural makeup are considered to be unique among the Atlantic English-lexifier creoles. We know a fair amount about the history of their speakers (e.g. Price 1983 for Saamaka) and dispose of detailed descriptions of several aspects of grammar (e.g. copulas, property items, locational and directional concepts, expression of tense, aspect and mood, morphology) in one or the other of these languages (Sranantongo, Eastern Maroon Creoles – Aluku, Ndyuka, Pamaka – Saamaka) and of comparisons involving two or more of them. We also know which languages contributed to their emergence and development (e.g. English, Dutch, varieties of Gbe, Akan and Kikongo). However, detailed descriptions and comparisons of individual areas of grammar only provide limited insights into the nature of a grammar. Scholars tend to pick certain areas of grammar in order to prove a particular theoretical point. In the case of creole genesis research, for instance, they have purposefully focused on areas that are structurally distinct from European languages and show strong parallels with the posited substrate languages. Even the descriptions themselves may not always be holistic, but instead concentrate on those aspects that appear to be most relevant for the purpose at hand. Full grammatical descriptions of a language are thus a real god-sent. They allow us to discover new areas of grammar, new aspects of known constructions, all of which can then be used to follow up on related details. McWhorter & Good's description significantly expands on existing grammatical sketches for Saamaka (Rountree and Glock 1992), and thus fills a gap in our knowledge about the creoles of Suriname that has been sorely felt for a long time.

The 56th grammar in the prestigious Mouton Grammar Library series, it is a comprehensive, high quality description of Saamaka written by two researchers who have extensively published on the language. The grammar follows the stipulation of the editors in that it does not follow any particular theoretical model. The volume consists of an introduction, 17 chapters dealing with different areas of grammar, a two-page word list, glossed passages from a recorded folktale and a conversational interaction, a reference list, and an extensive subject index.

The grammatical description covers a wide range of aspects: Chapters 1 & 2 examine segmental and prosodic phonology, Chapter 3 deals with morphology and morphophonemics, Chapters 4 & 5 discuss the noun phrase and pronouns, respectively. Chapter 6 focuses on adjectives, and chapters 7 & 8 explore the verb phrase and verb serialization, respectively. Chapter 9 describes coordination and subordination, while chapter 10 is devoted to passive and imperative constructions. Chapters 11-12 cover questions and non-verbal predication, respectively. The expression of position, direction and time follows in Chapter 13, and adverbial modification is the topic of Chapter 14. Chapters 15-

17 are concerned with information structure, numerals and expressions of time and lexical variation, respectively.

A unique aspect of this grammar is found in the extensive discussions of the phonology of the language. The first chapter on segmental phonology presents phonotactic patterns and meticulously discusses each consonant and vowel in the language, providing details about their distribution in the lexicon, frequency, patterns of variation, and attempts to assess their overall status. For instance, the authors show that Saamaka has double articulated stops (/gb/ and /kp/) that most likely have their origin in African (Gbe) languages. While they predominate in African-derived lexical items, their occurrence is not restricted to such words. They alternate with labialized velars (/gw/ and /kw/), but the nature of this variation is unclear; they argue that variation appears to be due to individual, dialectal, and lexical patterns of variation. Another unique feature of Saamaka are prenasalized stops. The authors argue that they alternate with nasals and 'nasal consonants with a secondary oral stop release' (p. 7). However, the existence of a few minimal pairs suggests that they also contrast at some level. With respect to the recently discovered implosive oral stops (Smith and Haboo 2007), McWhorter and Good demonstrate that they alternate with plain oral stops rather than being in contrastive distribution with them. They speculate that this variation probably represents a case of dialectal variation and call for further research among a broader section of speakers in order to resolve the issue.

The extensive chapter on prosodic phonology examines word-level and phrasal prosody, and intonation. The authors argue that Saamaka maintains two separate word-level prosodic systems 'wherein the majority of its words are marked for pitch accent but a noteworthy minority are marked for tone' (p. 30) due to influences from African and European languages. The section on phrasal prosody focuses on the process of high-tone plateauing 'wherein TBU's unspecified for tone are realized as high tones when flanked by high tones in certain syntactic contexts' (p. 45). The section on intonation examines final lowering, a special falling pattern associated with negative clauses and pitch contours in areas such as yes/no questions and emphasis. The rich discussion of Saamaka's phonology provides a solid basis for further research in this relatively understudied area. As such, it will be of interest not only to scholars interested in Surinamese creoles, but also to others who study prosody from both a phonetic and sociophonetic perspective.

The chapters on the syntax, morphosyntax and morphology of the language are equally rich in information. Limitations of space prevent me from going into details about Chapter 7, which deals with the core predicate phrase modifiers. Like the other Maroon creoles, Saamaka has two invariant preverbal predicate negation markers, *ná* and *á/ǎ*. *Ná* has a wider distribution than *á/ǎ*, occurring in presentational, imperative and emphatic sentences, and with verbal ellipsis while *á/ǎ* merges with subject pronouns, giving rise to portmanteau morphemes. Differences to the Eastern Maroon creoles arise mostly in relation to aspect. Saamaka expresses imperfective aspect with the preverbal marker *tá* (< *stand*) rather than *e* (< *de* 'there'), but its distribution appears to be mostly the same (progressive, habitual). The only exception is that *tá*, like the two tense particles *bi* and *ó* appear to be auxiliary verbs as 'they can occur without a host' (p. 123). Saamaka also appears to have an additional category: the past habitual

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marker *náa* which the authors treat as an allomorph of *tá* 'used with the locative marker (*n*)*a* as *tá a*' (p. 125). They argue that it is modeled on the British dialectal habitual/progressive marker *a*-. Finally, while all Surinamese creoles use *kaba* in postverbal position to indicate completion of an action similar to English 'already', Saamaka has two forms, *kaa* and *kabá*. *Kaa* (< *kabá*) is a true completive marker that can occur with states and activities to encode that an event ended.

The grammar is very well edited and although aspects of the same area are sometimes treated in different sections, it is not difficult to find the relevant information as everything is expertly cross-referenced within the text and in the subject index. One mildly disappointing aspect about the grammar is the background information on the language. First, more information could have been given about the current state of the Saamaka language. The opening sentence of the introduction and the map on page xviii give the false impression that speakers of Saamaka are essentially rural dwellers. A small paragraph on page xvii also mentions that the related Creole Sranantongo is influencing Saamaka. However, neither observation is further explored in the grammatical description despite the fact that particularly the latter one is relevant for assessing the status of the grammar. Second, on page xv the authors acknowledge input from other researchers who have worked on Saamaka, but the publications of several of these researchers (Aboh, Bickerton, Alleyne, Lefebvre) do not appear in the reference list. Similarly, the brief discussion about the history of Saamaka and the relationships between the different creoles of Suriname on pages xiv and xv does not reference much of the literature on these topics. Third, the authors do not say anything about naming conventions and the reasons for choosing Saramaccan, an anglicized version of its Dutch name (Saramaccaans) –the other English version is Saramaka– instead of the term used among its speakers, Saamaka (or Saamáka).

These are, however, very minor quibbles: this is undoubtedly a very useful and easy to read grammar that provides researchers with a wealth of information on the language of the Saamaka people.

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