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Locative constructions and the genealogical differentiation of the Afro-Caribbean English-lexifier Creoles

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This talk aims to provide a typologically informed comparative analysis of locative constructions in the African and the Caribbean branches of the Afro-Caribbean English-lexifier Creoles (henceforth AECs). The analysis is based on primary data collected in West Africa (Ghana, Nigeria, Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea), and the Caribbean (Jamaica, Barbados, Trinidad and Tobago, Suriname). A second objective is to account for the genealogical differentiation of this young linguistic family that arose in the 17th century (cf. e.g. Hancock 1987; Smith 2015) by focusing on a specific functional domain: There are marked typological differences in the way spatial relations are expressed between (a) the attested African substrates and adstrates of the AECs (chiefly languages of the Volta-Congo linguistic phylum of Africa), and (b) the AECs' lexifier language English. The following points summarize the distinctive characteristics:

1. The use of general locative prepositions in static (Place) *and* dynamic (Goal, Source and Path) spatial descriptions in the (a) languages above. In English (b), there is no general locative preposition. Instead we find a large number of prepositions specialized to the expression of specific topological relations of Place (e.g. *at, on, in*) and others that incorporate dynamic senses of Goal, Source and Path (e.g. *to, from, through*).
2. The use of (pre- or postpositional) relator nouns expressing the Region or Search Domain, as a default strategy in the (a) languages above. In contrast, English does not employ relator nouns by default, but only when a high degree of specificity is desired.
3. The use of serial verb constructions together with general locative prepositions and relator nouns in descriptions of motion events in the (a) languages. English makes exclusive use of monoverbal constructions and Goal, Source or Path conflating prepositions.

Individual AECs vary in the degree to which they make use of typologically more "African" versus more English or "European" locative constructions. For example, the Surinamese Creole Ndyuka has Source-oriented constructions like (1), which are isomorphic with corresponding Ewe substrate constructions like (2). The common characteristics of the Ndyuka and Ewe constructions are the use of a general locative preposition (the first element in bold) and the simultaneous presence of a postpositional relator noun expressing the Region (the second element in bold), which functions as the head to the Ground in a possessive construction (source of examples (1)-(4): field data):

(1) *a   man   puu   a   koosi   **ne**   a   dosu   **ini**.*
     DEF.SG man   remove   DEF.SG clothing   LOC   DEF.SG box   containing.region

'The man took the piece of clothing from the box.' (Ndyuka, Suriname)

(2) *ŋutsu-la* *tsɔ* *awu* ***le*** *aɖaka* ***me****.*
    man-DEF   take   clothing   LOC   box   containing.region
    'The man took the piece of clothing from the box.' (Ewe, Ghana)

I hypothesize that the degree to which an individual AECs leans towards the African or European pole in the types of locative constructions found in the language reflects the intensity and duration of exposure of the language to (1) African substrates and adstrates, (2) English, or (3) other European languages in places where the colonial official language has never been or not been English for a long time (e.g. Dutch in Suriname, Spanish in Equatorial Guinea).

Hence in the AEC Pichi, we find Source-oriented locative constructions of the European type like (3) next to African ones like (4):

(3) *è* *pul* *dì* *klos* ***frɔ̀n*** *dì* *bed.*
    3SG.SBJ   remove   DEF   clothing   from   DEF   bed.
    'She took the piece of clothing from the bed.' (Pichi, Equatorial Guinea)

(4) *è* *pul* *dì* *tin* ***nà*** ***pàntap*** *dì* *bed.*
    3SG.SBJ   remove   DEF   thing   LOC   upper.surface   DEF   bed
    'She took the thing from the bed.'

The data can therefore tell us that Pichi has undergone more intense contact with European languages (in this case English and Spanish) than Ndyuka (cf. (1)), next to (continuing) contact with African adstrates. The presence of typologically more "African" versus more "European" locative structures correlates with the presence of more "African" versus "European" features in other domains of the grammar of individual AECs (Yakpo 2012a, 2012b). The hypothesis of contact intensity is also corroborated by socio-historical evidence (cf. e.g. Hoogbergen 1990 for the AECs of Suriname).

In such a way, data from a variety of AECs, as well as African and European languages can be used to disentangle complex contact trajectories in order to account for the structural differentiation of the AEC family since its emergence about three hundred and fifty years ago.

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