JAMAICAN CREOLE SYNTAX
TO THE MEMORY OF MY
GREAT-GRANDFATHER
HENRY LOFTMAN
WHOSE PASSION FOR THE
RUDIMENTS OF ENGLISH GRAMMAR
EARNED HIM THE NICKNAME
‘SYNTAX’
JAMAICAN CREOLE SYNTAX

A Transformational Approach

BY

BERYL LOFTMAN BAILEY

CAMBRIDGE
AT THE UNIVERSITY PRESS
1966
FOREWORD

Dr Bailey, the author of this book, has been one of the pioneers of systematic research into the problems presented by the Creole languages of the Caribbean, and in particular the Creole English of Jamaica. She acknowledges her indebtedness to other scholars in the field; they would I think in turn acknowledge their indebtedness to her. Certainly I wish to do so myself.

The study of Creole languages has two applications of major importance. In the first place, in a great many parts of the world and not only in the Caribbean, these languages are the lingua francas of countries which have recently achieved or are about to achieve full independence of the former colonial powers. In most of these countries the educational system operates in the medium of the language of the colonial power—French, or English, or Dutch, for example; but the great mass of the population in their homes speak Creole of one kind or another. The Creole languages have in the past been despised as ‘broken talk’, and their very existence has often been ignored by teachers and Education Departments. The children from poorer homes have therefore made very little progress in poorly equipped schools being taught in what was in fact, but was not recognized to be, an alien tongue; few of them have struggled through to higher education, and the talents of clever children from poorer homes have thus often been wasted. Since independence, the Government of Jamaica has instituted a great many scholarships to give more primary schoolchildren the chance of secondary education; the problem of selection immediately arises—what tests are there in which language plays no part? How can the selectors take the language differential into account unless adequate descriptions of the Creole exist? How can the teachers themselves be trained to get the best out of the children unless the problems of communication and expression are fully understood? In making so thorough and careful a study of the Creole English of her native
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island Dr Bailey has therefore made a most important contribution towards solving the language and education problems of Jamaica.

The second important application of Creole language studies lies in the field of general linguistics. During the present century immense strides have been made in synchronic linguistics—the descriptive analysis, that is, of the systems inherent in the linguistic behaviour of an individual or a language community at any one time. The advances in diachronic linguistics—the study of how and why languages change—have not been so marked; partly because so much excellent descriptive work on language change was done by the historical philologists of the nineteenth century; partly because much of the stimulus for synchronic linguistics came from those who studied the American Indian languages, which had virtually no written records; and partly because the second group, reacting against the dominance of the first, drew a fairly sharp dividing line between synchronic and diachronic studies.

It is now being recognized that this division helps to falsify the picture.¹ The descriptive analysis of an idiolect at any given moment may reveal a great many overlapping systems, some of which are coming to the end of a period of change, others just beginning. The descriptive analyst freezes for a moment what is in fact a highly dynamic system, and describes it in static terms. The ‘quantum mechanics’ era in linguistics has not yet arrived, but I believe that the study of Creole languages will help it forward, since it appears generally true that the kinetic energy

¹ See, for example, J. Berry, ‘English Loan-words and Adaptations in Sierra Leone Krio’, in Creole Language Studies, ii (London: Macmillan, 1961), 1–16: ‘Having said that my paper is descriptive, not historical, in intention I ought perhaps to go on to say that historical data cannot wholly be excluded from a consideration of interlingual identifications; if only because earlier loan-words, in a fully or even partially assimilated phonetic form, create potential analogy patterns, sometimes conflicting. There is a frequent conflict for the Krio-speaker who must regularly use English words in Krio utterances and is faced on each occasion with a choice of phonemic integration or retention, as far as possible, of the English sounds.’

See also an extended and important discussion in David De Camp, ‘Creole Language Areas considered as Multilingual Communities’ (CSA/CCTA Publication no. 87, Symposium on Multilingualism. Brazzaville 1962, London: CSA/CCTA, 1964).
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within Creole systems is greater than that within older systems. A Creole language generally has low prestige, and is juxtaposed in the social system to a ‘model’ language of high prestige. This is true also of provincial dialects of, for example, English in relation to what is called Standard British English. But the structure of the Creole, owing in the case of Jamaican Creole a great deal to West African languages, is much further removed from that of the model than is the structure of, say, the Gloucestershire dialect. Any individual in any country will operate two or three or even more modes of speech, depending on the context in which he speaks; but in Jamaica the structural differences between these various modes are liable to be far greater than in England, and a static model for a single description even more unreal.

Many of the world’s languages have probably undergone some degree of creolization at one time or another; by studying what is happening under our noses at the present day we should get a much better idea of what has happened in, for example, French, or English, or Hindi in the past. Until we have evolved descriptive techniques somewhat analogous to those of quantum mechanics, however, the best we can do is to describe the two ends of the linguistic spectrum in a country like Jamaica and give some indication of the nature of the continuum in between.

Dr Bailey has concerned herself in this study with the grammar of the Creole English which she knew intimately as a child growing up in Jamaica; she has tested her memory against a corpus of material obtained from informants more recently, during her extended visits to the island as a research linguist. After trying a number of different methods of grammatical analysis she has found that the transformational approach gives the best insight into the structures inherent in her material. Her book seems to me a highly competent and extremely valuable study.

It has as great an interest for the general linguist as for the Creole specialist, with the added (and rare) virtue of being extremely readable even for the layman. It is not, of course, the
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end of the road. In particular I feel that the roles of stress, intonation and juncture in Creole syntax urgently need further investigation, preferably by an Africanist. That fact does not detract in any way from Dr Bailey's achievement.

R. B. LePAGE

The King's Manor
University of York
February 1965
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PREFACE

This book is the result of many years of interest in Jamaican Creole, its origins and subsequent development, as well as its influence on the English language in Jamaica. As early as 1942 when I started teaching English Literature and Composition at Bethlehem Training College, the local institution run by the Moravian Church for the training of women teachers, I began to be aware of difficulties constantly encountered by the students in writing English essays. These were not new problems to me, however. I had had similar difficulties during my early years at Wolmer’s Girls’ School, where a teacher of English had in desperation once asked whether I intended to go through life talking mathematics.

When, therefore, I was first exposed to the problems of language interference in contact situations, it was only natural that I should direct my attention to the contact situation in Jamaica, and, in order to do so intelligently, to prepare this grammar of the Creole.

The book has been written with three goals in mind:

(a) to explode once and for all the notion which persists among teachers of English in Jamaica, that the ‘dialect’ is not a language, and further that it has no bearing on the problem of the teaching of English;

(b) to provide the basis for the production of realistic English language text-books for Jamaican schools; and

(c) to provide one model for the description of other related Creole languages.

I am deeply indebted to the following foundations and institutions for their support in this project: The Research Institute for the Study of Man, whose two research grants enabled me to make the first field trip to Jamaica in 1956, and to produce the Language Guide to Jamaica for the training of United States Peace Corps volunteers in 1962; the University of the West Indies, which made available to me the facilities of its library and of the
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English Department during the 1956 field trip, and in addition appointed me a Junior Research Fellow during 1960–2, so that I was able to continue research for the grammar; the American Association of University Women, who granted me their Founder’s Fellowship for the year 1962–3, and thus helped me to complete the course requirements and the comprehensive examinations for the doctoral degree, and to complete the first draft of the text; the American Council of Learned Societies, through whose senior graduate fellowship for 1963–4 the book has now been concluded.

I must also express my gratitude to the following persons who in one way or another have assisted in bringing this project to its conclusion: Professor Allen Walker Read, who introduced me to the field of Linguistics, and who has maintained a steady interest in my studies over the past fifteen years; Professor Andre Martinet, who first suggested the possibility of Comparative Creole studies as a fruitful area of concentration; Professor Robert LePage, editor of the Creole Language Studies series, whose interest in Jamaican Creole has led to this particular study, and to whom I am further indebted for providing the opportunities for me to carry out the research in Jamaica; Professor Kenneth Croston, who, as head of the English Department at the University of the West Indies, gave his support to the research project; Professor Frederic G. Cassidy, who, as the only other Jamaican-born linguist, has not only followed this study every step of the way, but has given unstintingly of his vast knowledge of the subject; Professors Robert Allen and John Lotz, members of my doctoral dissertation committee, who have painstakingly given their instruction and advice in the preparation of the text; Mr Cedric Lindo, Public Relations Officer of the University of the West Indies, and the many informants who cheerfully answered the questionnaire and helped in elucidating many problems which arose in the course of the investigation.

Finally, I must express my deepest thanks to Professor Uriel Weinreich, chairman of the dissertation committee, for his patient guidance and painstaking instruction during the writing
PREFACE

of the text, as well as his sympathetic understanding of the difficult conditions under which this study had to be pursued. Without his help, guidance, and sponsorship, this would have been an impossible undertaking, and I can only add: ‘Tenk yu, mi moki maasa.’

B. L. B.

Hunter College of
The City University of New York
New York
June 1965

1 ‘Thank you, my respected master.’