

# The Atlantic

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## Introduction

A common theme in the description and theorization of the Atlantic Ocean and its African, American, and European littoral is ‘movement, transformation, relocation’ (Gilroy 1993). The interaction and merging of populations, languages, cultural traditions, and economic modes in the Atlantic basin from the 16th century onwards can be seen as a harbinger of the shape of things to come. The colonial Caribbean in particular became the epitome of the later trajectory of the world in which Europe forged its version of modernity (Mintz 1996), with its constitutive elements of industrial capitalism, asymmetrical globalization, forced labour, castism-racism, large-scale labour migration, and the destruction of older social institutions and kinship systems, the ‘melting of solids’ (Bauman 2013).

But the Atlantic world also saw the rise of an equally modern counter-project, the syncretic and subversive culture of ‘métissage’ (Glissant 1997) constructed by enslaved and colonized African-, Indigenous-, and Asian- descended peoples, of the Americas who rejected the hierarchical binaries of European colonialism that sought to dehumanize them. The resulting ‘créolité’ (Bernabé et al. 1989) is powerfully embodied in the Afro-European, Afro-Indigenous (e.g. Taylor 1956), Euro-Indigenous, and Afro-Asian (e.g. Yakpo 2017a) cultural and linguistic contacts along the Atlantic rim. A whole range of linguistic varieties emerged from these contacts. Among these, the Afro-European Creole languages of the Atlantic basin stand out because they combine the various linguistic lineages spoken by their progenitors in particularly interesting ways, and continue to be spoken in ecologies characterized by extensive contact.

Here, we focus on the Afro-Caribbean English-lexifier Creoles (AECs) in order to flesh out some salient features of language contact in the Atlantic. Today, AECs are spoken by around a hundred and twenty million people in a string of closely related, often mutually intelligible but typologically differentiated varieties in Africa and the Americas (Yakpo 2016). Contrary to the colonial official languages of the Atlantic, the exponential growth in AEC speaker numbers across time and space has been entirely self-authored, and against formidable ideological odds inherited from colonialism and enslavement: The masses of working peoples who speak AECs as their primary languages still face educational, political, and economic exclusion (Devonish 2010). At the same time the economic and socio-cultural transformations of the last few decades have dramatically extended the reach of the contact languages of the Atlantic.

Afropop sung in Nigerian Pidgin, Reggae and Dancehall in Jamaican, and African American English Rap lyrics have become the musical and linguistic signatures of a Trans-Atlantic culture. The trajectory of the AECs therefore epitomizes the significant linguistic and social transformations of the Atlantic world, and the globe at large, in the past few centuries.

## **1. The Atlantic as a contact and convergence area**

The littoral zone of the three continents bordering the Atlantic Ocean has served as an arena of people and language contact for millennia. In precolonial times, the North Atlantic with its character of an inland sea and coastal lowlands served as a theatre for contact and convergence between peoples and related and unrelated languages (Ureland 2011). Canoe-powered naval trade, warfare, and fishing connected the entire western seaboard of Africa (Smith 1970), and extensive marine networks linked the continental Americas and the Caribbean (Hofman et al. 2010). Existing patterns of contact had therefore already shaped the linguistic practices and individual experiences of people on the three Atlantic continents when the Western European nations set out to colonize the Americas and the Atlantic islands of Africa in the 15th century.

The colonial period laid the foundations for the Atlantic as an intercontinental convergence zone across hitherto regionally confined linguistic macro-families. Arawak languages indigenous to the Americas, Atlantic-Congo, Afro-Asiatic and Mandé languages of West Africa, European regional dialects of Portuguese, Spanish, English, French, Breton, and Irish were brought together in ever-changing constellations in early colonial-era settlements.

From the late 17th century, and particularly the 18th century onwards, the European colonial plantation economies grew to industrial proportions, fuelled by the enslavement of Africans. In this period, the Atlantic increasingly became a contact ecology dominated by Kwa and Benue-Congo substrate languages, Romance and Germanic superstrates, and Afro-European Creole languages. An additional layer of typological complexity was added in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Large numbers of indentured labourers came with their languages from India (e.g. Boer 1998), southern China (e.g. Rojas-Berscia & Shi 2017), Java (e.g. Villerius 2018), and West Africa (e.g. Warner-Lewis 1996).

The postcolonial era since roughly the 1960s – with the notable exception of Haiti which rid itself of colonialism and slavery in 1804, and the continental American colonies – is again characterized by migration and mobility, albeit without direct coercion. The experience of a considerable portion of the populations of the Americas, Africa, and Europe is one of (often circular) migration and language contact between languages of the Northern and the Southern hemispheres of the Atlantic (e.g. Hinrichs 2011; Kootstra & Şahin 2018). These more recent migratory movements have extended the reach of Afro-European contact varieties from their homesteads in the once colonized Southern Atlantic to the Northern Atlantic. True to their historical role as languages of identity and resistance, Afro-European contact varieties have garnered prestige in grassroots culture, thus feeding into urban popular culture, and interethnic youth speech styles in the cities of the former colonizing nations (for the Netherlands, see Dorleijn et al. 2015).

## **2. Current contributions and research**

Research on language contact in the Atlantic has been deeply invested in theorizing the ontological status of Creoles. Sensationalist claims that Creoles have the ‘simplest grammars

of the world' (McWhorter 2001), and more diligent arguments that Creoles constitute a 'typological class' (e.g. Bakker et al. 2017) have occupied a disproportionate amount of discursive space in Pidgin and Creole studies.

A consequence of the singular focus on creolization is that Afro-European Creole languages have been excised from their genetic heritage and areal context. The study of Atlantic (and other) Creoles however offers countless possibilities for cross-fertilization with the traditional fields of comparative and historical linguistics, and with genetic and areal-typological linguistics, more so in combination with an increasingly sophisticated linguistic data science. In Section 3.1, we address genetic aspects in the reconstruction of an AEC proto-language. In Section 3.2, we turn to areal typology.

### 2.1 Genealogical perspectives: 'Ingredient X'

The structure of the AECs may be seen to reflect the genealogical heritage of the lexifier (for a recent, data-driven study, see Blasi et al 2017), of the substrates (e.g. the pioneering study of Boretzky 1983), or a combination of both (van Sluijs et al. 2016). A fourth perspective is to postulate a 'non-genetic' origin of Creoles (e.g. Thomason & Kaufman 1988). Here, we turn away from the embattled question of determining external genetic continuities and look at the equally interesting internal genealogy of the AECs. A relationship between the Afro-Caribbean English-lexifier Creoles has been suggested for quite some time (Hancock 1969; Alleyne 1980; McWhorter 1995; Huber 1999). In the following we give a brief overview of the position of Smith (1987, 2015), which combines socio-historical and linguistic data to argue for the emergence of an AEC proto-language in the Caribbean in the early 17th century.

Smith (1997, 2015) introduced the term 'Ingredient X' on the model of a term employed in British TV soap powder advertisements. This was a supposedly secret ingredient that would help produce a more sparkling wash. The intended implication was that a group of words from coastal West African languages dispersed along many hundreds of miles of coast, had, in *unexplained fashion*, entered the vocabularies of many English-lexifier Creole languages in the Atlantic area.

In Table 9.1, we repeat the list in a form based on Smith (2015: 70–72, sources provided there) (also see Baker & Huber 2001; Avram 2004; Parkvall 2016). The number of AECs has however been increased to cover more varieties. We give one African form only, choosing, where possible, the likeliest source language, whose name is given immediately preceding the relevant form. The very fact that this set of lexical items was drawn from a disparate group of at least eleven African languages makes it very unlikely that any common source has to be looked for in Africa itself (*pace* Hancock 1986). This also suggests that these items belonged to a single original linguistic system employed in the very early 17th century during the English colonization of the Caribbean. The presence of 'Ingredient X' in the African AECs also supports the idea that a Maroon variety of Jamaican was transplanted to Sierra Leone in the late 18th century and substantially fed into the emerging Krio language (Smith 2017). A comparison of the phonology, grammar and lexicon of the African AECs among each other, in turn, suggests that the diffusion of the Krio language from along the West coast of Africa in the 19th century ushered in the formation of Pichi, Nigerian Pidgin, and Cameroon Pidgin (Huber 1999: 128–129).

Some 'Ingredient X' items also occur in the French-lexifier Creoles of the Caribbean Creoles (Parkvall 2016). This need not, however, in itself indicate more far-reaching genealogical

Table 9.1 Ingredient X words in the Afro-European Creoles

English	African languages														Total
	Sr	J	Kr	Sa	SK	Guy	Bah	Mi	Gren	Bar	Ant	Gul	Is	Bel	Total
(1) spider	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	14
(2) eat	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	14
(3) stab	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	14
(4) White man	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	13
(5) only	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	13
(6) magic	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	13
(7) a staple food	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	12
(8) drum	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	10
(9) you (plural)	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	11
(10) ghost	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	11
(11) leprosy	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	11
(12) gossip	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	8
(13) headpad	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	8
(14) evil ghost	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	10
(15) ackee	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	8
(16) rattle	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	8
(17) deaf/dumb	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	8
(18) beancake	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	8
(19) okra	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	10
(20) monster	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	7
(21) game	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	7
(22) mud	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	6
(23) peanut 1	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	6
(24) peanut 2	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	8
(25) yam	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	6
(26) dumpling	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	7



links between the different Afro-European Creole groupings. For one thing, Africans were deported to the Americas from the same regions in Africa. Second, the distribution of ‘Ingredient X’ words is not the same. *Dopi* ‘evil ghost’ is restricted to the AECs, while *makak* ‘monkey’ is only found in French-lexifier Creoles. *Jumbi* ‘ghost’, on the other hand, is near-universal. Names for foods and plants tend to be present in both groups.

Third, there was contact and borrowing between the Creole groupings due to population movements between American colonies held by different European nations. So for example, we have the near-universal *bakra* ‘White person’ in the AECs. The French-lexifier Creoles, in contrast, mostly have *beke*, probably of Eastern Ijo origin. However, Bajan, the English-lexifier Creole of Barbados, also has *beki*, a form related to *beke*, while *bakra* is only recorded in Bajan in the 18th century. Barbados is geographically cut off from the other English Creole-speaking islands by a string of (former) French Creole-speaking islands including Dominica, Martinique, and St Lucia. A possible conclusion is, therefore, that Bajan *beki* has been borrowed from (one of the) French-lexifier Creoles.

The existence of grammatical items (e.g. the subjunctive complementizer *mek*, see Section 3.2) in addition to lexical ones provides further evidence for an AEC proto-language. Given present-day speaker numbers of more than one hundred million, this is quite a remarkable trajectory for a language once spoken by a few thousand Africans who had arrived on the shores of the Caribbean in chains.

## 2.2 Areal perspectives on Afro-European contact languages

Another line of research has looked at the Afro-European Creoles of the Atlantic basin in an areal perspective. Thick descriptions emanating from this perspective (e.g. Essegbey 2015; Aboh 2015; Yakpo 2019a; Hackert 2019) have made the identification of a Creole ontological type ever more elusive. A coherent body of areal work is, for example, the work on the ‘Transatlantic Sprachbund’ (Muysken & Smith 2015), showing the links between the speakers, grammars, and lexica of the Gbe languages spoken in present-day Togo and Benin, and the Creole languages spoken in Suriname. Yakpo and Muysken (2017) trace the outlines of a linguistic area within Suriname itself. An interesting finding is that Suriname’s dominant Creole language Sranan functions as a conduit for influences on the Indic, Austronesian, Sinitic, Arawakan, and Cariban languages for both European (via Dutch) and African (via the substrates) areal features, for example in the transfer of overt clause linkage with ‘and’ to Hakka vs. the strengthening of serial strategies in Javanese, and the borrowing of a ‘say’ complementizer by Lokono.

An Atlantic linguistic area can therefore be conceived of in much broader geographical terms. Muysken (2008: 11–24) discusses the Atlantic as an intercontinental linguistic area, as in the spread of African structural features and lexical items to the European languages and Creoles of the Americas, and European lexical and structural influence on the Creoles and Indigenous languages of the Americas. Taking this further, the Atlantic can be pictured as the meeting ground of two large linguistic areas that we may conveniently call the ‘Afrosphere’ and the ‘Eurosphere’, made up of the languages of the West African littoral and its hinterland, and of the European colonizing nations respectively.

The areal character of Eurosphere and Afrosphere languages beyond their genetic connections have been studied for West Africa (see Güldemann 2018 for a recent overview) and Western Europe (see Haspelmath 2001 for an overview). Some of the many features of the Afrosphere described in the literature and relevant here are serial verb constructions; a tendency towards isolating morphology; ‘hypertransitivity’ (Essegbey 1999); few prepositions

and (mostly postpositional) locative nouns; no (pro-)nominal gender; no pro-drop; a specificity distinction; aspect and mood prominence; tone systems; and lexical, idiomatic, and pragmatic Africanisms (e.g. ‘kiss teeth’, a signifier of negative affect, see Figueroa 2005). Relevant features of the Eurosphere, in turn, are overt clause linkage, some fusional morphology, many prepositions, a definiteness distinction, stress systems, and lexical Europeanisms.

Evidence for the presence of both African substrate and European superstrate features suggests that these two spheres converge in the Afro-European Creole languages of Atlantic Basin. The Creoles therefore form an ‘areal buffer zone’ (cf. Stilo 2005) between the Eurosphere and the Afrosphere. Some of the convergences and co-occurrences of Eurosphere and Afrosphere features in the Creoles are:

Full-blown tone systems (e.g. Ndyuka, Huttar & Huttar 1994: 562–579), next to ‘residual’ (Berry 1972) tone systems (e.g. Sranan, Smith & Adamson 2006), stress systems (e.g. Jamaican, Gooden 2003), and mixed systems combining tone and stress (Papiamentu, Rivera-Castillo 1998) or etymologically layered tone systems (Saamaka, Good 2004); for an overview, see Devonish 2002); Tendency towards analyticity characteristic of both Kwa and English/Romance; ‘Mismatches’ in constituent order, e.g. strict SVO and the expression of core spatial relations through prepositions *and* postpositions in the same Creole (e.g. in Sranan, see Yakpo 2017b); African-style TMA systems (e.g. Winford & Migge 2007) and mixed NP systems combining European (e.g. adjective-word order in the AECs) and African formal features (e.g. post-posed determiners, plural expressed only once in the NP).

In the American Atlantic, the presence of Afrosphere features gradually tapers off in line with various factors that conditioned the differing demographic distribution and socio-economic stratification between Black and White populations in the New World (Mintz 1971; Faraclas et al. 2007; Yakpo 2020 for a discussion of both factors). Structurally somewhat less independent Black ethnolectal varieties than the Creoles like African American English (e.g. Green 2002) and Afro-Spanish varieties (e.g. Afro-Yungueño, see Perez & Zipp 2019), as well as rural/working class varieties like Brazilian Vernacular Portuguese (e.g. Petter 2004) for example, have comparatively fewer Afrosphere features than the Creoles on the one hand, but still more than White ethnolectal and standard varieties, on the other.

Probably the most important driver of the spread of Eurosphere features in the last century or so is the expansion of formal education in the former European colonies of the Atlantic rim, as well as increased national, regional, and international mobility, migration, and media access. Uninterrupted contact for five centuries with European superstrates in the Americas has infused more Eurosphere features into Afro-European Creoles and Indigenous languages of the Americas than into Creoles (and other African languages) spoken on the African continent. In the following section, we show how the resulting Trans-Atlantic areal cline of Eurosphere vs. Afrosphere features can be captured with the help of a particular linguistic feature.

### ***2.3 The stratal-areal contact model: subjunctive mood in the AECs***

Processes of areal convergence have played a central role in shaping the differentiation of AEC grammars. The stratal-areal contact model (Yakpo 2017c, 2017d) suggests, among other things, that contact with African adstrates has reinforced and expanded existing Afrosphere

features in the African AECs, while the absence of contact with African adstrates has led to a weakening of Afrosphere and a strengthening of Eurosphere features in the American AECs. We briefly explore this by looking at the formal-functional differentiation of subjunctive mood across AECs in Africa and the Americas (examples from Kofi Yakpo’s field data unless a source is provided).

Subjunctive mood is instantiated in the modal complementizer *mek(i)* ‘SBJV’ homophone of, and diachronically related to the lexical verb ‘make’ (for an overview, see Smith 2015: 83–85). The use of subjunctive mood in complement clauses is associated with the presence of the deontic nuance of ‘manipulation’ (Givón 1995: 125ff.). Subjunctive mood appears in the directive main clause types of imperative (1), cohortative (2), and jussive (3):

- (1) *mék* *yù* *wét* *smól!*  
 SBJV 2SG wait small  
 ‘Wait a bit!’ (Cameroon Pidgin)
- (2) *mek* *wi* *go!*  
 SBJV 1PL go  
 ‘Let’s go!’ (Jamaican)
- (3) *a* *so* *meki* *a* *tan!*  
 FOC like.that SBJV 3SG.SBJ remain  
 ‘Let him/her/it be (like that).’ (Ndyuka; Suriname)

Second, the subjunctive complementizer *mek(i)* also introduces subordinate clauses dependent on main verbs whose meaning contains an element of causation, manipulation, proposal, desire and other affective nuances compatible with deontic modality (see (4)–(5)). This is the central domain of the subjunctive, where the modal complementizer occurs with a great number of deontic main verbs in some AECs (e.g. in Pichi, see Yakpo 2019b: 389–392; and in Nigerian Pidgin, see Faraclas 1996: 26–32):

- (4) *mi* *bali* *en* *taki* *meki* *a* *an* *kon.*  
 1SG shout 3SG.OBJ QUOT SBJV 3SG.SBJ NEG come  
 ‘I shouted at him/her that he should not come.’ (Ndyuka; Suriname)
- (5) *ii* *gud* *meeK* *ii* *faal* *dong.*  
 3SG.SBJ be.good SBJV 3SG.SBJ fall down  
 ‘It’s good (serves him/her right) that/if s/he falls.’ (Tobagonian)

Among the deontic ‘manipulative’ contexts, we also find WANT-complements (6), and the subordinate clause of effect in analytic causative constructions. Like (4) and (5), these constructions are ‘balanced’, consisting of two finite clauses and hence a subject undergoer (like in African languages, see later), rather than ‘deranked’ (Cristofaro 2003) ones involving an object undergoer and argument sharing (like European languages, see the translations of examples). However, only some of the African AECs allow the co-occurrence of the causative verb and the homophonous subjunctive marker as in (7) (again like in African languages, see (15)):

- (6) *mi* *wani* *meki* *a* *du* *wan* *sani* *gi* *mi.*  
 1SG want SBJV 3SG.SBJ do one thing PREP 1SG  
 ‘I want him/her to do something for me.’ (Sranan; Suriname)



- (7) à            **mék**    **mék**    è            dróngò.  
 1SG.SBJ    make    SBJV    3SG.SBJ    be/get.drunk  
 ‘I got him/her drunk.’ *Lit.* ‘I made that s/he get drunk.’ (Pichi; Equatorial Guinea)

Third, subjunctive mood occurs in purpose clauses, which contain the deontic nuance of an anticipated outcome:

- (8) *blak*    *di*    *ruod*    **mek**    *im*    *no*    *kom*    *iin*.  
 block    DEF    road    SBJV    3SG    NEG    come    in  
 ‘Block the way so that s/he doesn’t come in.’ (Jamaican)

The occurrence of subjunctive mood across the three functional domains (directives, complement clauses, and purpose clauses) is, however, unevenly distributed across the AECs. There are roughly speaking three groups of AECs with respect to the role of subjunctive mood. Group (1) contains all African AECs. These have a unitary system, in which all three functional areas are characterized by the use of subjunctive mood. Group (2) consists in geographically isolated AECs of the Americas (e.g. Tobagonian) and AECs that have not been in contact with the lexifier English for a considerable time. These have instead been in contact with a non-lexifier superstrate. For instance in Suriname, Sranan has been in constant contact with Dutch since the 1670s, and less so the maroon Creoles Ndyuka and Saamaka. In all three Creoles, the unitary system is (still) available. However, MAKE-subjunctives compete with other modal strategies. In Sranan, for example, SBJV *may* but need not occur in the subordinate clauses of deontic main verbs like *wani*, as opposed to the obligatoriness of SBJV in this context in the African AECs), compare (6) and (9):

- (9) *mi*    *wani*    *dati*    *a*            **musu**    *kari*    *en*            *gi*    *mi*.  
 1SG    want    COMP    3SG.SBJ    must    carry    3SG.OBJ    PREP    1SG  
 ‘I want him/her to carry it for me.’ (Sranan; Suriname)

Group (3) are AECs that have been in continuous close contact with English over the centuries. In these, *mek(i)*-subjunctives are now largely restricted to the less central functions of directives, and sometimes, purpose clauses. In Jamaican, the non-finite modal complementizer *fi* is far more common than *mek* as a modal complementizer for the subordinate clauses of deontic main verbs; compare (6) and (10). Also note that (10) no longer involves an African-like ‘balanced’, but rather an English-style ‘deranked’ structure. Trinidad English Creole has gone further. Constructions that involve subjunctive *mek* in Group 1 and 2 AECs have generally been replaced by more English-like alternatives; compare (11):

- (10) *mi*    *no*    **wahn**    *dem*    **fi**    *shout*    *aafami*.  
 1SG    NEG    want    3PL    MOD    shout    after 1SG  
 ‘I don’t want them to shout at me.’ (Jamaican)

- (11) *a*            *doon*    **wont**    *yu*    *kam,*    *yu*    *noo*.  
 1SG.SBJ    NEG    want    2SG    come    2SG    know.  
 ‘I don’t want you to come, you know.’ (Trinidadian English Creole)

Deontic subjunctives are an areal African characteristic. We assume that the AEC proto-language had an African-type unitary system of subjunctive marking, which has gradually become fragmented in accordance with the amount of exposure to European superstrates.

Without going into too much detail, we provide the following examples from West African languages of diverse genetic affiliations. The field data contains examples of the full range of possibilities of subjunctive use in fifteen West African languages (for details on the corpus, see 2017c). In the five languages provided below, a subjunctive complementizer is found across the three domains of directives, complements of deontic main verbs and in purpose clauses, like in the African AECs. In all instances we find the same kind of ‘balanced’ structure involving a subjunctive complementizer and a finite subordinate clause with a subject (not an object) pronoun. Compare the following examples with the AEC examples previously. Note that Kriyol (16), the Portuguese-lexifier Creole of Guinea-Bissau, behaves no differently from the non-Creole African languages listed:

- (12) *kí ó wá!*  
 SBJV 3SG.SBJ come  
 ‘Let him/her come!’ (Yoruba; Nigeria)
- (13) *i po kane kɔ kama ɔ kɔŋɛ.*  
 1SG.SBJ PFV tell 3SG.OBJ SBJV 3SG.SBJ go  
 ‘I told him/her to go.’ (Temne; Sierra Leone)
- (14) *má lɔ̀ɔ̀ mɔ́ tú à zí.*  
 1SG.SBJ want COMP SBJV 3SG.SBJ come  
 ‘I want him/her to come.’ (Bafut; Cameroon)
- (15) *ɔ̀-má-à mà ɔ̀-kɔ̀-ɔ̀.*  
 3SG.SBJ-cause-COMPL SBJV 3SG.SBJ-go-COMPL  
 ‘S/he made him/her go.’ *Lit.* ‘S/he made that s/he go.’ (Fante; Ghana)
- (16) *aos n bin prasa pa n toma kafe na Imperio.*  
 yesterday 1SG come town SBJV 1SG take coffee loc PLACE  
 ‘Yesterday, I came to town (in order) to take coffee at the Hotel Imperio.’ (Kriyol)

There is therefore an east- west areal cline across the Atlantic basin. The widest distribution of *mek(i)* ‘SBJV’ in a unitary deontic domain is found in the African AECs, hence in the core of the Afrosphere. The most fragmented, non- unitary expression of deontic modality through various forms (complementizers, auxiliaries, and preverbal markers) is found in the AECs with the historically most profound exposure to the Eurosphere. Other AECs fall between these two poles, depending on their individual contact trajectory. The issue of post-formative contact-induced change with the lexifier is addressed further in the following sections.

### 3. Critical issues

Much ink has been spilt on the controversy around the so-called Creole prototype, represented *in extremis* by the work of Bickerton (1984) and derivatives (e.g. McWhorter 1998). The prototype idea is founded on a *terra nullius* scenario, in which Atlantic basin Creoles arose *ex nihilo* via the simplification of European lexifier languages. The methodological foundations of this approach have been criticized from various angles including its typological assumptions (Aboh & Ansaldo 2007), circularity (Fon Sing 2017), the ahistoricity of its social premises (Mufwene 2000), its epistemology (DeGraff 2005), the paucity of the data (Lupyan & Dale

2010) and the shallowness (Spears 2009) of the linguistic analysis (also see Yakpo 2019a). The core assumption of the *terra nullius* scenario that there was a transmission bottleneck in the early stages of creolization has been called into question (see Blasi et al. 2017 for a recent study based on large amounts of comparative data).

In Section 3.1, we briefly discuss the idea that enslaved Africans did not have sufficient possibility to learn English and therefore pidginized it. In Section 3.2, we place the equally much-discussed concept of ‘decreolization’ within the broader context of post-formative change in the AECs, by addressing differences in the outcomes between lexifier and non-lexifier contact.

### **3.1 *The social context of the formation of Proto-AEC***

Enslaved Africans spoke quite a variety of languages, and as a result of regional fluctuations during the European slave trade, the linguistic balance among enslaved Africans kept shifting. This meant that it was usually out of the question for enslaved Africans to adopt a common African language. In the initial phase of the first colonies, the number of enslaved Africans was small, and this phase is often referred to as the ‘homestead’ phase, because enslavers and enslaved lived together in close proximity. The ratio between Blacks and Whites is assumed to have been relatively balanced so that newly arrived Africans would have learned English rapidly, within a few years at most.

From here on the opinions among creolists begin to diverge rapidly. The standard approach is that the increasing numbers of newly enslaved Africans from Africa as well as larger plantations meant that access to English was reduced more and more, and that the end result was a Creole language. Such theories ignore the fact that a body of Black speakers of English had most probably already been created in the homestead phase. Therefore newly enslaved Africans would have had access to Black speakers of English if it had been advantageous to them to learn and use English as a lingua franca. Instead, the Proto-AEC would have served as language of ‘identity alignment’ (Ansaldò 2009) and resistance (cf. Alleyne 1980; Faraclas et al. 2007). The linguistic evidence seems to indicate that English was widely known among enslaved people during the formative period of Proto-AEC and thereafter (as shown, for example, in the subtle English-derived distinctions in the use of definite determiners in AECs; see Aboh 2015: 74–75).

It is instead more likely that there was multilingualism among early enslaved Africans including *two* lingua francas, next to other (African, European, and in some cases Indigenous) languages. The first lingua franca would be English, indeed to communicate with the colonists at least during the homesteading period. The second would be a variety of the Proto-AEC that spread through the Caribbean with the movements of English colonists and their enslaved workforce. The Proto-AEC, in turn, would have developed in the early 17th century when the English only had a few small colonies in the Caribbean. It must therefore have developed *prior to* the expansion of English colonization in the Caribbean. This is demonstrated by the presence of ‘Ingredient X’ lexical items in all AECs (see Section 2.1). Further evidence comes from a core of common grammatical items (Smith 2015: 83–87, 2017), among them the sub-junctive complementizer *mek(i)* (see Section 2.3).

### **3.2 *The role of contact with the lexifier in Creole language change***

A second question much debated in the literature next to the social conditions that engendered the AECs is that of post-formative change. This question was discussed from a broader, areal perspective in Section 2.3. Here, we look at the specific role of contact with the superstrate,

which has traditionally been studied in linguistically rather homogenous Creole-speaking societies like Jamaica and Guyana (see Winford 1997 for an overview). The variation of forms encountered in a continuum between a basilectal and a mesolectal Creole variety has been assumed to reflect diachronic stages of a Creole's development including 'decreolization' (e.g., DeCamp 1971; Bickerton 1973; Rickford 1987).

The continuum approach has, however, not been successfully transferred to more complex multilingual ecologies (e.g. Nigeria, see Deuber 2005). Equally, the terms 'superstrate' and 'lexifier' are used interchangeably in Creole linguistics (but see Snow 2002; Selbach 2008). The difference is significant, however. The formal-lexical similarity between a Creole and its lexifier appears to facilitate change of phonologically similar Creole words in the direction of lexifier etymons, including the development of multiple variants and hybrid forms, a phenomenon also found in dialect contact (Gaetano 2005). Existing overlaps in form and meaning make the Creole amenable to faster semantic change toward the lexifier than in cases of contact between unrelated languages. A shared genealogy may also result in the interchangeability of grammatical elements between lexifier and Creole even in more tightly organized areas of the grammar (cf. Law 2013). Yakpo (2017c, 2017d) provides first systematic accounts of differences in outcomes between lexifier and non-lexifier contact in African and Caribbean AECs. However, a high degree of societal multilingualism including the Creole and a *non-lexifier* superstrate may also engender far-reaching typological change in the direction of the superstrate (Yakpo 2017b). Work therefore still remains to be done on the fine differences between Creole change induced by contact with a lexifier vs. a non-lexifier superstrate.

The different outcomes of lexifier-Creole and non-lexifier-Creole contact can be explained by the fate of certain phonological features. One of these is the treatment of the diphthongs /ai/ or /əi/, and /au/ or /əu/ in closed syllables in English; the other is the presence of anaptyctic vowels, i.e. supporting vowels that prevent certain consonants from appearing word-finally (for a detailed treatment, see Smith 2015). Languages with little exposure to English (Group 1) in the 'post-founder' period (Mufwene 1996) show the short-mid vowel monophthongs /ɛ, e/ and /ɔ, o/ as in /fait/ vs /fet/ 'fight', and /haus/ vs. /(h)os/ 'house'. Languages with much exposure to English (Group 2) have diphthongs and lack anaptyctic vowels. Compare Table 9.2:

Table 9.2 Phonetic isoglosses compared

<i>English</i>	<i>Sranan</i> ( <i>Suriname</i> )	<i>Ndyuka</i> ( <i>Maroon</i> )	<i>Saamaka</i> ( <i>Maroon</i> )	<i>MSL</i> ( <i>Jamaica</i> )	<i>Jamaican</i>	<i>Krio (Sierra Leone)</i>
black	blaka	baaka	baaka	blaka, braka	blak	blák
dead	dede	dede	dede	dede	ded	dédè
knock	naki	naki	naki	naki	nak	nák
talk	taki	taki	taki	taki	tak, taak	tók
walk	waka	waka	waka	waka	waak	wákà
climb	kren	kelen	*	klem, krem	klaim	klém
time	ten	ten	ten	tem	taim	tém
fight	feti	feti	feti	fete	fait	fèt
night	neti	neti	ndeti	net	nait	nét
white	weti	weti	weti	wete	wait	wét

\*Saamaka uses a Portuguese-derived word for 'climb'

Group 1 consists of Sranan (Suriname) and the Maroon AECs of the Caribbean (Ndyuka, Saamaka, Windward Maroon), as well as Krio, the African offshoot of Leeward Maroon Creole (Jamaica) and the direct descendants of Krio (e.g. Pichi). Group 2 consists of all other AECs today spoken in the Caribbean (e.g. Jamaican) and in Africa (e.g. Ghanaian Pidgin English). The parallelisms between the Group 1 languages MSL and the Suriname Creoles include anaptyctic vowels and monophthongization of pre-coda English diphthongs as phonological parallels (see Table 9.2). The Group 1 language Krio also has monophthongs and anaptyctic vowels appear in some, but not all common words (e.g. *w á k à* ‘walk’). Of the languages in Table 9.2, only Jamaican (the only Group 2 language) therefore has diphthongs in words whose English model had a diphthong-consonant sequence, and no anaptyctic vowels.

The Suriname Creoles and the Proto-AEC that spawned them had contact with English for a maximum of about seventy years: an unknown period of maximally twenty-five years on Barbados, St Kitts, Nevis, and Montserrat from whence Suriname was colonized by the English in 1651, followed by sixteen years in Suriname until the Dutch take-over of 1667. Conceivably, English was still spoken for another twenty-five years in Suriname after the Dutch conquest (Smith 2009: 315).

The Suriname Creole languages show striking structural and lexical parallels with the Maroon Spirit Language (MSL) of the Windward Maroons of Jamaica (Bilby 1983). MSL is today still used to address spirits of maroons who were born in Jamaica. Up till the early 1930s MSL seems to have represented the everyday language used by the Windward Maroons (Harris 1994), but it has now been supplanted by Jamaican. The conservative nature of MSL shows that even within Jamaica, where English has been spoken without interruption for more than 350 years, the relative isolation of the Windward Maroons preserved Proto-AEC features that are today still found in the Suriname Creoles (see Bilby 1983 for some grammatical features as well).

Smith (2015: 92–106) argues that Krio is largely descended from Western Maroon Creole (*pace* Hancock 1986), hence another, now extinct Maroon Creole spoken on Jamaica in the 18th century similar to MSL. The fate of these two phonetic isoglosses therefore shows how varying degrees of exposure to the lexifier English have led to different contact outcomes.

#### 4. Future directions

We still know too little about the fine details of grammar, phonology, lectal variation, and the effects of contact with adstrates and superstrates in the Atlantic basin to make broad claims about Creole typology. Detailed studies are necessary in order to catalogue the immense genealogical and typological diversity in linguistic structures; an observation already made in the 19th century by Schuchardt, that pioneer of contact linguistics. Future work will be complemented by quantitative approaches, with data drawn from language-specific (e.g. Green et al. 2016; Caron 2019) and typological databases (e.g. Kortmann & Lunkenheimer 2011; Michaelis et al. 2013).

Contact-related work will have to factor in the tectonic demographic shift and far-reaching socio-economic changes underway in Africa, and their consequences for patterns of language use and contact along the Atlantic rim. The population of Africa is reckoned to quadruple in the next eighty years, reaching over four billion by 2100. Nigeria alone is projected to grow in excess of seven hundred million until 2100 (United Nations 2017). Demographic growth rates for the other major AEC-speaking countries Sierra Leone, Ghana, and Cameroon are similar. It is therefore not unrealistic to expect up to half a billion speakers of AECs in West Africa alone

by the end of the 21st century. The mutually intelligible string of African AECs would then overtake Spanish, Portuguese, and French as the most widely spoken (group of) language(s) of the Western hemisphere besides English.

Research on other large and small Atlantic rim languages that make for equally exciting subjects of study in language contact has barely begun. This includes, for example, the Mande zone across the Atlantic rim states Senegal, Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Guinea, Liberia, and Côte d'Ivoire (e.g. Diallo 2014). Between eastern Ghana and the Benin-Nigerian borderlands, languages of the Gbe cluster (Ewe, Gɛ̃, Adja, Gun, and Fɔ̃n among others) are in intimate contact with each other, English in Ghana (Amuzu 2015), French in Togo and Benin (Essizewa 2007), and with other African languages (see e.g. the studies in Ameka 2017). Hardly any work has yet been done to describe contact-induced changes that the languages of the Beti-Bulu-Fang cluster, Lingala, and Kikongo have undergone in recent decades in their expansion to the cities and along the coastal zones of Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, the two Congos, and northern Angola.

The African capitals dotting the Atlantic rim are, in turn, sites of intense contact that have seen the emergence of urban lingua francas, koines, and youth languages that are only beginning to be studied. Among them feature urban Wolof in Dakar (McLaughlin 2001), the French-lexifier contact language Nouchi in Abidjan (Kube 2005), the Gbe koine of Lomé (Sédji 2013), the Akan koine of Accra (Yankson 2018), and the vernacular Portuguese varieties of São Tomé (Bouchard 2018) and Angola (Nzau et al. 2013).

Adstratal influence from African languages on the European-lexifier contact languages spoken in Africa, as well as on the standard European superstrate varieties spoken in Africa, require detailed scrutiny. Recent research is beginning to show, for example, that many African varieties of European colonial languages have tone systems (for French, see Bordal 2012; for English, see Gussenhoven 2017; for Spanish, see Bordal Steien & Yakpo 2020), thereby calling into question established ideas about the vulnerability of tone during language contact and creolization.

So far, only a small body of work has addressed the expansion of the communicative functions of contact languages in the Atlantic basin (e.g. Heyd & Mair 2014; Moll 2015). The absence of top-down, state-administered language policies requires looking at the standardizing and multiplier roles of private digital media (e.g. Beltman 2018), instant messaging, social media, film, and pop music. The emergence of more formal registers in contact languages on both sides of the Atlantic, including the spread of vernacular orthographies opens up possibilities for the study of language policies and language ideologies (e.g. Migge et al. 2010; Yakpo 2016). In the coming decades, the importance of the Atlantic will only grow as a crossroads of language contact, and a site for the emergence of new languages, speech styles, and plurilingual practices.

### Further reading

Alleyne, M. C. 1980. *Comparative Afro-American: an historical-comparative study of English-based Afro-American dialects of the New World*. Ann Arbor, MI: Karoma Publishers. Well ahead of its time in its holistic approach and coverage, and in continuation of earlier pioneering work such as Hancock (1969), this book looks at the evolution of the Afro-Caribbean European-lexifier Creoles through the lense of historical, comparative, genetic, and typological linguistics, without shunning the discussion of socio-cultural aspects of Creole genesis.

Linebaugh, P. & Rediker, M. 2000. *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic*. Boston: Beacon Press.



This history from below reconstructs the crucial role that enslaved, oppressed, and marginalized women and men of African, European, and Indigenous descent played in fashioning the modern Atlantic area in the interstices between colonial conquest and slavery.

Muysken, P. & Smith, N. (eds.). 2015. *Surviving the Middle Passage: The West Africa-Suriname Sprachbund* (Trends in Linguistics, Studies and Monographs (TiLSM) 275). Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

This edited volume is the first to systematically conceptualize the African and American Atlantic as a linguistic area. It contains fifteen studies in socio-history, phonology, morphosyntax, semantics, lexicography, and phylogenetic analysis that assess and show the extent of the areal connections between Gbe and Kikongo, and the Suriname Creoles.

Ureland, P. S. (ed.). 2011. *Language Contact across the North Atlantic* (Linguistische Arbeiten 359). Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag.

This 500-page volume contains over twenty studies of pre- and postcolonial (Trans-)Atlantic contact in the Northern hemisphere. The focus is on Germanic (and Scandinavian in particular), but Celtic, Romance, and Krio are also included.

Yakpo, K. 2017. Towards a model of language contact and change in the English-lexifier creoles of Africa and the Caribbean. *English World-Wide* 38(1). 50–76.

The first study to present a comprehensive typology of post-formative contact and change in the Afro-Caribbean English-lexifier Creoles on both sides of the Atlantic, this article shows the importance of areal and stratal forces in the genealogical differentiation of this group of languages. )

### Related topics

Sub-Saharan Africa, North America, and Hawai'i; Caribbean, South and Central America; Diachronic studies of Pidgins and Creoles; The Typology of Pidgin and Creole Languages; Pidgin and Creole Ecology and Evolution; Identity Politics.

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