

Paula Morgan & Valerie Youssef (eds). (2013) *Reassembling the fragments: Voice and identity in Caribbean discourse*. Kingston: University of the West Indies Press. 204 pp., USD 25.00.

**Reviewed by Nicholas G. Faraclas (University of Puerto Rico, Río Piedras)**

This collection of papers on linguistics, literature, and identity in the Caribbean is yet another in a long series of potentially consequential and essential contributions to our understanding of creolization that have been published over the past few decades by scholars in the Caribbean, but which have been largely ignored by creolists in Europe and North America. Along with the other contributors, editors Paula Morgan and Valerie Youssef remind us once again that creolistics appears to be stuck in needlessly constrained debates that rarely (if ever) question a patriarchally defined notion of genesis, a monolingually and mono-motivationally defined concept of 'target' language, and a fictitious Chomskian monolectal, monocultural and mono-identified speaker.

Most of the articles in this work make it abundantly clear that many specialists in the areas of language, literature, and identity in the Caribbean have moved on to a new paradigm of creolistics that looks at the emergence of creole languages and identities from a multi-causal and multi-dimensional perspective, where plurilingual, pluricultural and pluriidentified speakers and audiences dialogically and dialectically collaborate and conspire to create and re-create language, aiming at multiple targets.

The year 2010 marked the retirement of Professors Barbara Lalla, Ian Robertson, and Bridget Brereton, three pioneering scholars from the St. Augustine campus of the University of the West Indies in Trinidad. In 2011, a conference was organized in their honor around the theme of 'Reassembling the Fragments' based on Caribbean Nobel laureate Derek Walcott's vision of Caribbean scholarship as a labor of love that carefully reassembles the shattered remains of language, culture, and identity in the region. The book under review presents a selection of these conference papers alongside others specifically written for the volume.

The volume is divided into two parts, the first consisting of papers presented at the 2011 conference which focus on the work of Barbara Lalla and Ian Robertson, and the second consisting of articles on history dedicated to Bridget Brereton. Despite the fact that it is composed of a very diverse set of contributions from a

number of disciplines, a key thread that binds the entire work together is a shared commitment to getting beyond the politically saturated constraints imposed on the study of creolization by the dominant discourses of European and North American scholarship, in order to re-center Caribbean peoples of all backgrounds as agents in the emergence of creole languages and identities.

In Chapters 1 and 6 respectively, Donald Winford and Valerie Youssef discuss Ian Robertson's contributions to the field of creolistics. Because of his insistence on accountability to the facts on the ground, Robertson's seminal work on Berbice Dutch has led him to critically question many of the fundamental concepts that still define much scholarly work on creole languages, especially those that minimize the role played by adult speakers in the successful transmission of their linguistic practices. Robertson's challenge to a 'motherless' creolistics, which renders invisible the agency of women, African descended, and other marginalized peoples has inspired many Caribbean scholars to re-assess the entire framework within which they do their work. Winford and Youssef also illustrate how the significance of Robertson's contributions to theoretical and descriptive creolistics are more than matched by his unceasing efforts to promote the acknowledgment and valorization of creole languages as an indispensable element in educational policy and practice in the Caribbean. In these and other ways, Robertson has been constantly crossing the disciplinary borders between linguistics, social history, and education.

Barbara Lalla's intellectual trajectory is traced by Velma Pollard (Chapter 2) and Valerie Youssef (Chapter 4), where emphasis is again placed on her ability to successfully transgress the artificial borders of the disciplines that unnecessarily limit the potential impact of so much of our intellectual work. Although she began her career as a linguist, Lalla has gone on to become not only a central figure in the field of literary criticism, but also a major author of Caribbean fiction. Instead of detracting from her potential contributions as a linguist, this transgressive disrespect for conventional constraints has propelled her study of language to new levels of analysis and synthesis, which should make her writing essential reading for all creolists. In her copious work on language in the Caribbean, Lalla convincingly argues for a re-conceptualization of creolization as a plurilingual, pluriidentificational, multicausal process, which demonstrates the artificiality and hegemonic nature of many of the assumptions routinely and unquestioningly made by creolists, such as the idea of a single target language in studies on language acquisition, the notion that monolingualism has been the norm throughout human history, Grice's conversational maxims, etc. Lalla's vision of creolization involves a dynamic space where dialogical partners move creatively and constantly among a multiplicity of codes and varieties and moving 'targets', in an economy of

performance that cultivates subversive ambiguity at least as much as it cultivates informative adequacy.

In Chapters 3 and 5, Jennifer Rahim and Paula Morgan demonstrate how Lalla's approach to language and literature go beyond the current stagnant debates in Europe and North America between essentialist modernists and ultra-relativist postmodernists concerning the role of language in how we come to know our world(s). While there is a tendency among certain creolists to immediately brand as 'post-modernist' challenges made from the Caribbean to the outdated assumptions that continue to underpin much of the discipline, Lalla's approach illustrates how nothing could be further from the truth. Rahim and Morgan show how, while seemingly following postmodernists in her critical rejection of the totalizing epistemeology that has underpinned modernist concepts such as 'nation' and 'humanism', Lalla does not discard the idea of 'nation' or 'humanism' altogether. Instead, she redefines these terms in ways that go far beyond the debilitating postmodernist negation of continuities. Lalla reclaims the concept of 'nation' in the Caribbean as a potentially human(ist)-centered commons from which creole spaces have been and continue to be opened up for creative resistance to colonial and neo-colonial hegemonic domination.

In Chapter 7, Barbara Lalla discusses these themes and others in explaining her understanding of what might constitute a Caribbean creole voice. Of particular interest to creolists is her historical typology which traces the use of creolized varieties in the fictional (and non-fictional) literature written about the Caribbean since colonization. She divides this trajectory into four phases: (1) the Ventriloquist Phase, in which non-creole speaking Europeans put what they imagined to be creole language into the mouths of the Caribbean peoples they purported to represent (most of the historical archives used by creolists come from this phase); (2) the Censored Phase, in which creole speaking authors hesitantly introduce bits of creole language varieties that they think can 'pass'; (3) the Alternating Phase where Caribbean people portrayed in writing are allowed a creole voice for the first time; and (4) the current Expanded Phase, where even narrators give themselves tentative permission to find a creole voice.

Lise Winer's Chapter 8 opens the second part of the volume. She underscores the positive effects that the replacement of the two-dimensional 'creole continuum' model by a multi-dimensional creole space model has had on Caribbean scholarship. These effects include (but are not limited to) our abandonment of the futile search for 'authentic' or 'classical' creole languages and our withdrawal from the tired debates that pit reactionary and postmodern creole exceptionalists against modernist creole anti-exceptionalists. This and other articles in the volume suggest that there is nothing exceptional about creole languages, beside the fact that it is impossible to study them within the idealized and fundamentally unaccountable

frameworks deployed by European and North American linguists from Saussure to Chomsky. Creole languages force us to admit defeat in our wrongheaded attempts to make language conform to domesticated Platonic and Cartesian models, and, precisely because creole languages are not exceptional, the paradigm shifts required to account for the creole facts are likewise required for the study of any language, even the most standardized European varieties. It is this that makes creole languages an *exceptionally important class of languages* to study.

In Chapter 9, Maria Landa Buil presents some interesting data comparing the noun phrase of Palenquero with the noun phrase found in the interlanguage of L2 learners of Spanish whose L1 (KiSwahili) is a Bantu language. In Chapter 10 Ian Robertson provides some equally interesting data on the socio-historical context of the emergence of creolized languages in Guyana. Each in their own way, Buil and Robertson argue for acknowledgment of the agency of marginalized peoples in the emergence (and non-emergence) of creolized varieties during the colonial era. Chapter 11 by Nivedita Misra demonstrates how social historian Bridget Brereton in her quest to document the history of Trinidad manages to cross the border between literature and history, much like Caribbean novelist and Nobel laureate V.S. Naipaul has done in his work. Chapter 12 ends the volume with a carefully compiled annotated bibliography of the books and articles published by Lalla and Robertson.

This volume should remind us all of this simple fact: as creolists, we must urgently expand the inventory of sources that we consult when studying the Caribbean and other epicenters of colonial and post-colonial creolization.

### *Reviewer's address*

Nicholas G. Faraclas  
 Pedreira 4  
 Inglés, Humanidades  
 Universidad de Puerto Rico  
 Río Piedras  
 PO Box 23356  
 San Juan, PR 00931  
 Puerto Rico  
 nickfaraclas@yahoo.com