

Hanne-Ruth Thompson & Momoh Taziff Koroma (eds). (2014) *Krio Dictionary and Phrasebook, Krio-English/English-Krio: A language of Sierra Leone*. New York: Hippocrene Books. vii + 222 pp., Paperback \$14.95.

Sheikh Umarr Kamarah & Marjorie Jones (eds). (2013) *Beg Sɔl Nɔba Kuk Sup: An Anthology of Krio Poetry*. Freetown: Sierra Leone Writers Series. xxiv + 103 pp., Paperback \$15.00. <http://www.sl-writers-series.org>

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With the increased attention now being paid to Sierra Leone after the decade-long hiatus caused by that country's civil war, new Krio-related publications are beginning to appear. Two of the more recent are reviewed here.

***Krio Dictionary and Phrasebook* by Hanne-Ruth Thompson and Momoh Taziff Koroma**

Nearly two years after its publication was first announced, the Thompson & Koroma dictionary of Sierra Leone Krio finally comes as a welcome addition to the affordable series of language books published by Hippocrene. Welcome, because its price of \$14.95 is over forty times cheaper than the long out of print Fyle & Jones *Krio Dictionary* currently being offered for sale at \$635.97 on www.amazon.com, a price that places it well out of the range of most Krio speakers. Fyle & Jones, however, upon which T&K's little book has drawn extensively, is a dictionary, while the book under review is a wordlist. It is advertised as 'the only two-way Krio dictionary', though Bai-Sheka's *Krio-English Dictionary* – not in their bibliography – contains a reverse K-E index. The authors are mistaken in stating that one of the sources they used, Joseph Opala's two-volume introduction to Krio prepared for the Peace Corps (and not for Voluntary Service Overseas as stated) contains no wordlists; it contains extensive wordlists.

The authors, one German and one a non-Krio Sierra Leonean and both listed as 'experienced linguists', live or lived in Sierra Leone with daily exposure to Krio. They acknowledge particular help from Daphne Pratt, a well-known Krio author and native speaker. Hanne-Ruth Thompson has primarily worked on Bengali;

Momoh Koroma, a Mende speaker, is a lecturer at Fourah Bay College and has done a great deal to get Krio into the educational system. Nevertheless there are some lexical errors throughout their book, as well as some statements regarding Krio's structural features that bear examination.

The book consists of an overview of the language addressing its origins, current situation, and the appropriateness of its use, three pages on pronunciation, and 53 pages on grammar. Following the lexical entries, the phrasebook contains useful sentences under various headings which include 'social interaction', 'language difficulties', 'yes & no', 'introductions', 'travel & transportation', 'food & drink', 'sight-seeing & shopping', 'attitudes & emotions', 'health & body' and 'idiomatic Krio'. A folktale with an English translation and a list of sources complete the book.

In light of our present knowledge, T&K's statement that Krio 'first started in the early 15th century as a pidgin language between Portuguese traders and the local people ... [t]he shift to English resulted in Portuguese words being replaced by English words' (p. 2) is wrong. Portuguese contact on the Sierra Leone coast dates from the *late* 15th century, and a Portuguese-lexifier pidgin was certainly in use there until the mid-1700s alongside what was to become Krio; it has provided the indigenous languages of the area with many lexical adoptions (Bradshaw 1965). But the comparatively small number of Portuguese-derived items in Krio overall (and each of those that T&K provide as examples are also found in English), as well as the fact that over a quarter of the linguistic features listed in Holm & Patrick (2007) are *not* shared by Krio and the Portuguese-lexifier Crioulo spoken in Senegal and Guiné, suffice to demonstrate the unlikelihood of its having developed as a relexification of what is today Crioulo. Unlike Krio, *inter alia* Crioulo does not, for example, pluralize nouns with *them*, or form comparatives with *surpass* or adverbials with *one*, or form serialized instrumentals or benefactives; it has a passive voice and cannot front-focus verbals.

In the section on 'Krio sounds', /ny/ and the doubly-articulated labiovelar implosives /kp/ and /gb/ are listed without explanation simply as 'Krio sounds not found in English'. By noting that 'c and ch (when pronounced as k) become k: car → *ka*, character → *kereкта*', the implication is that Krio pronunciation is based on written rather than spoken English. The statement that 'colloquial spoken Krio has quite a lot of nasalization' (p. 12) suggests that there might also be a written (less nasal?) standard, and the Fyle & Jones dictionary and the Bible translation are mentioned by way of contrast, but these are found in very few Sierra Leonean households or serve yet as models for any perceived standard. The appearance of the Krio *New Testament* in 1987 and the entire Bible in 2013, however, did push an increasing number of Krio speakers to become familiar with phonemic orthography.

A serious omission is T&K's decision not to mark lexical or grammatical tone. While acknowledging that 'Krio is a tonal language that distinguishes pitch of voice (high or low) in order to convey meaning in some words' they opt not to indicate it, 'feel[ing] that marking tone in this book would make things look much more complicated than they really are' (pp. 5–6). Thus the entry *go* is glossed as both 'go' and 'incipient action, future tense marker' when these are two different words, distinguished by tone (*gó* and *go*). Likewise *blant* is listed both as 'belong to' and 'accustomed to', while these are likewise two separate words, *blánt* and *blant* respectively. It is impossible to speak Krio properly without incorporating such distinctions (see e.g. Johnson 1974, Berry 1970, 1975, and Finney 2004). Tonal behavior bears upon morpheme boundary as well. As in Fyle & Jones, two-morpheme items are written as single words, probably because their English equivalents are. However, entries such as *miséf* 'myself', *wetin* 'what', *ustem* 'when', and so forth consist of two adjacent high-tone items which thus incorporate downstep: *ús↓tém*, *mí↓séf*, *wé↓tín*, etc., articulations not allowed by the present orthography. Some strings of words are unaccountably entered as single items, thus *datende* 'then' (< *dá tēm dé*), *dawande* 'that one there' (< *dá wán dé*, usually *dá'án dé*).

The section on phonology omits mention of Krio's distinctive velar /r/, probably reflecting the fact that this is a shibboleth that distinguishes native from most non-native speakers and, like the Bai-Sheka dictionary, this book does not deal with the 'deep' Krio that is slowly disappearing from the Peninsula villages and the coastal islands, although the authors do refer to it, noting that the non-native varieties 'are occasionally a source of irritation to advocates of *piɔ* Krio (*pure Krio*)' (p. 4).

Factors such as the civil war and the Internet have brought far greater exposure to metropolitan English, particularly in areas away from the Krio heartland, so that much-diluted varieties of the language are gradually superseding the older native speech. This is reflected in T&K where only the anglicized pronunciations for some of the entries are listed (*drɔp* 'drop' for *dráp*, *amək* 'hammock' for *amáka*, *gɔta* 'ditch' for *gwáta*, *bush* 'wilderness' for *bús*, *gad* 'guard' for *gyád*, *neva* 'never' for *nɔba* – although *nɔba* is listed elsewhere as 'emphatic no'. The inclusion in creole language dictionaries of 'uncreolized' words from their metropolitan lexifiers raises the question of how extensive should this practice be; with few exceptions (e.g. Sranan, Papia Kristang) creoles are spoken in the same geographical (and increasingly social) environment as their lexifiers, thus any English word is potentially a Krio word, as I noted earlier in my review of the Fyle & Jones dictionary (Hancock 1981). Very many of the approximately 3,000 (not 4,000+) separate entries in T&K are of this type, thus taking a section at random there are, in order, *probeshɔn*, *prodəkshɔn*, *prodyus*, *profeshɔn*, *profeshɔnal*, *prɔfɛsɔ*, *program*, *progres*, *promɔshɔn*, *pronawns*, *propoz*, *provayd*, *provishɔn*, *provok*. Comparatively few second-language

Krio speakers are fluent in English, however, and thus do not have access to such words; while they become Krio if used in Krio, their indiscriminate use may still hamper rather than aid communication.

In the section dealing with grammar, a few comments might be made. There is nothing 'present' in listing *dɔn* as a 'present perfect marker', cp. for example *a bin dɔn de rɪd am* 'I had been reading it', *a go dɔn de rɪd am* 'I'll have been reading it'.

Kin is listed as both 'can' and 'habitual aspect', but except in anglicized speech, the former is expressed with *ébul*, not usually *kin* – evident in two alternatives provided in the book itself (p. 158): *usay a go ebul fɔ get tin fɔ it nia ya?* ~ *usay den kin sel chɔp nia ya?* 'where can I get something to eat near here?' *Chɔp*, incidentally, is not Krio but West Coast Pidgin – another shibboleth; 'eat' and 'food' are (y)it in Krio.

Of particular interest is the inclusion of the sentence *misef yon ashɔbi na bin yala* 'my own ashɔbi [dress] was yellow' (p. 203). *Na* does not as a rule go with adjectives (as verbs), as Finney makes clear in his grammatical sketch of Krio: 'the copulas *na* and *nɔto* are used to introduce predicative nouns but not predicative adjectives. The copula is null for the latter' (Finney 2013:162). Neither is it allowed in Fyle & Jones (1980: xxxii) or Yillah & Corcoran (2007). However, a number of Krio speakers asked about this accepted it as possible, differing from *misef yon ashɔbi bin yala* in that the dress was once yellow but is no longer, while still rejecting the future construction **mí séf yón ashɔbí go bí yála*. This appears then to be an innovative construction, certainly not one I ever encountered when I first learnt Krio in the 1960s; it may reflect the increased use of (in this case deleted) nominal *wan* (thus *mí séf yón ashɔbí na bin yála wán*, cp. *fɔ úna kám wán na Flórída jís mék a nó* 'as for your visit to Florida, just let me know'), *i mít am na di domót gládi wán* 'he met her in the doorway happily'), &c.

One of the meanings given for *na* is 'and', with the examples *na naw a no we-tin fɔ du* 'and now I know what to do', *na in opin do go mit am* 'and he opened the door and approached her', and *na bɔt tri awa den flay bifo den rich* 'and they flew for about three hours before they arrived'. But in each case, *na* here is serving in its function as a (verbal) highlighter: 'it's now that I know what to do', while the second example is the result of mishearing *na in i opin* [na ĩ i opin] 'thereupon he opened' as *na in opin*. While *na* can mean 'and' in Cameroonian Creole, as in *mi na yu* 'me and you', such constructions do not occur in Krio.

Under 'idiomatic uses' the verbal function of locative *de* is mistranslated as 'there, where' in the examples *usay Abu de?* 'where is Abu?', *wi dɔn de naya fɔ siks wik* 'we have been here for six weeks', *usay yu go de?* 'where will you be?'; only in the additional example *i nɔ bin de de yestade* 'He was not there yesterday' is the second *de* meaning 'there' identified correctly. These are not particularly 'idiomatic' uses of *de*, but examples of regular grammatical constructions.

Space does not allow for an exhaustive critique of the lexical entries, a considerable number of which require comment. A few examples include *e.g.* *berin*, which does not mean 'grief' but 'funeral'; *biol* is not primarily an 'expression of disbelief' but the word meaning 'nevertheless'; *doti* means 'dirt' as well as 'dirty'; *sɔk tit* does not mean 'hiss' but 'chupse'; *mol* does not mean 'brain' but 'fontanelle'; *yɛk* does not mean 'tease' but 'be startled', and so on. While two words sharing the same origin can diverge in form and meaning (*e.g.* *dréb* 'shoo away' and *dráyyv* 'drive a vehicle' or *ɔrenj* 'orange (color)' and *ɔrínch* 'orange (fruit)'), distinguishing *meshɔ* 'measure of land' from *menshɔ* 'measure of weight', simply reflects variant pronunciations; both are giving way to *mézhɔ*. Similarly, *wan* and *want* are discussed as two separate words. *Man* means a great deal more than just 'man', cp. *man-káw* 'bull', *tif-mán* 'thief (of either sex)', *mán-pikin* 'boy', *mán-pɔpɔ* 'non-fruitbearing papaya'.

Kushɛ is listed as 'hello!' in the section on 'Greetings and Farewells' (pp. 142–143). Krio greetings are complicated, and in traditional Krio society different situations call for different (mainly Yoruba-derived) formulas. *Kushɛ* ([kú↓ʃɛ]) is only given to one met at work, for example. Its generalization to 'hello' reflects the ongoing loss of specifically Krio culture and language, and the changing sociodemographic character of Sierra Leone as a whole. Equally revealing of change is the paucity of other Yoruba-derived entries in T&K, which make up so large a part of the Fyle & Jones dictionary of (expressly) native Krio, and the replacement of single African-derived items with circumlocutions, *e.g.* *tot pikin na bak* 'carry child on one's back' instead of *bambá* or *popó*. Non-native and pidginized varieties of Krio are handily discussed in Jones (2013: 55–68).

Regardless of its shortcomings (as a popular treatment rather than a scholarly work), the availability of a reasonably priced grammar, lexicon and phrasebook for Krio is much needed, and long overdue. Its glued binding may not stand up to a tropical climate for long (pages of my own copy have already fallen out) but it needs to be made available in Sierra Leone not only for expatriates there but for Krio speakers themselves; it will do much to legitimize and give status to a language that too many still regard as 'bad English'.

***Beg Sɔl Nɔba Kuk Sup: An Anthology of Krio Poetry.* By Sheikh Umarr Kamarah & Marjorie Jones (eds.)**

'If you must borrow salt from a neighbour to finish preparing your stew' (*Beg Sɔl Nɔba Kuk Sup*) you'll never have enough to do the job properly. This is the literal meaning of the Krio proverb that the editors chose for the title of this new collection of poetry; figuratively, it is a comment on the value of independence and

self-sufficiency. It was well chosen; Sierra Leone is still recovering from a horrific civil war that lasted more than a decade (1991–2002), and the long-term effects of the ebola epidemic have yet to be ascertained. Now the country must perforce rely on foreign intervention in its process of rebuilding. It is no secret that some outside agencies have exploited the situation for their own gain – hence the urgent need for Sierra Leoneans themselves to re-establish control of their own affairs. Predictably, this is the theme of a number of the contributions to this volume.

All of the poems are in Krio, which emerged as the mother-tongue of a colony founded in Freetown in the late 18th century for various groups overseas seeking a home in Africa; they came from England, Jamaica and North America, and were joined on the Sierra Leone Peninsula by local indigenous peoples as well as by Africans taken captive from all parts of Africa in great numbers – illegally, after the abolition of slavery – and released in the new colony. And from this cosmopolitan mix emerged a new people, the Krios.

There are at least eighteen different languages spoken in Sierra Leone, and while the official medium is English, it is spoken natively by practically no one. It was perhaps foreordained that Krio should become the lingua franca of the whole country, and today far more people speak it as a second language than as a mother-tongue. It truly serves as a nationally unifying force.

The introduction to the whole anthology is by co-editor Sheikh Umarr Kamarah, who provides an overview of earlier attitudes to Krio and a synopsis of the individual contributions to the volume. The foreword was written by Professor Eldred Durosemi Jones, a giant in the Krio repertoire of giants, a fierce champion of the cultivation of Krio as a literary language, co-compiler of the *Krio-English Dictionary* and – I must add a personal note– the man directly responsible for making my own academic career possible. Together with the ‘pioneer’ poets, these are the Geoffrey Chaucers of their age, demonstrating the richness and potential of their language in the face of uninformed bias: government officials sent out from England to Africa in the nineteenth century condemned Krio as ‘semi-civilized’ and a ‘travesty’ of a language while at the same time being quite unable to speak it themselves. Yet English itself was similarly castigated in the past as ‘a language devoid of ornate terms ... a grosse [sic] tongue, a rude and barren tongue, when compared with so flourishinge and plentiful a tongue as Latin’ (Jones 1953: 20). Thus the scathing criticism once aimed at *English* (referred to as ‘one of the great languages of civilization’ in the pages of the *Sierra Leone Weekly News*!) became aimed in turn at Krio, which ‘was not flexible enough and did not contain the literature to meet modern demands’ (Taylor 1965: 23). It really depends upon who is in charge.

We cannot date the earliest oral literature in Krio, which surely predates the verses recorded by Rankin in 1836, but the first published composition – a poem

by 'J' – appeared in the 1880s. By the middle of the 20th century, published writings in Krio had become commonplace.

It would take a great deal of space to examine each contribution individually. The editors have divided the collection into three parts: the first includes examples of traditional oral literature, children's rhymes whose composers are long forgotten. The second is a tribute to the 'pioneers', four earlier 20th century poets, Thomas Decker, Gladys Casely-Hayford, Clarice Davies and another whose name has been lost to us. They reflect a gentler time – market women preparing their goods for sale, a tribute to a lover – contrasting sharply with the most recent compositions in the third (and longest) section of the book, 'The contemporary poets'. Here, reflections on the effects of the civil war are a constant theme, particularly on the struggle to restore the country, potentially so rich, to what it once was.

Students of language will find much of interest in the pages of this book; it is written in the official spelling, which brings Krio in line with Sierra Leone's other languages, though I would question the continued exclusive use of *ŋ* rather than *ng* since the latter is able to incorporate both [ŋ] and [ŋg], sounds distinct in Krio (for example *tɔŋ* 'town', *tɔŋg* 'tongue'). With the large numbers of second-language Krio speakers coming into Freetown in recent years, the traditional urban dialect has undergone considerable change, influenced not only by the first languages of its 'second language' speakers – Temne, Mende, Limba and so on – but by the increased exposure to English as well. Certainly the older conservative dialect of the village Krios is disappearing, and with it much of the richness and nuance of the language. This has resulted in what has sometimes been called *shweng-shweng Krio* or *watawata Krio*, 'watered down Krio', and is the theme of one of the poems. But the real ownership of any language is with its poets and writers, and it is they who must ensure the full potential of the language.

The Sierra Leone Writers Series promises to bring us more of the same, and I look forward eagerly to the publication of further anthologies and seeing more new names; clearly there is some real talent emerging which, like Sierra Leone itself, is slowly gathering momentum.

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