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Ghana Pidgin English in Its West African Context: A
Sociohistorical and Structural Analysis (review)

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b. Il a habité Londres {pendant la guerre/de 1939 à 1945/pendant sept ans}⁹.

Si l'on en croit Facques, les analyses du type de celles évoquées précédemment ne suffisent pas à prédire les alternances entre les temps : certains « changements de temps « inattendus » [sont] interprétés comme des « ruptures » » (p. 105). En fait, après analyse, cette auteure n'arrive à considérer comme rupture temporelle « que les changements temporels qui indiquent un marquage idéologique du locuteur à l'égard d'énoncés ou d'énonciateurs dont il se différencie » (p. 128–129). Par ailleurs, elle fait l'hypothèse que les verbes de sentiment et les verbes interprétatifs ont une « prédilection » pour l'imparfait.

Somme toute, le présent livre offre une grande variété de données et d'analyses intéressantes, voire pénétrantes. On ne peut s'attendre à plus d'un recueil de communications données par des chercheurs d'orientations diverses. Il est donc difficile d'en retirer une idée cohérente de ce que sont les temps du passé en français. À vrai dire, les utilisations des temps cachent nombre de subtilités, sur lesquelles les intuitions varient parfois (d'une personne à l'autre, voire d'un moment à l'autre). Il y a encore de quoi publier quelques cahiers *Chronos* !

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Magnus Huber. *Ghana Pidgin English in Its West African Context: A Sociohistorical and Structural Analysis*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins. 1999. Pp. xviii + 323, maps, index, CD. US\$95.00 (hardcover).

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This work is a cumulation of years of research by Magnus Huber on the understudied Ghanaian variety of Pidgin English and related pidgins and creoles of West Africa. The book is informally presented in two parts. In Chapters 2–4, Huber presents a sociohistorical account of the origins of various West African pidgins. In Chapters 5 and 6, the author

⁹Ces exemples développent (et modifient) une analyse de Vinay et Darbelnet (1977, §117). L'opposition ouvert-fermé se retrouve aussi dans ces exemples de Ducrot (1979) : *L'année dernière, Paul habitait à Paris (*mais seulement en mai)* vs. *L'année dernière, Paul a habité/habita à Paris, mais seulement en mai*.

turns to a synchronic syntactic and sociolinguistic description of Ghana Pidgin English. The book includes maps, a comprehensive index, and appendices with West African pidgin wordlists and excerpts from historical texts discussed in the first part of the book and transcriptions of sample texts supporting the structural description in part two. The book also comes with a CD-ROM that includes photos and audio samples of various sources of language data.

In an attempt to trace the origins of Ghana Pidgin English (GhaPE, as abbreviated by the author), in Chapter 2 Huber first retackles the question of the elusive origins of related West African Pidgin Englishes (WAPes) generally. Competing theories abound concerning the genesis of creole languages, the universals of pidgins and creoles, and the connection between the earliest English- and Portuguese-based pidgins and jargons on the one hand and present-day pidgins and creoles around the world on the other. In light of the multitude of opposing voices on these issues, Huber's work is a commendable effort to directly address and refute certain viewpoints. Huber has combed over 200 historical sources, such as travelogues and colonial records in addition to grammars, in order to identify documented evidence of the linguistic status of various West African pidgins and jargons over the past four centuries and in numerous geographical areas. While Huber is to be commended for his thoroughness, I question whether he reads too much into some sources. For example, Huber focusses on such expressions as "une espèce de" ('a sort of') and the nuances of the choice of conjunctions like *and* and *or* in "Portuguese and the *lingua franca*" and "a little *Lingua Franca* or broken Portuguese" to draw conclusions as to whether the languages referred to by different terms indeed constituted separate languages at particular historical periods (pp. 17–18). Huber does not address the possibility that the authors of these sources are merely using terms loosely or are uncertain as to which one is more appropriate. The author also analyzes historical documents more broadly to speculate on the extent of use of pidgins and their related superstrate colonial languages by African populations based on the nature of interactions with Europeans.

In Chapter 3, Huber presents demographic records on the origins of repatriated slaves who settled in Sierra Leone. Huber recognizes Sierra Leone Krio as a central factor in investigating the development of West African pidgins in general. In addition to being a major location of trade activity where the earliest pidgins may have developed, Sierra Leone was also a major site for repatriation of slaves from the New World, many of whom subsequently migrated to other parts of West Africa, where Sierra Leone Krio then "substantially influenced the pidgins that are today spoken in Cameroon, Nigeria, Ghana, Liberia, and the Gambia" (p. 59). Among the noteworthy points raised by Huber is the significant role played by repatriated slaves from Nova Scotia in the development of West African Pidgin Englishes — a factor heretofore neglected in comparison with the role of Jamaican Maroons and Gullah. Drawing on the evidence of considerable "segregation and edgy relationships between the different population groups" (p. 72, referring to repatriated groups and the native inhabitants of Sierra Leone), the main point of this chapter is to establish that the Krio, which eventually spread to other areas, was strictly a language developed in the New World — not a remnant of any English-based pidgin developed in Sierra Leone during the earliest period of contact with the West.

In Chapter 4, Huber presents comparative linguistic data of phonological, syntactic, morphological, and lexical features of various WAPes at several stages in their development, based on attestations in historical documents and early grammars. Huber is very systematic in his methodology for determining the interrelation of various pidgins and creoles. He

presents tables which track if and when given linguistic features are attested in certain varieties of “restructured English” (including Sierra Leone Krio, Kru Pidgin English, Ghana Pidgin English, Nigerian Pidgin English, Cameroonian Pidgin, and other pidgins such as Gullah, Jamaican English, and Pacific Pidgin Englishes). The relative date of attestation of features shared between two or more WAPes is used to speculate on the genesis, interrelatedness, and spread of present-day varieties of these languages. Furthermore, Huber supports his linguistic findings with sociohistorical considerations, such as citing the reported “isolationism” of Liberian Krumen as contributing to the unlikelihood that West African pidgins spread primarily from these communities, contrary to the popular notion to this effect, which has been crystallized in the term “Kru English”, used by some people in reference to GhaPE (p. 87).

As it relates to Ghanaian Pidgin English in particular, this first half of Huber’s work addresses the question of “how far modern WAPes can be seen as descendants of the English-lexicon MIC [means of interethnic communication] of earlier centuries, or if perhaps these are innovations vis-à-vis the earlier contact languages” (p. 57). The socio-historical and linguistic evidence leads to the conclusion that GhaPE (as well as other WAPes) is a recent innovation independent of earlier English-based jargons used in the pre-colonial era. Despite the apparent recentness of its innovation, however, the exact origin as well as the linguistic status of GhaPE is debated. Huber has conducted ethnographic interviews to at least refute the common belief that GhaPE is simply an import of Nigerian Pidgin through the exodus of Ghanaians returning to Ghana in the 1980s, as held by Amoako (1992), or that the rise of Pidgin English in Ghana was primarily due to northerners, as posited by Trutenau (1975).

Chapter 5 begins the second part of this work by reviewing sociolinguistic issues relating to the functions of GhaPE in the overall linguistic ecology of Ghana. Huber draws attention to two distinct varieties of GhaPE: 1) an “uneducated” variety used as a primary means of inter-ethnic communication by speakers who share no other lingua franca, and 2) an “educated” or “institutionalized” variety used mainly for in-group solidarity by people (mostly male students) who are otherwise fluent in standard Ghanaian English. Huber’s collection of data and personal observations at several periods from 1991 to 1998, combined with information obtained in ethnographic interviews, provides interesting insights into changing sociolinguistic patterns of use of GhaPE—such as increasing acceptability and use by women and older speakers and in mixed company.

In Chapter 6, while Huber admits a high degree of linguistic variability by speakers of GhaPE and acknowledges a wide variety of registers along the basilect-acrolect continuum, he concludes his work with a grammatical sketch of GhaPE based on what he considers to be the prototypical basilect variety. As Huber discusses in his sociolinguistic account, hardly any documentation of this variety of English has been published, due to the widespread view among adult professionals that GhaPE is merely a bastardization of proper English, if not a direct import of Nigerian Pidgin English. Huber’s work represents the second major attempt to document GhaPE—following Amoako’s unpublished dissertation (1992). Attention to tone and intonation is a particularly strong point of this grammatical description.

Although Huber openly makes an effort to point out the relation between GhaPE and its primary substrate languages (especially Akan), my main criticism falls where Huber does not adequately explain areas in which considerable influence from Akan is apparent. The grammatical sketch would have benefitted from more thorough input from Akan-speaking collaborators. As a particular example, Huber claims that the educated student variety of

GhaPE “uses the equative copula *bi* as a post-nominal topicalizer” (p. 249). Huber offers the following data to exemplify this feature:

- (1) a dʒas de insai sɔm sməl ʃɔts bi
 1SB just COP inside some small shorts TOP
 ‘I was only wearing shorts.’ (p. 250)

Huber makes no effort to explain such an unlikely — possibly unprecedented — use of the so-called “equative copula”. In fact, this is clearly a direct employment of the Akan word *bi* (meaning ‘some’ or ‘certain’), which happens to be homophonous with the equative copula (drawn from English *be*) in GhaPE. So, *bi* and *sɔm* in the sentence above appear to carry redundant meaning.

A similar pattern of redundancy of substrate and superstrate lexical items can be seen with other words from the same class of “topic particles” described by Huber, as in the combination of the demonstrative *that* and the topicalizer *nɔ* in other data cited by Huber:

- (2) dat big ɡɔta nɔ
 DEF big gutter TPC
 ‘that big drain’ (p. 248)

Unlike the problem with *bi*, the source of *nɔ* is correctly identified as *nɔ* in Akan (topicalizer or referent of given information often glossed as ‘that’/demonstrative) — not, for example, as the negative “no” or the verb “know” in English. While properly recognizing *nɔ* as a lexical item from a substrate language, Huber still neglects to describe the complex variety of functions that this particular lexical item carries in Akan, as compared to the more specific functions of most of the other items that he has grouped together as topicalizers and intensifiers. The complexity of this feature would help to explain Huber’s observation that it is more frequent and appears in a greater variety of environments than other topic particles (p. 248).

Despite small shortfalls such as those mentioned above, Huber’s grammatical sketch provides necessary documentation of this otherwise neglected English-based pidgin. As with his presentation of the historical context and genesis of West African pidgins, Huber clearly points out where and why his syntactic description deviates from other accounts. Beyond the merits of the content of Huber’s work, Huber is to be commended for the transparency of methods — through the inclusion of the CD-ROM, as well as the style of his written presentation. While sharing primary data sources in this way may leave Huber’s work open to more criticism, this work presents an exemplary case of methodological decisions that all researchers are faced with.

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