



**Journal of the Linguistic Society of Papua New Guinea**

**ISSN: 0023-1959**

**Vol. 33 No. 1, 2015**

## Book Reviews Section

**Pidgins, Creole & Mixed Languages: An Introduction by Viveka Velupillai.** Creole Language Library (CLL) Volume 40, John Benjamins: Amsterdam/Philadelphia, 2015, 599 pages, ISBN 9789027252715 (hardcover €99), ISBN 9789027252722 (softcover €33), ISBN 9789027268846 (e-book €33)

-Reviewed by **Craig Alan Volker**, Divine Word University / The Cairns Institute, James Cook University

Over the years, a number of good, comprehensive introductions to pidgin and creole languages have appeared. With *Pidgins, Creole & Mixed Languages: An Introduction*, Velupillai gives us a new introduction, drawing on up-to-date databases and organised specifically as a textbook for classroom use. It includes discussions on mixed languages, which are often omitted in introductions to pidgins and creoles. Besides being a general introduction to the field, the book examines some features shared by pidgins and creoles, and asks whether these languages can, in fact, be said to be 'typologically different' from other languages. The book's 15 chapters are divided into two sections, the first being a general introduction to the field, and the second introducing a more detailed examination of structural typology issues. Each chapter follows the same format. They first introduce the relevant linguistic concepts, useful to even advanced students, and follow up with a description and analysis of the topic of the chapter. Three 'language snapshots', descriptions of one pidgin, one creole, and one mixed language from a variety of geographic and historical locales come next. These give a historical and sociological background to the languages under consideration, as well as some basic descriptions of their phonology and grammar. Of the 45 language snapshots, 3 are in Melanesia: Tok Pisin (chapter 1), Rabaul Creole German (chapter 4), and Solomons Pijin (chapter 12). Of the others, 4 are also in our general Asia-Pacific region: Hawai'i Creole English (chapter 6), Ambon Malay (chapter 7), Gurindji Kriol of the Australian Northern Territory (chapter 9), and Pidgin Hawaiian (chapter 11). The descriptions in these snapshots are quite detailed, given their short length, so that they can be used in class for many purposes besides examining the actual topic of the individual chapter. Each chapter begins with a map showing the approximate location of the languages discussed in the chapter. At the end of each chapter, there is a list of key points covered in it, and a set of 'exercises', which are actually reading comprehension questions about the text. The lack of linguistic problem-solving exercises, common in many introductory and intermediate linguistic textbooks, is unfortunate, given the otherwise comprehensive scope of the book. The book ends with a good glossary. The references and index are given at the end of the book, not after individual chapters.

The first part of the book is a general introduction to pidgin and creole studies, covering the types of issues found in most textbooks. Chapter 1 gives a good introduction to pidgin languages. For PNG students, the fact that Tok Pisin is the subject of one of the 'language snapshots' of this chapter will be useful, although they may be surprised to read that Malay was a lingua franca in the early German colonial period (it was

actually used largely by the Asian labourers brought mainly from what is today Indonesia). Besides discussing a wide range of types of pidgins (military, trading, urban, etc.), the chapter discusses assumed typical linguistic features of pidgins, a topic Velupillai returns to in Section 2. Chapters 2 and 3 follow a similar pattern, introducing first creole and then mixed languages, respectively. Chapter 4 discusses the sociohistorical contexts of the formation, development, and diffusion of all three types of contact languages. Chapters 5 and 6 deal with the important question of the formation of pidgins and creoles and the theoretical controversies this question has given rise to, such as the bioprogram hypothesis. Weighing into this topic, Velupillai makes the very important point that the 'question of whether creoles form a unique typological class can only be answered by empirically comparing creoles with non-creoles', a task she addresses in detail and with mixed results in the second part of the book. Chapter 7 examines variation and change, including the phenomena of depidginisation and decreolisation. Chapter 8 deals with sociological issues in the status of contact languages in society and their use (or non-use) in print, the modern media, and education.

Much of Velupillai's previous work (e.g., Velupillai 2012) deals with issues of linguistic typology, both in contact languages and languages in general. She draws on this in the second part of the book, where she deconstructs generalisations often made about pidgins, creoles, extended pidgin-creoles, and mixed languages. Each chapter takes characteristics, related to one aspect of language, describes the typical generalisations regarding those features of pidgins, creoles, and mixed languages, and examines the evidence for the veracity of these generalisations. She does this by comparing the extent to which these characteristics are evident in the pidgin and creole languages described in *The Atlas and Survey of Pidgin & Creole Languages* (APiCS, Michaelis et al 2013) with the extent to which they are evident in the languages described in the *World Atlas of Language Structures* (WALS, Dryer & Haspelmath. 2013). She uses statistical methodology to ascertain whether there is any statistically significant difference in the percentages of languages listed in these surveys having a particular characteristic. Students arriving at PNG universities tend to come from secondary schools where the critical analysis of written texts, especially textbooks, is not the norm. The process of analysis used in this part of the book is therefore an extremely important example for our students of the importance of applying the scientific method and critical analysis to statements made in print, even those made by experts. For this reason, instructors using this textbook would be well advised not to rush through this material too quickly. Indeed, this second part of the book could easily form the core of an entire separate class in a linguistics program at a PNG university. Chapter 9 examines generalisations regarding phonological issues (e.g., that pidgins and creoles have smaller phonological inventories than their lexifying languages), chapter 10 deals with questions related to morphology (e.g., that reduplication is rare in pidgins but common in creoles), chapter 11 looks at noun phrases (e.g., that pidgins have no plural or articles, whereas creoles have optional plural and definite articles that are identical to demonstratives), chapter 12 focuses on verb phrases and predication (e.g., that

pidgins lack tense, aspect and mood, whereas creoles have tense, mood and aspect markers, in that order), chapter 13 discusses simple sentences (e.g., that pidgins and creoles have SVO order and no passive construction), chapter 14 examines generalisations regarding complex sentences (e.g., that pidgins and creoles rarely have subordinate clause constructions), and chapter 15 analyses statements often made about the pragmatics of pidgin, creole, and mixed language (e.g., that yes-no questions are marked only by a change in intonation). In each chapter, several characteristics are examined. For example, chapter 15 looks at the often made generalisations that pidgins and creoles tend to have only one negative marker (concluding that this is in fact more likely in both pidgins and creoles than in languages in general, albeit with some noticeable exceptions), that yes-no questions are formed only by a change in intonation (finding this more likely in pidgins than in creoles), and that there is no differentiation for politeness levels in the pronominal systems (a true generalisation for pidgins but not a statistically significant tendency in creoles). In her analyses, Velupillai is conscious of the danger of overgeneralising in fitting languages, with their often ambiguous structures, into linguists' sometimes too-rigid grammatical categories, something she does especially well in her discussion of Gullah.

The writing style of the book is clear and easy to follow, with most linguistic jargon explained both in the text itself and in the comprehensive glossary at the end of the book. For a book of this length, and dealing with so many languages, there are remarkably few typos. One striking problem is with the language map on page 294, where the numbers on the map do not match up with the numbered list under the map. A more entertaining typo is on page 419, where we are told that 'a number of Solomon Islanders were enrolled in forces and corpses in World War II'.

Besides the discussion mentioned above of Malay as a general lingua franca in colonial German New Guinea, I noticed only one other small detail that was factually inaccurate: speaking about Gullah, page 116 states that slavery was abolished in the United States in 1808. Sadly, this was only the year when the importation of slaves from overseas was outlawed, and American slavery was only completely abolished at the end of the American Civil War in 1865. This is, however, not germane to Velupillai's assertion that the Gullah-speaking area had linguistic input from African-born slaves trafficked illegally into the United States until the middle of the nineteenth century. Another detail that might cause misunderstanding is the statement on page 22 that Tok Pisin is now used as a medium of instruction in PNG schools. Not mentioned is the fact that this use is usually informal, with virtually no guidance on classroom use of Tok Pisin by the PNG Department of Education.

The layout of the book is appealing, making it easy for students to access information. The availability of a downloadable e-book version is particularly useful for students in Melanesia, where the delivery of hard copies of textbooks is often fraught with delays and 'disappearances'. One does however wonder why the price of the e-book version is the same as the soft cover version, when the printed version is much more expensive to produce and distribute. Does the e-book version subsidise the printed versions? More

disturbing is the one-price-for-the-entire-world policy of this and most other First World academic publishers. The price of €33 / K110 may represent two hours' work in Amsterdam or New York, but for the parents of many of our students in Melanesia it is an entire month's income. Surely, linguistic publishers such as John Benjamins do have a duty to provide more assistance to the societies where so much of their authors' data come from. One way would be to encourage linguistic study in countries such as ours by selling at least their e-book texts at a more realistic price when downloaded in regions such as Melanesia. Pricing issues aside, this book is a welcome addition to texts for use in PNG linguistics classes. It would be most applicable after students have already had a basic introduction to linguistics. In a PNG university linguistics course the book could easily be spread out over two classes, one an introductory class on pidgin-creole studies and one a more advanced class examining issues of typology and structure. Velupillai set out to provide a well-organised state of the art introductory textbook for use in many different countries, incorporating APiCS and other recent data and demonstrating how the scientific method can be used by linguists. She has accomplished this goal.

### References

- Dryer, Matthew S. & Haspelmath, Martin (eds.). 2013. World Atlas of Language Structures (WALS Online). Leipzig: Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology. <http://wals.info> (5 October, 2015).
- Michaelis, Susanne Maria & Maurer, Philippe & Haspelmath, Martin & Huber, Magnus (eds.) 2013. Atlas of Pidgin and Creole Language Structures Online. Leipzig: Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology. <http://apics-online.info> (5 October 2015).
- Velupillai, Viveka. 2012. An Introduction to Linguistic Typology. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Craig Alan Volker  
Divine Word University  
Madang, PNG  
[cvolker@dwu.ac.pg](mailto:cvolker@dwu.ac.pg)