Atlantic English Pidgin/Creole as a pluriareal language: an opportunity for regional and transatlantic cooperation

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Background

Previous research on Atlantic English-lexifier Pidgin/Creole (EP/C) as a pluriareal language as opposed to a pluricentric one:
- Pluricentric languages
- Occurrence in at least two nations, official status, taught in schools, linguistic distance, etc. (Clyne 1992:1; Muhr 2012:30).
- Pluriareal languages
- Focus on linguistic differences in these language forms independent of national and political borders (Niehaus 2015; Elspaß et al. 2017).

Shared structures of Atlantic EP/Cs (Alleyne 1980; Holm 1988-1989; Holm & Patrick 2007; Michaelis et al. 2013; Mühleisen 2018; etc.)
- However, it is possible to go far beyond this and actually speak of worldwide EP/C features (Faraclas et al. 2019, building on previous work, compiled a total of 153 features; see also Faraclas 2022).

Possible common origin as well as physical, cultural, and increasingly virtual diaspora (cf. McWhorter 1997; Mair, Mühleisen & Pirker 2015)
➤ The idea of mutual intelligibility of Atlantic EP/Cs
➤ Will mutual intelligibility hold when it comes to writing, a key element for languagehood, and thence eventually passing from a pluriareal to a pluricentric language?
➤Writing, in the Western and now universal tradition, is fundamental for "languagehood" and "language making" (cf. Bartens 2022; Krämer et al. 2022).

Study on the mutual intelligibility of Atlantic EP/Cs and the acceptability of a common writing system

Online survey
- conducted from June 15, 2019, until Oct. 9, 2019, via the platform purdue.ca1.qualtrics.com
- audio clips of Ghanaian, Nigerian, Jamaican, and Sranan EP/C
- total respondents 56

Interviews
- 20 interviews conducted in Guyana in Oct. 2019 with informants representing eight different nationalities and residing in the country at the time.

Reading comprehension and translation task
- goal: mitigating the caveats of self-report of intelligibility arising from the dependence on language attitudes
- University students in Guyana (24) and Ghana (10), Dec. 2020
- control group of 17 Finnish university students (UTU), spring semester 2021
- eight text samples from different EP/Cs
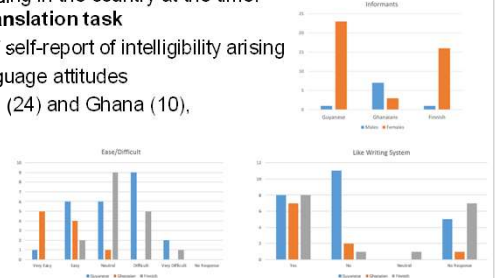
Reading comprehension and translation task questions

- What is the name of this language?
- What was the excerpt about?
- Rewrite the first two lines in English.
- List five words that you would have written differently in your language, indicating how they are represented in your EP/C.
- List five words that you found to be the most difficult to understand.
- Rate how easy/difficult it is for you to understand the paragraph (1: Very Easy – 5: Very Difficult)
- Do you like this writing system; why (not)?

Key findings of the AEP/C mutual intelligibility studies

The attitudes towards a common writing system were relatively positive as, e. g., 48/51 of the participants in the online survey (total number of respondents 56) and 13/20 of the interviewees expressed themselves favorably.

Writing systems and, *mutatis mutandis*, languages similar to one's own were usually liked, meaning that if, for example, a text passage was incomprehensible, the writing system was not liked, either. For example, Jamaican being similar to Creolese (Guyanese) was appreciated by the Gyanese students who participated in the reading comprehension and translation study.

➤Geographic, cultural, and linguistic proximity explains mutual identification and perceived intelligibility as well as liking determined writing systems within the Caribbean on the one hand and the West African region on the other.

Familiarity with Nollywood and Jamaican culture, especially reggae
➤Naija and Jamaican EP/C are better known and taken as representative of West Africa and the Caribbean, respectively.

Sranan constituted a variety difficult to identify and understand for all test groups.

Exceptions to the applicability of a common writing system are inevitable.

Note also the iconic letter of the Krio alphabet {ɛ} and {ɔ}.

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Discussion

Writing anchors a community in its social, historical, religious, and political context (cf. Lüpke 2018: 129).

In the case of Atlantic EP/Cs, it also signals a cluster of pluriareal languages is on its way to a pluricentric one.

Caribbean EP/Cs already now draw upon each other and especially Jamaican for orthographic solutions, claiming ownership of language through this medium.
➤ English is included to a certain extent in this process of creating *ausbau* through *abstand* (Kloss 1967) from English (and for Central American EP/Cs also Spanish).

Assuming Atlantic – or at least Western Caribbean EP/C – gained acceptance as a pluriareal language, this might solve some of the LPP (Language Policy and Planning) issues at hand.

Example: sharing educational materials and resources, e.g.
➤ **Textbooks to be used by different communities, maybe with minimal adaptations.**
  cf. Papiamentu vs. Papiamento textbooks of Curaçao-Bonaire vs. Aruba.
➤ **Joint online courses at the university level.**
➤ **South-South exchange programs.**

Acknowledgements

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