Derek Bickerton, *Dynamics of a Creole System*. Cambridge, CUP, 1975, pp. vii + 224.

In his introductory article to *Pidginization and Creolization of Languages* (Hymes ed. 1971:29), David DeCamp has this to say of the Jamaican linguistic continuum:-

> Each Jamaican speaker commands a span of this continuum, the breadth of the span depending on the breadth of his social activities; a labor leader, for example, can command a greater span of varieties than can a sheltered housewife of suburban middle class. A housewife may make a limited adjustment downward on the continuum in order to communicate with a market woman and the market woman may adjust upward when she talks to the housewife . . . but the fact is that the housewife's broadest dialect may be closer to the standard end of the spectrum than is the market woman's standard.

The problem of how to describe the linguistic varieties existing in such a situation is one which has been occupying a growing number of linguists in recent years. While some have concerned themselves mainly with the social and cultural aspects of the continuum, others have attempted to make use of the Transformational-Generative framework in order to find a more 'linguistic' solution. Derek Bickerton, the author of the book under review, is one of the latter and his book represents the most comprehensive and at the same time the most rigorous attempt to date to discover the 'linguistic rules' which underlie one such continuum.

The 'creole system' in question is the Guyanese continuum which the author chooses to describe as 'a single, if non-homogeneous unit' (p.14). Thus, he rejects both Labov's variable rules and DeCamp's implicational scale, designed to generate discrete dialects. As he points out, a co-existent systems-model is inappropriate to this situation, for 'not only are there forms which span both the putative systems, but also intermediate forms which cannot properly be assigned to either' (p.12). Besides, he feels that even if the earlier models can account for speaker competence, they cannot account for hearer competence since the members of the speech community understand all the varieties though few can produce all of them. The solution he proposes is a polylectal grammar of the community to which each individual's grammar is related.

The 'system' is dynamic because, for him, it mirrors linguistic change in progress. That is, the different speech varieties reflect different stages in the process of decreolization all of which are simultaneously present. For purposes of description, three 'segments' are identified:-

1 the *basilect*, represented by the 'broad' creole varieties spoken by uneducated East Indians in remote country villages.

2 the *acrolect*, represented by those varieties closest to Standard English spoken by highly educated urban Negroes.

3 the *mesolect*, represented by the intermediate and wide-ranging varieties stretching between the two extremes just mentioned.

Bickerton bases his treatment on the assumption that the basilect represents an early stage in creole development, comprising as it does those forms which are furthest removed from Standard English. He goes on to claim that the rules from which the basilectal forms are derived are also those which form the base of the continuum as a whole. These rules undergo successive modifications to account for the replacement or adaptation of original forms and the acquisition of new ones.

The development from the basilectal stage to the acrolectal is illustrated by a detailed study of the verb phrase. At the basilectal end of the continuum, the relevant division of predicates is into [+ stative] and [- stative]. The bare verb stem signifies 'past' with non-statives and 'non-past' with statives. For determining the system that that governs the use of the realis markers *a, bin, bina* the relevant parameters are given as [± anterior], [± punctual]. During the mesolectal stage radical changes take place; for example, a straight past/non-past time distinction is gradually introduced. As the acrolectal stage is approached non-English forms and patterns give way to English ones.

Unlike the case with Labov's studies, the emphasis here is on the individual rather than the social group. For though it certainly appears that in each social group there is a great deal of invariant patterning, this is also true of the speech of individuals despite the variability of the latter. The fact is that each individual creates his own 'rule-system' and one man's invariant feature may be another's variable feature. Yet the individual is of interest to Bickerton only insofar as his grammar relates to that of the community. It is the grammar which is the author's immediate concern, not the question of determining the social and cultural correlates of variables.

This concern to have neat rules takes him into the realm of speculation. For example, he argues that *don* which does not fit into the neat scheme he proposes to explain the use of the basilectal verbal markers is really an unintegrated late arrival from Africa. This, of course, cannot easily be proved or disproved and the case is well prepared. It is pointed out that in situations where, unlike the Guyanese one, the integration of *don* has not been cut short by decreolization, the form can co-occur with other markers.

This has happened in Belize (formerly British Honduras) creole just as it has in Krio and Weskos which he cites. The existing linguistic situation in the Central American territory is such that decreolization is comparatively little advanced. The combinatory power of *don* is certainly stronger than in Jamaican creole (from which it largely derives) and apparently, too, judging from Bickerton's own examples, than in Guyanese creole. This is illustrated by the following extracts from interviews with two Belizean schoolgirls:-

(1) dem hea somadi drap out a di bed an a shii mi stif an ded; i mi don ded aredi.

'They heard someone fall off the bed and it was she (who) was stiff and dead; she was already quite dead.'

(2) i se: 'mi don gaan fu mi tingz ya aredi an a don di kuk'

'He said: "I have already gone for my things here and I have finished cooking."'

The latter example includes the only case of *don* occurring with the *di* [-punctual] marker in data collected from over two hundred informants. The combination of *don* with *mi* the [+ anterior] marker is, however, quite common. These two examples support the evidence mentioned by Bickerton in footnote 12 (p.50). In this instance, however, both girls spoke creole as a first 'language' though they lived in Cayo District and their creole was such as would be considered 'hispanicized' by natives of Belize City.

The additional claim that clause-final *don* is historically older than the pre-verbal use of the form falls into the same category as the other. Whether or not one believes that the occurrence of clause-final markers of similar function in creoles from other areas and the report of a similar shift in Neo-Melanesian are evidence that we are here dealing with a 'natural' process depends on one's Faith. It is a fact, however, that forms of similar function used in *both* pre-verbal and clause-final positions were not unknown in West African languages, e.g. Twi (Christaller 1875:135). What adds support to Bickerton's argument, however, is the fact that I have found no examples of clause-final *don* in Belize Creole, though pre-verbal *don* is common. As has been pointed out, in this creole - at least in some varieties of it - *don* can combine with other verbal markers. To quote from the text:-

> If the predictions of wave theory are correct, then at some as-yet undetermined date one of the West African pidgins or creoles added the *don*-rule to its grammar in this form. (i.e. clause-finally)
>
> . . . subsequently modified the rule to permit pre-verbal insertion, then dropped the clause-final insertion and generalised the rule to permit tense-aspect combination. (p.55)

There is further evidence that the presentation of a neat picture is what really matters to Bickerton. Why else would he have represented *bina* as a single unit despite his admission of the fact that it is really a combination of *bin* the [+ anterior] marker and *a* the [- punctual] marker? The result is a tidy schema (p.47) illustrating the relevant parameters for the basilectal system of verbal markers but the parallel between this form and ones of similar function and meaning in other creoles is ever so slightly obscured in the process. In Dominican creole, for example, in identical circumstances a speaker would use *te ka* which, too, is a combination of the [+ anterior] and [- punctual] markers.

One may also wonder how far the ordering of the linguistic rules really reflects the chronological development of these rules. Even if, as far as the verb phrase is concerned, the claim that forms furthest removed from Standard English are historically the oldest is valid, this cannot apply everywhere in the system. To give a fairly trivial counter-example, hypercorrected forms, which one assumes are a common feature of mesolectal varieties, are of more recent origin than their basilectal counterparts and yet are likely to be further removed than these from Standard English. Of course, whether or not one considers one form to be further removed than another from Standard English may depend entirely on one's criteria. Bickerton does not specify his. Nor does he need to in the particular instances he is here considering.

It could very well be that in Guyana two forms of parallel function but traceable to different sources, for example, one English another African, were both in use from the very early stages of the creole, i.e. before the decreolization process began. Such a situation does occur in Dominican creole which lost all direct contact with Standard French well over a century ago. In expressions of comparison one finds both:-

(a) *pli* 'more' + Adjective + *ki* 'than' (cf. French), and

(b) Adjective + *pase* 'pass' (cf. West African languages)

Yet the use of the structure less removed from Standard French cannot be considered to be the effect of decreolization without some modification of that concept.

Bickerton's conviction that grammar is necessarily independent of social context is perhaps unfortunate. It recalls others' insistence on the necessary independence of grammar from semantics. The fact that we are, in the present state of knowledge, unable to predict the effect that social context may have on a speaker's usage is surely no reason for believing that this cannot be 'rule-governed' or that linguistic rules are best understood in isolation?

However, the claims that the evidence presented in the book indicates the necessity for a more dynamic view of language and a re-definition of 'linguistic system' are amply justified. So too is the statement calling for a wider definition of 'competence'. For, in the first place, it is convincingly demonstrated that what is represented in the Guyanese continuum are neither discrete 'languages' nor discrete 'dialects'; secondly, that speakers born within the 'system' all have at least a passive knowledge of the whole range of varieties.

Finally, it must be said that the onus now rests on others to confirm or refute Bickerton's hypotheses. For his book not only provides valuable detailed information about a specific linguistic situation but is above all a challenge to all who are involved in the attempt to understand language variation.

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