



The Emergence of Hybrid Grammars: Language Contact and Change (Cambridge Approaches to Language Contact)

By Enoch Oladé Aboh

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Children are extremely gifted in acquiring their native languages, but languages nevertheless change over time. Why does this paradox exist? In this study of creole languages, Enoch Aboh addresses this question, arguing that language acquisition requires contact between different linguistic sub-systems that feed into the hybrid grammars that learners develop. There is no qualitative difference between a child learning their language in a multilingual environment and a child raised in a monolingual environment. In both situations, children learn to master multiple linguistic sub-systems that are in contact and may be combined to produce new variants. These new variants are part of the inputs for subsequent learners. Contributing to the debate on language acquisition and change, Aboh shows that language learning is always imperfect: learners' motivation is not to replicate the target language faithfully but to develop a system close enough to the target that guarantees successful communication and group membership.

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Editorial Review

Review

"Enoch Aboh's book is a tour de force as it weaves together painstakingly documented history, novel and reliable empirical bases and elegant theoretical analyses in order to draw a fascinating and often profoundly satisfying scenario of Creole formation. Such a scenario will enliven and enlighten current debates in Creole studies. Aboh raises the bar by many notches - way above the quality level of most other hypotheses on the market. This book is a delight as it takes us up close and personal to the theater of Creole formation, from Africa to the Americas ... original and insightful ... This book is a refreshing contribution to Creole studies and beyond, with many enriching insights for linguistic theory and for theories of language contact and language change writ large. Bravo!"

Michel DeGraff, Massachusetts Institute of Technology

"In this extremely well-argued volume Aboh does two things. He argues convincingly against the imperfect second-language learning hypothesis of creole formation. He then provides a host of arguments for the competition-and-selection hypothesis with the help of creole languages, Saramaccan and Haitian, colonial languages, French and English, and African Gbe languages."

Norval Smith, University of Amsterdam

"Aboh offers compelling yet challenging arguments for the non-exceptionalism of creoles and presents the most vigorous defense of the competition and selection hypothesis."

James Essegbey, University of Florida

"This book is a major contribution to Creolistics and language change in general. Its main strength is the tight link between socio-historical analysis and a linguistic theory of the emergence of creoles. The historical part presented in Chapter 2 is undoubtedly an important contribution to the field. The number and quality of the quoted historical sources are impressive. [Aboh] knows West Africa and he is able to interpret the historical sources in a way that makes sense to the reader. Undoubtedly, being a speaker of (some) Gbe languages helped the author in his comparison of Gbe and Haitian/Saramaccan. There are plenty of examples and the analyses are very precise, up to the standards expected for the study of better-known languages such as English or French. The presentation of the theory (Feature Pool Hypothesis) is clear and precise and the contrast with other competing theories is grounded."

Emmanuel Schang, Linguist List

About the Author

Enoch O. Aboh is Professor of Linguistics at the University of Amsterdam. His publications include *The Morphosyntax of Complement-head Sequences* (2004). In 2012 he was awarded the renowned one-year NIAS fellowship, and in 2003 he obtained the prestigious Dutch Science Foundation (NWO) five-year vidi grant to study the relation between information structure and syntax.

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