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Is Kamtok a Variety of English or a Language in its Own Right?

INTRODUCTION

Although some writers, teachers – perhaps even scholars – continue to describe both pidgin languages and dialectal varieties of English as impoverished communication systems whose users should strive to embrace features of the related standard language in order to avoid stigmatization, such names as “bush English,” “Pidgin English” and “uneducated English” are no longer widely applied. Contact languages, like Cameroon’s Kamtok, may still not be accorded the status they deserve as fully-functioning mother tongues, capable of fulfilling the linguistic needs of their speakers but a growing number of their users are not only struggling to empower their status but are also questioning whether the classification of “Pidgin(ised) Englishes” is appropriate. In this paper it is claimed that Kamtok, like most West African contact languages or the so-called West African Pidgin Englishes, is not only a fully developed language in its own right, but that, given its language-specific dynamics that are often systematically different from those of English, it may be time to question whether it is even a variety of English in spite of the lexical overlap between the two languages. Although the general assumption that pidgins and creoles are varieties of their European lexifiers is deeply rooted in the famous imperfect second language learning theory widely acclaimed in creolistic literature (see, for instance, Jespersen 1922; Hall 1966; Samarin 1971; Mufwene 2001; and Siegel 2008), the evolutionary trajectory of Kamtok, the footprints of different languages in its linguistic system, its typology and its possible unintelligibility to speakers of English without any knowledge of West African realities strongly suggest that it is, in fact, misleading to continue considering the language as a variety of English, as is claimed, for instance, in Ubanako (2008). If the language has to be considered a dialect of any language for whatever reasons, it should be considered a composite dialect of all the languages that came together during and after its formative

period, especially languages that are currently leaving indelible footprints at all linguistic levels in its linguistic structures.

ARE PIDGINS AND CREOLES DIALECTS OF THEIR LEXIFIERS?

The general tendency to reduce pidgins and creoles to varieties of their European lexifiers is not unique to Kamtok; such a tendency has its roots in the imperfect second language theory of genesis which claims that these categories of contact languages, in part, result from the unchecked mistakes of non-native speakers of superstratal languages. But the fact that there is a proliferation of opposing theories of pidgins and creoles genesis is a clear indication that many scholars do not embrace the assumptions inherent in this theory in order to account for the origin and nature of contact languages. It should be noted that no single theory of genesis can account for the origin and nature of all pidgins and creoles, including Kamtok. In the case of most West African contact languages, their origin and nature cannot be entirely accounted for without reference to such theories as the relexification theory and the substratal essence. A consideration of these two theories in the attempt to determine the status of West African contact languages implies that if these contact languages have to be reduced to language varieties, they should be considered as varieties of Portuguese and those of West African substratal languages. This is because the relexification theory suggests that most of the world's pidgins and creoles originated from a Portuguese-based pidgin that came into existence in West Africa in the XVth century and the substratal essence is rooted in the claim that pidgins and creoles result from a mixing of the lexicon of the superstratal languages and the "grammars" of the substratal languages. This implies that any attempt to reduce contact languages to language varieties on the basis of some theories of genesis is likely to result in a situation where the contact languages may be seen as varieties of all the languages that have left footprints in their linguistic systems.

Naming contact languages in terms of their European lexifiers can give the impression that they do not merit the status of fully-fledged languages. Such names as West African Pidgin Englishes, Caribbean English Creoles, Hawaiian Creole English, and Mauritian Creole French, in fact, reduce these contact languages to mere varieties of some of their European lexifiers and also give the impression that their language-specific dynamics cannot be appreciated independently, without reference to the so-called superstratal languages. Such names also ignore the linguistic inputs from the other lexifier

languages. For instance, the so-called Cameroon Pidgin English, which has been renamed “Kamtok,” has linguistic inputs from four different European languages (Portuguese, German, English and French), from at least one creolized language, namely Krio, and from many indigenous mother-tongue Africans spoken in Cameroon and beyond. Describing the language as “Cameroon Pidgin English” ignores both the inputs from these languages as well as its language-specific dynamics that are significantly different from those of English. The following observation made by Mühlhäusler’s further shows the misleading nature of the names often assigned to contact languages:

Pidgins [and creoles] are classified and often defined as being based on a principal lexifier language, typically the language spoken by the socially dominant group. Two objections can be labeled against this view (for a more discussion of this issue, see Walsh 1984). As pointed out by Dennis and Scott (1975: 2), “we will avoid calling the creoles ‘English-based’ or ‘Portuguese-based’ and so on, since we can see no grounds for deciding that the lexicon is the base of the language, as opposed to the semantic-syntactic framework of the language.” The second objection is that the mixed or compromised character of pidgin lexicons is typically ignored. (Mühlhäusler: 1997 5)

As pointed out in the above quotation, contact languages and the European languages used to name the former share mainly a lexical relationship whereas their other linguistic levels such as phonology, syntax, morphology and semantics are often ignored, as if they were not as important as the lexical level. In addition, the other lexifier languages (European, creolised and African languages) are barely considered, inadvertently giving the impression that the linguistic inputs from these languages are insignificant.

Emphasizing the lexical inputs from only one of the lexifiers of pidgins and creoles to the exclusion of the other lexifiers has helped to generate mixed feelings towards these contact languages, in that many of their speakers (and some scholars) seem unable to decide whether their languages are fully autonomous or merely dialects. It is not surprising when Egbokhare makes the following observation about the situation of the so-called Nigerian Pidgin English:

There is some controversy surrounding the status of NP [Nigerian Pidgin English] as a language. At one extreme, there are those who see NP as simply a “broken” and “bastardised” form of English which is best left alone.

A second view sees NP as a variety of the English language among the “world Englishes.” Yet a third view sees NP as a language of its own in spite of its relationship with English and its substratum. (Egbokhare: 2003 23)

In spite of the conflicting views about the status of pidgins and creoles as independent languages or dialects of their European lexifier, many linguists do not doubt the status of these contact languages as systems of communication that do not need to depend on other languages to be self-contained. Holm, for instance, argues that

[t]heir systems are so different, in fact, that they can hardly be considered as even dialects of their base language. They are new languages, shaped by many of the same linguistic forces that shaped English and other “proper” languages. (Holm: 1988 1)

With reference to English based pidgins and creoles, Todd (1990), like Holm (1988), argues that

[p]idgin and creole Englishes have arisen in multilingual areas where speakers of English have come into contact with speakers of languages which are structurally very different, where English has been so influenced by the other languages that the grammar of the pidgin which emerges is not just a simplified grammar of English or a simplified version of the grammar of the other languages. It is not even a common denominator grammar of the contact languages. Rather, the grammar of creoles and extended pidgins are a restructuring of the grammars that interacted. A grapefruit has much in common with oranges and lemons but its taste is uniquely its own. (Todd: 1990 9)

Todd’s argument, captured in the above quotation, is that the linguistic systems of pidgins and creoles are not even the simplified versions of the linguistic systems that came together during the formative period; in her opinion, the different linguistic systems of the different lexifiers produced a “grammar” that bears little or no resemblance to any of the languages that “interacted” during and after the contacts that led to their creation.

Is **KAMTOK** IN A DIALECTAL CONTINUUM WITH **ENGLISH**?

This paper claims that Kamtok is a fully autonomous language, and not a variety of English. Apart from the fact that some schools of thought actually consider the language as the error system or the basilectal variety of Cameroon English (see Ubanako 2008), the name “Cameroon Pidgin English,” used by many authors to refer to this language (see, for instance, Ayafor: 1996, 2004, 2006; Kouega: 2001, 2008; Schröder: 2003; Sala & Ngefac: 2006; Echu: 2007; and Sala: 2009), can have the effect of reducing the status of the language to a pidginized or impoverished variety of English, as argued above. Contrary to such a view, this paper considers the evolutionary trajectory of the language, which brings into the limelight the impact of other European languages and Krio on the structure of the language, the footprints of different indigenous languages in its linguistic spectrum, its typology and the intelligibility factor to argue the thesis that Kamtok is a fully autonomous language.

The complex evolutionary journey of Kamtok and the impact of other lexifier languages

A detailed examination of Kamtok allows us to illustrate the impact of other languages including Portuguese, English, German, Dutch, French and, perhaps most significantly of all, Krio. If a lexical correlation implies a dialectal relationship between languages, then Kamtok can be said to be in a dialectal relationship with the different several languages that have had an impact on the language from the time it started its evolutionary journey in the XVth century until today. A diachronic overview of Kamtok suggests that an embryonic communication system as a Portuguese Pidgin began in the late XVth century when the Portuguese had their first recorded contacts with the coastal people of Cameroon. This Portuguese Pidgin seems to have begun receiving English linguistic inputs only as late as the end of the XVIIIth and early XIXth centuries, when the British became a dominant force on the West African coast (see Mbassi-Manga: 1976, Mbangwana: 1983, Huber: 1999, Wolf: 2001 and Egbokhare: 2003). The prevalence of Portuguese Pidgin on the West African coast, including Cameroon, for more than three centuries and the significant presence of Portuguese Pidgin structures in what is now referred to as Kamtok suggest that the impact of Portuguese is significant in any consideration of Kamtok’s origins. Some of Kamtok’s most frequently used items owe their origin to Portuguese:

dash < *dar*, meaning “give money, tip.” The OED has a 1,705 reference to *dashee*, “tip.”

Palava < Portuguese *palavra*, meaning “speech, talk.”

pikin < derived from *pequeno* meaning “small, little.”

savi < *saber*, meaning “know, knowledge, know how to.”

In the light of elements of Kamtok’s core vocabulary coming from Portuguese, should Kamtok be considered a variety of Portuguese? It would seem foolish to classify it in such a way!

Furthermore, Kamtok lexicon includes many lexical items, either borrowed from German or at least strongly reinforced by German cognates, because of the German colonial administration that started in 1884 and ended in 1916. Weber (2010) reports the following lexical items and expressions that may well have been borrowed from German into Kamtok with or without significant modifications:

bik- broda (derived from German *großer Bruder*) “elder brother”

smol-broda (derived from German *kleiner Bruder*) “younger brother”

kini (derived from German *Knie*) “knee”

gut apitait (derived from German *Guten Appetit*) “enjoy your meal”

kukuru (derived from German *Kukuruz*) “corn pap”

magi (derived from German *Maggi*) “German spice”

suka/shuga (derived from German *Zucker*) “sugar”

kombi (derived from German *Kumpel*) “friend, colleague”

shwain (derived from German *Schwein*) “pig, swine”

kasingo (derived from German *Kaisers Peitsche*) “cane, whip”

midro-wok (derived from German *Mittwoch*) “Wednesday”

mon en (derived from German *Monatsende*) “end-of-month”

tosilam (derived from German *Taschenlampe*) “torch”

(Weber: 2010 http://www.inst.at/trans/17Nr/2-3/2-3_weber17.htm)

In addition to the above examples, she provides many other linguistic influences of German on Kamtok inherited from German as a result of the German colonial administration in Cameroon (see Weber: 2010). Should Kamtok be considered a variety of German because the two languages share a lexical relationship? Again, this would seem unreasonable!

French, like Portuguese, English and German, has significant inputs in the linguistic system of Kamtok because of their co-existence at different historical points. Besides the fact that French now enjoys a renewed contact

with Kamtok because of its status as a co-official language of Cameroon, the two languages coexisted for many decades during the Franco-British colonial administration which started in 1922, after the defeat of Germany in World War I and ended in 1960, when French Cameroon gained her independence, and in 1961 when British Cameroon voted in a plebiscite to unite with the newly independent French Cameroon. This co-existence of French and Kamtok at different historical points has left indelible linguistic footprints in the system of Kamtok at different linguistic levels. Mbangwana (1983 82) and Todd (n.d.) provide a long list of French lexical items in Kamtok. But what is more interesting is the fact that the impact of French is not felt only at the lexical level; other linguistic levels have equally experienced significant influences from French and this explains why French Kamtok is one of the main varieties of this language. Should Kamtok be called “Cameroon Pidgin French” because of the significant impact of French on the language at different linguistic levels? Certainly not!

The above evidence suggests that English is not the only European language that shares a lexical relationship with Kamtok; the complex evolutionary itinerary of the language has made it possible for other European languages to leave their marks on it. Admittedly, the lexical influence from English is considerably larger than the impact from the other European languages, but large numbers of borrowings do not constitute a reason for naming a language. Standard English is classified as a Germanic, not a Romance language, even though its vocabulary owes much to Latin and French. We can illustrate this point clearly if we examine the word origins of the 80,000+ words in the *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*. According to Manfred Scheler in *Der Englische Wortschatz* (Berlin: 1977), Anglo-Saxon only accounts for 22.5% of the total vocabulary, whereas French and Latin have contributed 55%. Of course, such statistics are only one element in a discussion into how a language should be labeled but they are a warning against over-facile classifications. If we do not label Standard English a Romance language, we should not automatically assume that Kamtok is a form of English. The significant presence of linguistic items from different European languages in Kamtok suggests that if the language has to be reduced to a language variety simply because of a lexical relationship, then it should be considered a variety of all the European languages that have influenced the structure of the language at different historical points.

The impact of Krio

Before assessing the extensive impact of the indigenous languages on Kamtok, it is worth evaluating the influence of XIXth century Sierra Leoneans. Many speakers of Krio were among the Christian missionaries who established their base near Victoria (now Limbe) in Cameroon. These missionaries came via Fernando Po (now part of Equatorial Guinea). The vocabulary of Kamtok is even closer to Krio than it is to English, and this is most clearly illustrated in words and calques that do not come from English. In addition to the lexical links between the two languages, similarities are found at all other linguistic levels. Our examples come from the lexicons and the grammatical patterning:

Kamtok	Krio	Approximate equivalence	English
agbada	agbada	embroidered yoruba gown	
ashia	ɔ shya	ɪ empathise with you	
biabia	biabia	hair	
big ai	big ai	greed, greedy	big eye
buba	buba	blouse	
dei klin	dei klin	dawn, daybreak	day clean
drai ai	drai ai	bold, brazen	dry eye
fufu	fufu	pounded yam ? starch food	
egusi	egusi	melon seeds used in cooking	
mami wata	mami wata	female water spirit	mammy water

Lexical Similarities

Kamtok	Krio	Meaning
a drai	a drai	ɪ am thin
a di drai	a di drai	ɪ am getting thin
a bin drai	a bin drai	ɪ was thin
a bin di drai	a bin de drai	ɪ was getting thin

a d ɹ ŋ drai	a d ɹ n drai	rve got thin
a go drai	a go drai	i will be thin

The impact of the indigenous languages

In addition to the different influences from non-indigenous languages, Kamtok has received significant linguistic inputs from the local languages spoken in Cameroon (see Todd: 1979, Ayafor: 2004; Neba *et al.*: 2006; Sala & Ngefac: 2006; and Ngefac & Sala: 2006). Unlike European languages such as English whose impact on the language is mostly at the lexical level, the different linguistic levels of the language have been significantly influenced by the indigenous languages spoken in Cameroon and in neighbouring countries (see Sala & Ngefac: 2006 for lexical influences from Cameroon indigenous languages, Ayafor: 2004 for lexical influences from indigenous languages spoken beyond the frontiers of Cameroon, Neba *et al.*: for syntactic influences and Ngefac & Sala: 2006 for phonological influences). The fact that Kamtok receives significant influences from the indigenous languages at different linguistic levels, not just at the lexical level as is mostly the case with English, implies that if the language has to be reduced to a language variety, it should be considered a variety of these indigenous languages which have a greater impact on the linguistic system of the language than English.

The typology of Kamtok

When the linguistic differences between the typology of Kamtok and that of English is considered, one is likely to wonder why there should even be a debate about Kamtok's status as a fully-fledged language. The linguistic dynamics of the language at all linguistic levels are significantly dissimilar to English. Phonologically, both segmental and suprasegmental aspects of Kamtok are often different from those of English, and even from the indigenized Cameroon English that has undergone significant contextualization. Segmentally, such phonological processes as the palatalization of alveolars (e.g. [ɹwit] for "sweet"), pre-nasalization or nasalized consonant clusters (e.g. *mbanga* "palm kernels," *ndohti* "dirt, earth") the lateralization of consonants (e.g. *tilenja* "stranger," *dohkta* "doctor"), [b]-substitution tendency (e.g. *palaba* "palaver," *neba* "never"), are attestable in Kamtok, but not attestable in indigenized Cameroon English, which is also locally shaped. Supraseg-

mentally, tone, a phonological aspect of many Bantu languages, is a well rooted phenomenon in Kamtok, but not attestable in either SE or indigenized Cameroon English phonology. The following examples illustrate how tone is semantically distinctive in Kamtok:

<i>bàbá</i> “father”	<i>bábà</i> “barber”
<i>Chóhp-Chóhp</i> “proper name”	<i>chòhp-chóhp</i> “always eating”
<i>kòkò</i> “cocoyams”	<i>kókò</i> “cocoa”
<i>mòhní</i> “money”	<i>móhni</i> “casual good morning”
<i>tòhn-tòhn</i> “polite way of addressing an elderly person”	<i>tòhn-tóhn</i> “strolling”
<i>mǎmà</i> “pet name”	<i>màmá</i> “mother”
<i>pǎpà</i> “pet name”	<i>pàpà</i> “father”
<i>gò</i> “preverbal particle marking futurity”	<i>gó</i> “action verb”

The phonological evidence provided above indicates that Kamtok and English are, in certain ways, significantly different. Syntactically, Kamtok displays many features that are distinct from those of English, but, because of space constraint, only its verbal system will be considered in this paper to demonstrate how the syntactic system of the language differs from that of English. The verbal aspects of the language to be considered include its TMA (tense mood and aspect) and its copular system. As concerns its TMA system, it is worth pointing out that the way its categories of tense, mood and aspect are expressed is very different from what is obtained in English, but very similar to the TMA system of many creole languages, including Krio (1981). For instance, there are systematic preverbal particles that mark the anterior tense, the irrealis mood and the nonpunctual aspect, including the completive aspect that was not included in Bickerton’s (1981) prototypical creole core TMA system, as illustrated in the following examples:

- a) Anterior tense, e.g.
Ma pa bi chohp fufu yestade.
 POP CN1 ANT eat CN1 yesterday.
 “My father ate fufu (local meal) yesterday.”

- b) Irrealis mood, e.g.

Na wich de yu gò go Nigeria?
 EMP/I IP day 2PS IRR go Nigeria
 “When will you travel to Nigeria?”

c) Nonpunctual aspect, e.g.

A di/dè du ma homwohk.
 1PS npASP do POP homework.
 “I am doing my homework.”

d) Completive aspect, e.g.

Papa dohn kam.
 Father cASP come.
 “The father has come.”

Besides the fact that the TMA system of Kamtok is characterized by particles that all occur preverbally, the markers can be combined in a certain predictable manner, fairly similar to what obtains in Bickerton’s creole prototype model. The following combinatorial possibilities exist in Kamtok:

d) ANTERIOR TENSE + COMPLETIVE ASPECT, e.g.

Wi bi dohn ova sofa bifoh wa salari stat pas.
 4PS ANT cASP ADD suffer P POP salaries start pass
 “We had suffered a lot before our salaries started being paid.”

e) ANTERIOR TENSE + NONPUNCTUAL ASPECT, e.g.

Pita bi di soso hambok yi ticha dem.
 PN ANT npASP ADF disturb POP teachers PM
 “Peter was always disturbing his teachers.”

f) ANTERIOR TENSE + COMPLETIVE ASPECT + NON-PUNCTUAL ASPECT, e.g.

Ma pikin dem bi dohn di slip tam weh dia gran ma bi kam.
 POP children PM ANT cASP npASP sleep time RP POP ADJ mother
 ANT come.
 “My children were already sleeping at the time their grandmother came.”

g) IRREALIS MOOD + COMPLETIVE ASPECT + NONPUNCTUAL ASPECT, e.g.

In Mach a gò dohn di wohk fo Pohplik Sevis fo ten yias.
 P March 1PS IRR cASP npASP work LOC Public Service P ten years.
 “In March I should have served in the Public Service for ten years.”

With regard to the copular system of Kamtok, the language has three copular elements (“bi”, “de/di” and “na”) and none of them are attested in Cameroon English. The following examples illustrate:

A go bi haos tumoro.
1PS IRR COP house tomorrow
“I’ll be at home tomorrow.”

A bi kam tam weh Albertine no de haos.
1PS ANT come time RP PN NEG COP house
“I came when Albertine was not at home.”

Portugal na Waytman kohntri oh.
Portugal COP Whiteman country EMP
“Portugal is a country of White people.”

The above data offers evidence at the syntactic level of Kamtok that differentiates it from English.

The intelligibility factor

As suggested in the introduction of this paper, the intelligibility factor can also be considered to support the view that Kamtok does not share any dialectal relationship with English. A dialect is defined as the sum total of the phonological, syntactic, morphological and semantic characteristics of a given variety of a language spoken by a given speech community. It should necessarily be intelligible to speakers of other varieties of the same language in order not to be considered an autonomous language in its own rights. If a variety of a language ceases to be intelligible to speakers of other varieties of the same language, it implies that it is already an autonomous language. It is for this reason that such languages as Spanish, French, Catalan, Italian, Portuguese, and Romanian can no longer be considered varieties of Romance, given that there is complete absence of mutual intelligibility among speakers of these languages.

As concerns the intelligibility of Kamtok to speakers of English, there is no doubt that speakers of English from England or the United States who have not taken time to learn the different West African contact languages, including its sociocultural and pragmatic dynamics, are likely to perceive Kam-

tok as a completely different language, given that the intelligibility of this language is likely to be zero for such English speakers without a sound knowledge of Kamtok and the sociolinguistic realities of West Africa. In the same light, Standard British English or even “Standard Cameroon English” is likely to be completely unintelligible to Kamtok native speakers without any formal education. It should be noted that it is through the scholastic medium that Standard English is learned, but Kamtok is simply acquired, like Cameroon indigenous languages, and formal education is not a necessary prerequisite for a native-like competence. If the two languages were varieties of the same language, Kamtok speakers without formal education should not face any major difficulty understanding speakers of Standard English.

CONCLUSION

This paper has argued that Kamtok is a fully-fledged language that should not be regarded as a variety of English, in spite of the lexical relationship between the two languages. The claim is buttressed by different factors. First, there have been significant linguistic inputs from different languages that have helped to mould Kamtok during its complex evolution. Second, substratal inputs make the language closer to the indigenous languages than to its European lexifier languages. Third, the typology of the language at different linguistic levels is significantly different from that of English. Fourth, the fact that the language is not likely to be intelligible to speakers of English without a knowledge of West African realities is a further indication that the two languages are significantly different.

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APPENDIX

List of Abbreviations and Symbols

ACC	Adversative coordinating conjunction
AD	Adverb
ADD	Adverb of degree
ADF	Adverb of frequency
ADJ	Adjective
ADJV	Adjectival verb
AJ	Adjunct
ANT	Anterior
AP	Anaphoric pronoun
ART	Article
cASP	Completive aspect
CC	Coordinating conjunction
CN1	Singular common noun
CN2	Plural common noun
COP	Copular verb
dART	Definite article
DEM	Demonstrative article
DEO	Deontic modality
DET	Determiner
DO	Direct Object
EMP	Emphatic marker
EQ	Equative

HCE	Hawaiian Creole English
HPE	Hawaiian Pidgin English
I	Focus introducer
INTJ	Interjection
IO	Indirect object
IP	Interrogative pronoun
IRR	Irrealis
LOC	Locative
MOD	Mood or modality
npASP	Nonpunctual aspect
OBJ	Object
P PCs	Preposition Pidgins and creoles
PDET	Pre-determiner capable of a pronominal function
PM	Plural marker
PN1	Singular proper noun
PN2	Plural proper noun
PO	Objective pronoun
POP	Possessive pronoun
PS	Subjective Pronoun
REL	Relativizer
RP	Relative Pronoun
SC	Subordinating conjunction
SjM	Subjunctive mood
VIPs	Very important personalities

Symbols	
1	First Person singular Pronoun
2	Second person singular pronoun
3	Third person singular pronoun
4	First person plural pronoun
5	Second person plural pronoun
6	Third person plural pronoun

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