Reading and Writing Krio

Proceedings of a Workshop
Held at the Institute of Public Administration and
Management, University of Sierra Leone,
Freetown, 29—31 January, 1990

Edited by
Eldred D. Jones, Karl I. Sandred,
Neville Shrimpton
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Abstract

This volume contains eight papers which were delivered at a workshop organised to review the practical problems facing readers and writers of Krio, an English-oriented creole language which has its centre in Freetown, Sierra Leone. Besides being the mother tongue of a number of people, Krio serves as a lingua franca throughout the country and forms part of the linguistic group of related and mutually intelligible anglophone pidgins and creoles extending over parts of West Africa. Originally only a spoken language, Krio is now increasingly used in the national development in Sierra Leone. Thus, the papers focus on questions which are of special concern to people working in fields such as health, journalism, broadcasting, and education. Among the subjects dealt with are questions concerning dardisation, orthography, grammar, the introduction of Krio into the primary school curric and translating into Krio. The final article contains a brief report of an ongoing Krio research and publications project funded by SAREC and involving cooperation between researchers at Universities of Uppsala and Umeå in Sweden and the University of Sierra Leone in Freetown.

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Programme

MONDAY 29 JANUARY

9.00 a.m. Opening Statement by Professor Eldred D. Jones
Morning Session, Chairman: Eldred D. Jones
Ajayi Coomber: The New Krio Orthography and Some Unresolved Problems
11.00 a.m. Coffee Break
11.30 a.m. Julius Spencer: Factors Militating against the Easy Reading and Writing of Krio in the Theatre
1.00 p.m. Lunch
2.15 p.m. Afternoon Session, Chairman: Gipu Felix George
Raymond E. De-Souza George: Problems Relating to Reading from a Script (with Special Reference to Broadcasters, Actors and Other Readers)
3.45 p.m. Discussion

TUESDAY 30 JANUARY

9.00 a.m. Morning Session, Chairman: Alex C. Johnson
Eldred D. Jones: The Business of Translating into Krio
10.30 a.m. Coffee Break
11.00 a.m. Alex C. Johnson: Varieties of Krio and Standard Krio
12.30 p.m. Lunch
2.00 p.m. Afternoon Session, Chairman: Cecil M. Fyle
Eric Johnson: Problems Relating to the Publication of Krio Materials
3.30 p.m. Discussion

WEDNESDAY 31 JANUARY

9.00 a.m. Morning Session, Chairman: Alex C. Johnson
Karl I. Sandred: The Uppsala—Umeå—Freetown Krio Research and Publications Project: (1) Introduction
Neville Shrimpton: The Uppsala—Umeå—Freetown Krio Research and Publications Project: (2) The Production and Publication of Krio Texts
11.00 a.m. Coffee Break
11.30 a.m. Sulayman Njie: Gambian and Sierra Leonean Krio
12 noon Chairman: Eldred D. Jones
Final Discussion and Closing
1.00 p.m. Lunch
8.30 p.m. Dinner, The Lighthouse Restaurant, Aberdeen
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ALEX C. JOHNSON
Varieties of Krio and Standard Krio

1. Introduction

A variety is the technical term for a type of language identified by linguistic features on several levels which distinguish it from other types.\(^1\) The notion of variety is crucial for the study of language variation, and language variation has been a pre-occupation of sociolinguists, creolists, researchers into world varieties of English and all interested in the responsiveness of language to social, demographic and geographical realities.\(^2\) This paper examines the synchronic state of Krio from this perspective.

The notion of variety is not here coterminous with dialect as the term “dialect” would be inappropriate since it more accurately refers to varieties according to region and geographical location of users.\(^3\) In the case of Krio, this would account for only one aspect of a very complex situation.

Thus, there are varieties of the Krio language, and what we normally refer to as “Krio” is both the common core and the different variety realizations spoken around us. The varieties discussed below share a set of grammatical, phonological, lexical and contextual characteristics that constitute this common core on which the question of a standard turns.

A standard can be identified only for the written language in orthographic representation, grammar and vocabulary, but since Krio has only an incipient written tradition, the problem becomes difficult of resolution as the primacy of the spoken word exacerbates variation. The standardizing impact of the *Krio-English Dictionary*\(^4\) seems lost on our non-specialist writers and there is the need to promote a standard variety.

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\(^1\) This definition is after the neo-Firthians. Another expression of the notion in sociolinguistic terms occurs in Hudson, R.A., 1980, *Sociolinguistics*, Cambridge, p. 24: “What makes one variety of language different from another is the linguistic items that it includes, so we may define a variety of language as a set of linguistic items with similar social distribution”.

\(^2\) Pidgin and creole linguistics and the socio-linguistics of world varieties of English have produced a large number of books and journals in this area, See Jones, E.M.K., 1985, *Dialect and Other Varieties of Sierra Leone Krio*, a dissertation submitted for the degree of M.A. in English at Fourah Bay College, University of Sierra Leone, Freetown.

\(^3\) Other possible varieties are registers and stylistic variants, both not within the ambit of this paper.

In isolating varieties, each is marked by sets of indexical linguistic features of phonology, grammar and vocabulary. A convergence of these levels is preferred though a variety can be realized predominantly on one level. Notwithstanding this, for a variety to have a conclusive mode of existence and be considered seriously in the quest for a standard, a significant convergence of levels is essential.

2. Dimensions of Variety Differentiation

The often discussed dimensions of variation in Krio are the geographical (village, town, provincial, Fourah Bay), the temporal (age distinctions), the social class, and in terms of the mode of acquisition of the language.

2.1. The Geographical

Loosely interpreted, this can be said to relate to the demographic fact that the approximately 2% or 50,119 (1974), 64,403 (1985) of the Sierra Leone population who are native speakers of Krio live almost entirely in the Western Area. These Krio speakers have the social and temporal variants, and other usually attested types such as 'village', 'deep' and 'Aku' Krio. They could be considered as the users of the K₁ or native-speaker variant.

But the Western Area is host also to many Krio-speaking Sierra Leoneans with other Sierra Leonean languages as L₁ some of whom also, in infancy and childhood, have acquired Krio like native speakers alongside these languages. In addition, there are others who, though non-Krio in ethnic origins, because of their Western Area and/or westernized socialization experience, control only English and Krio. Other patterns of social behaviour are displayed by non-Krio Western Area indigenes who interact in the home, work, neighbourhood and other domains entirely in Krio.

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7. The Aku Krios are Mostems concentrated at Fourah Bay in the east end of Freetown and said to control a distinctive variant.
8. Diebold, A.R., 1961, "Incipient Bilingualism", *Language* 37: 97–112 describes this as "childhood acquisition of two or more native languages".
9. Due to social change this class of Krio users is growing.
For some of these groups, either the K₁ variety or the K₂, modified in phonetically and grammatically acceptable ways, could be considered their geographical variant. Thus in the first and third groups, this approximation of the K₁ variety varies with the length and degree of exposure to Krio, their educational and social background and, inevitably, the strength of native language interference. In the second group, there is the odd but not unusual situation of those born overseas and now domiciled in this area and those born locally but who somehow never acquired their parents’ native languages, all having only English and Krio. This when coupled with their social and educational background means a competence that is native-like.

We therefore find in the Western Area not one geographical “dialect” but a complex variety continuum among non-native speakers ranging from the most acrolectal, i.e. similar to and even identical with the native-speaker’s K₁, through the mesolects to the basilectal which is removed from, less close to the K₁, more L₁-influenced and untypical of the native speaker. Native speakers also show an acrolect-basilect contrast as will be presented later.¹⁰

Outside the Western Area, the provincial non-native users of Krio represent some two-thirds of the population and for them it is a lingua franca, technically a pidgin or contact language and their second, third, fourth language.¹¹ This is a multilingual geographical setting with the interference phenomenon being the crucial factor. Correlating setting and variant presents us with the usually attested K₂ or non-native variety, which is predominantly mesolectal and basilectal in terms of the K₁, as it contains those features of the L₁ which have different degrees of acceptability. The complexity of Krio variety differentiation on this dimension is therefore obvious.

2.2. Acquisition Pattern

Given the multilingual setting of Sierra Leone and the use of Krio as the national lingua franca, the conditions under which Krio is acquired are relevant to variety differentiation. The parallel acquisition of Krio and other Sierra Leonean languages in the Western Area and its acquisition alongside or after

¹⁰ The terms acrolect, mesolect and basilect are used here with reference to the extent to which a variety approximates to the most prestigious normative type where a continuum may be said to exist; in this case the acro-, meso- and basilect are stated in order of decreasing degree of prestige. Hence for K₂, the acrolect is the social class variant which tends towards English and the basilect the mainstream variant. For K₁, speech, the acrolect is the variant which approximates to that of the native-speaker, not English. The mesolect represents shades between this acrolect and the basilect, the latter being the variant furthest removed from the native-speaker norm.

¹¹ See Johnson A.C. 1983 and 1989 for estimates of the proportion of the Sierra Leone population who use Krio. Cf. note 6 above.
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English is such a reality of socialization in this setting that the distinction between native K, and non-native K, in the identification of varieties has to be approached with care. It is also clear however that where Krio is learnt as a second or third language and interference features are not refined out, the ensuing variety will necessarily be quite unlike the native speaker’s.

2.3. The Temporal

This dimension relates to the putative variety differentiation according to age and is a distinction exclusive to native speakers. The older generation of Krio speakers, variously 60+ or 70+, and who are usually, though not exclusively, largely found in the villages, are associated with features not found among young people. The question is whether these are enough, convergent and with a high degree of occurrence to allow a discrete and attestable type.

2.4. The Social “Class” Dimension

On this dimension, the main determining factors are educational background, social standing and exposure to English and, to some extent, wealth. These point to an incipient decretalizing situation. The Krio aristocratic class and intelligentsia of the colonial era may have now been diluted, eclipsed and largely neutralized with continued social change, but their tendencies survive in the linguistic behaviour of the new “middle class” who with education, continued exposure to English, use of English in informal domains, and a readiness to allow code-mixing and interference show attitudes that are at once linguistic and sociolinguistic. This tendency is now institutionalized and appears to be spread both vertically and horizontally with education, and the variety is realized in the features discussed below.

These dimensions of variation, individually and when they intersect or converge, condition the attested varieties in modern Krio. There is however the question of whether each variant exists. Is there conclusive linguistic evidence in the form of overt indexical linguistic features and their frequency of occurrence in current usage among the groups controlling such varieties?

3. Indexical Linguistic Features of Varieties

The Krio native speaker’s variant has the common core features of grammar, vocabulary and phonology from which all others can be shown to diverge. The Krio-English Dictionary provides a reference point for the lexicon; native
speaker intuition is the yardstick for the grammar in judging what is grammatically acceptable in the absence of a published grammar or dictionary of usage. For phonology, the phonemes can be represented orthographically as follows:

Vowels:       i e e a o u
Diphthongs:   ay aw oy
Consonants:   p b t d k g kp gb m
              n ng ny j ch f v th s
              z sh zh h r l w y

There are seven pure vowels or monophthongs, three diphthongs and twenty-six consonant sounds represented here, and there are nasal counterparts to the oral vowels. This phonology includes the suprasegmentals of tone and length not represented here orthographically, and syllable structure is \( (C_{o-1}) V(C_{o-2}) \). It is the phonetic realizations (in their normal distribution) of the sounds represented here which make the native Krio speaker sound as he does when using his lexicon and structure. These grammatical, lexical and phonological items are those found in the mainstream native-speaker variety, the \( K_i \).

Now there is evidence that the \( K_i \) native-speaker continuum involves divergence and variation along the acrolectal and basilectal planes in response to the conditioning factors discussed in sections 2.1, 2.3 and 2.4 with respect to the Western Area and the temporal and social "class" dimensions.

3.1. Thus, in the village settings, due to differences in the environments, in social and economic experience and activities and the uneven degree and type of language change, there are identifiable features in the speech of, in particular, the older generation. Specialized lexical items such as *takute* 'a trap' and *okele* 'a helping of foofoo'; the vowels *a* for *o* in *shala* as against *shalo* 'shallow' or *a* for *i* in *tanap* in contrast to *tinap* 'stand up'; the consonant *s* instead of *sh* in *fis* 'fish' and the removal of the cluster in *ton* as opposed to *ston* 'stone' are a few examples. It is however difficult to accept that these have a high incidence and frequency of occurrence in current village usage only.

3.2. On the temporal plane, older users are usually associated with archaisms, some distinctive phonetic features and vocabulary, a striving for pure or "deep" Krio, characteristics which are absent from the speech of young users, who are normally seen to control a mainstream \( K_i \) type. In phonology we have *e* for *e* in *snek*, *a* for *i* in *tanap* and the lost *st* cluster in *ton* or 'stone house', palatalization of *g* and *k* in *gyal* 'girl' and *kyanwud* 'camwood' and
some other features also found in village settings. Research has not yielded
significant grammatical features but numerous vocabulary items can be
assembled: miniral, ospikin, omole, abana, biba, nikaz, shimi, bedsha,
serjago, jombul, jokaki, swank, tay aja, kekenwayn.
A close scrutiny of these items would reveal that some have indeed been
displaced by new terms even among older people, viz. soft (miniral), pants and
slip (nikaz and shimi), pros (serjago), blsf (swank); some are in free variation
with newer terms among the old and even in the speech of young people, viz.
ospikin and omole, nikaz and pants, swank and blsf; others have lost their
referents and therefore been displaced, such as jombul, jokaki, and tay aja,
now tawa, and kekenwayn, now risepshan. Though some features continue to
be marginalized, e.g. the phonetic, there will continue to be a variant based
on age, especially on the level of the lexicon. But while there are these distin-
guishing indexical features the common core persists.

3.3. More readily identified is the sociolect which represents an early stage of
decreolization. The variety is marked on a number of levels—the
phonological, the lexical, the grammatical and by code-mixing—which con-
verge to make it the most significantly foregrounded and current type.

Phonology: In this variety we have, thik, bath, wosh, ticha, kandul, gal, for
tik ‘thick’, baf ‘bath’, was ‘wash’, chicha ‘teacher’, kyandul
‘candle’, gyal ‘girl’, respectively, which show consonant choice.

For vowels we note, eg, yelo, wosh, wata, son, tiket, maket, flo,
wok, wia, dawn, tawn, nayt, rays, haws for eg ‘egg’, yala
‘yellow’, was ‘wash’, wata ‘water’, san ‘sun’, tiket ‘ticket’, maket
‘town’, net ‘night’, res ‘rice’, os ‘house’—all with various kinds
of vowel substitution.

Cluster simplification or reversal can be seen in ask, desk, eskep instead of
aks ‘ask’, deks ‘desk’ and ekskep ‘escape’. On the suprasegmental level, this
variety shows a tendency to use stress patterns on African names and on
English-derived names instead of the tonal patterns which normally accompa-
ny assimilation e.g. 'Sisé, Koroma, Alís, rather than Sisé, Kôrdóma, Ális,
.i.e. Sesay, Koroma and Alice.

12 Decreolization is the gradual process by which a creole language merges with the corre-
sponding and antecedent standard language to which it is exposed in the same speech community.
It could lead to a post-creole continuum situation as in Jamaica or even complete the cycle back
to English as with Black English in the United States.
Grammatical features include code-mixing and using words, expressions and structures from English or which are English-coloured in preference to the mainstream forms.

1. *a don tel yu se ay kant elp it*
   I have told you that I can't help it
2. *a don tel yu se natin no de we a kin du*
   I have told you that there is nothing I can do
3. *a sospekt so*
   I suspect so
4. *a tink so*
   I think so
   *a want fo fil so*
   I want to feel so
5. *mas sen di mesnax kam*
   Do send the masons
6. *kom to think of it*
   Come to think of it
7. *boys kwotaz*
   Boys' quarters
8. *ay dont think so*
   I don't think so
9. *di hawvis en kac we i get*
   The houses and cars which he has

Examples 1, 3 to 9 have alternatives in mainstream usage; thus 2 is mainstream and less acrolectal than 1, as is the first item in 4, which could replace 3 as well as the second item in 4.

On the level of vocabulary, the following are examples of numerous attested items, and for this variety every English word is a potential Krio word: *mit, ips, brest, Krismas, bath, spring onyons* for *bif* "beef/meat", *wes* "bottom", *bobi* "breast", *baf* "bath", *lif yabas* "leaf onions".

These levels mark this variety as the most acrolectal of the native-speaker variants, especially when one considers the ease with which English vocabulary and expressions are incorporated without significant assimilation. In contrast to it is the mainstream basilect which the non-native speakers in the Western Area approximate to or diverge from in varying degrees in the non-native lectal continua. This basilect is also that which the temporal (age) and geographical (village) types diverge from in ways already discussed.

3.4. The non-native K₂ variety does not, on the phonological level, make use of all the K₁ phonemic segments identified above, even where some are
found in the users' native languages. All the Krio vowels occur in the other Sierra Leonean languages with Temne having two more vowels. The consonants in the five Sierra Leonean languages used here differ from the mainstream K₁ type in that the following are absent:

Mende: ch, j, th, sh, zh, z, r.
Temne: g, kp, ch, j, ny, sh, zh, v, z.
Limba: g, kp, gb, ch, j, ny, sh, zh, v, z.
Kono: g, j, th, sh, v, z, r.
Fula: kp, gb, ch, j, ny, sh, zh, v, z.

Their syllable structure also differs since it is the basic CVCV type. These segmental and syllabic features apart, the distribution of phonemes and treatment of clusters are important in producing those characteristic phonetic features which are distinctively K₂.

Phonology (K₃ items are on the left in each pair).

Consonants: tek—cheek, tot—choch, yomp—jomp, yam—jam, sip—zip, bin—vim, sebin—sevin, bilif—bilib, suga—shuga, masin—mashin, meyoment—mezhomme
Clusters: situl—stul, koshon—kwestyon, tiret—tret, pilles—ples, sipun—spun, mindul—midul, belful—belful
Syllable structure: wuna—una, ifi—if, wopin—opin, belful—belful, step—step
Vowels: ort—oray, wel—oye, wut—wit, wet—wet

One observes substitution of vowel and consonant segments due to interference, the splitting of clusters to conform to the CVCV syllable structure and the closing of initial open syllables for similar reasons.

Grammar presents areas of divergence though not as extensively as phonology.

i. K₃ adds sentence tags like so, ba, e:
   na in so—it's him—na im
   e na so i lan—it's like that—na so i lan
   na wetin ba—What is it—na wetin

ii. Word order and co-occurrence features:
   i de kam wit ron—i de ron kam
   He approaches running
   i no want; mi i no want—a no want
   I don't want (it)
   pas fomi da pan—pas mi da pan
   Hand me that container
iii. Lexico-semantic shift:

\[ \text{wetin } yu \text{ sen fo mi} - \text{wetin } yu \text{ bring fo mi} \]
What have you brought for me?
\[ \text{mi en yu} - \text{wi [slit] en yu} \]
Me and you/You and I

iv. Prepositions:

\[ \text{i de pan wok} - \text{i de wok} \]
He is working
\[ \text{a lef am pan bruk} - \text{a lef am de bruk} \]
I left him laundering
\[ \text{i kam wit ron} - \text{i ron kam} \]
He came running
\[ \text{na mi padi wit am} - \text{na mi padi} \]
He is my friend

v. Split serial verbs:

\[ \text{i de go en ron} - \text{i de ron go} \]
He is running and moving away

The lexicon does present some typical items as well as lexico-semantic divergences which mark the type. These features of the \( K_2 \) variety depend for their incidence in the speech of individuals on variable conditioning factors including socio-educational background, use and exposure to English, acquisition and socialization patterns and degree of exposure to Krio. Thus, though the potential for variety differentiation here is enormous, the actual variety which the above examples represent could be heard in the speech of some of the \( K_2 \) characters in “The Professionals”.\(^{11}\) The degree of incidence of these features in other \( K_2 \) users attests to the lectal continuum here as well.

4. A Standard Krio Variety

Variation will continue in Krio due to the continued existence of the conditioning factors and because languages exist in social settings which promote it. The relevant consideration therefore is which varieties would be enhanced, levelled out or become dominant, and also which variant has claims to being the standard.

\(^{11}\) “The Professionals” is a popular comedy group which among other things exploits variety differences for comic effects.
The mainstream $K_1$ variety seems set to gain dominance over those associated with the geographical (village vs. town) and temporal (age) dimensions. The latter will continue as people are dispersed and located in various places, and also grow old with consequent changes in the settings within which they use the language. But with better communications, education and mobility, with their attendant standardizing influences, these less marked types seem likely to be marginalized as the mainstream becomes more and more the norm.

The social variant of the $K_1$ appears to be spreading outwards and downwards, especially in its phonology and vocabulary. Items like bath, pako, boys, kwotaz, etc. have replaced the basilectal $baf$ and $kpako$, and kwotaz and kwataz are in free variation, and code-mixing and adoption of English lexicon are important features of this variety. Its future and that of the mainstream will depend on whether the sociolinguistic conditions making for the impetus towards decreolization continue to exist.

At its simplest, a standard is usually the variety which is most intelligible and acceptable to native speakers and to the wider speech community, the most dominant and the one which calls least attention to itself over the widest range of usage. It is also the norm for writing and usage. Of the variants discussed above, the mainstream $K_1$, rather than the acrolectal $K_i$, would appear to have claims to standard Krio status and should be promoted as such.

Since a standard written language is compatible with variation in educated accents, standard Krio, in the natural run of things, would be spoken with the native speaker’s and other more acceptable non-native accents. The uneducated accents, with intrusive, stigmatizing interference features, would be recognized for what they are by the speech community. It is hoped that the development of a written tradition will promote the standard whatever the accents associated with it.