



## **Review of A Description of Papiamentu. A Creole Language of the Caribbean Area, by Yolanda Rivera Castillo. Leiden: Brill**

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The volume under review is a formal descriptive grammar of Papiamentu, the Iberian-lexified creole language spoken by the majority of inhabitants of the ABC islands of the Caribbean (Aruba, Bonaire, and Curaçao). The grammar reviews previous work on the morphology, syntax, phonology, and semantics of Papiamentu and analyzes and discusses published and new data with the scope of confirming or challenging previously published findings. The work particularly focuses on typological features of Papiamentu and of the purported creole type in general, and positions these features as unexceptional within the panorama of world languages.

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The present title is the inaugural volume in the “Contact Languages” sub-category of Brill’s “Grammars and Sketches of the World’s Languages” series. A selective descriptive work intended for an audience of linguists and students of linguistics with particular interests in phonetics, generative grammar, and typology, Rivera Castillo’s grammar sets out to analyze Papiamentu in light of structures found in other languages. As is stated in the foreword, as well as in the author’s introduction, the conclusion, and throughout the work, one important premise presented is that Papiamentu is unexceptional among natural languages. The volume is also of interest to historical linguists and Romance linguists—given the unique blend of Ibero-Romance lexification in the language’s early formation, various layers of Portuguese influence, and the continued adstrate influence of Spanish—and especially to creolists of all stripes. Its findings will most likely resonate in the debate over the typological designation of creoles.

The introduction declares two goals for the work: 1) to describe Papiamentu; and 2) to draw generalizations regarding its typological features. The latter leads to a larger discussion on creole typological characterization, which is revisited in the final chapter (Chapter 8, “Conclusions and Typology”). As previewed in series editor Peter Bakker’s foreword, the grammar’s structure highlights “the most challenging aspects of Papiamentu, rather than a general description of the language” (2022: IX). It starts with morphosyntax—grammatical categories, combinatorial restrictions, and constituency and hierarchical structures (Chapters 2–4), with an emphasis on surface structure description and therefore a typological rather than strictly generative approach—followed by segmental features, syllabic structure, and prosody (Chapters 5–6), and finally semantic classification and marking of the DP (gender/animacy) together with TMA encoding in the VP, with some diachronic considerations on these markers (Chapter 7). The closing chapter (8) reflects on previous chapters’ findings and concludes with a discussion on the purported creole typological class and innovations in Papiamentu with regard thereto.

An important element of this grammar is its dependence on spontaneous speech data collected by the author together with native-speaker collaborator Camille Wagner Rodríguez through the *Papiamentu Spontaneous Speech Corpus (PaSSCo)*, referenced throughout, as well as data presented in Rivera-Castillo & Pickering (2004, 2008) (it should be noted that the co-author of these two studies, Lucy Pickering, also co-authors Chapter 6 in the present volume, “Papiamentu Prosody”). These data complement those found in important projects such as the *Atlas of Pidgin & Creole Language Structures (APiCS)* (Michaelis et al., 2013) and the *World Atlas of Language Structures (WALS)* (Haspelmath, 2005). The author makes frequent reference to works such as Kouwenberg & Murray (1994), Dijkhoff (1993), Maurer (1993), Kouwenberg (2013), Cinque (1999), Bybee et al. (1994), Bakker & Daval-Markussen (2017), and Croft (2003), among others. The reference list is immensely rich, and the utility and origins of the cited sources are generally well explained in the text. It comes as no surprise that such a formal, theoretically oriented work should feature a bibliography of mainly English-language titles, with only a sprinkling of Spanish and a light

dusting of French and even Papiamentu sources; the absence of Portuguese and especially of Dutch-language sources, however, is notable, and would have further enriched the grammar. Though largely outside of the theoretical domain, much scholarship specific to Papiamentu has been historically published in Dutch.

Following the initial chapter's presentation of the structure and scope of the book, Chapter 2, "Morphology and Grammatical Categories," outlines Papiamentu's morphological exponents, which includes inflection, derivation, suppletion, cliticization, reduplication, and free morphemes. The morphological variation outlined here is inconsistent with the widely held view that creoles are morphologically impoverished—a claim that, according to the author, might be better articulated as their being *inflectionally* constrained. Negation exhibits free morphological encoding as well as tonal features, a combination of which the author reminds the reader is common cross-linguistically. Other morphological elements that the author considers unremarkable include homonymy between TMA markers and lexical verbs. This is unremarkable to the extent that it is not a feature exclusive to the formation of creoles, but a simple case of grammaticalization, a common historical process across languages. Verbal inflection in Papiamentu is reported, though it is mostly of an inherent and unproductive nature. Only one recently inherited verbal morpheme seems to be productive: the *-ndo* suffix.

Chapters 3–4, "Syntax" 1–2, summarize word order as generally SVO (with some exceptions, especially in embedded clauses, which exhibit both VO and OV order), though the approach focuses on the head-complement parameter for individual phrasal structures rather than the common SVO typology. Concern for comparability, as addressed in the concluding remarks of Chapter 8 (see below), dictates a preference for "attested orders, not underlying structures" (40). Papiamentu is not a pro-drop language, though impersonal constructions exhibit no subject marking. Papiamentu is typically a head-initial language. The author reviews relevant literature on TMA marking in Papiamentu, which generally exhibits pre-verbal marking, though *kaba*—a marker of bound intervals—follows the verb. According to the literature, creoles tend to exhibit the order T-M-A, but in some creoles, including Papiamentu, modal markers can precede others. It is also noted that serialization plays a limited role in Papiamentu, particularly, in the author's view, in directional constructions with *bai* 'go' and *bini* 'come'; however, the author also highlights some sequences that do not constitute instances of serialization because they exhibit different tense markers or belong to separate clauses. Papiamentu parallels primary Romance idioms insofar as "constructions with *bai* follow a path to grammaticalization into grams with future meaning [and] have become periphrases with auxiliaries" (49; after Cruschina, 2013, pp. 280–281), but the data presented also suggest that *bai* can act in serial constructions with a present, directional function. Another notable aspect of syntax addressed, revisited in Chapter 7 from a semantic perspective, is negation and employment of negative concord words. It is determined that Papiamentu constitutes a "semi-strict" negative concord language compared to "strict"

negative concord languages (whose negative concord words require the presence of a standard pre-verbal negation marker), and compared to “non-strict” languages like Spanish in which “only one negation is allowed before verbs” (52; though one could cite Spanish sentences like “Nadie nunca ha tenido problemas” [No one has ever had problems] to dispute this claim). Papiamentu “allows the negative concord word to co-occur with the adverb *no*” (52). In comparison with Ibero-Romance, Papiamentu demonstrates a stricter word order, a result traditionally predicted by the language’s more restricted use of verbal inflection, though the author refuses to accept a direct relationship between limited inflectional morphology and strict word order *a priori*. A primary argument put forward in discussing Papiamentu syntax is that the existence of features common to other creoles hardly construes a creole type, given that all such features can be found outside the purported creole type. Various elements of morphology and syntax, in addition to negation, are revisited peripherally in Chapter 7, “Sentential Semantics.”

Prosody and segmental features lie at the core of Chapters 5–6. After a survey of segmental inventories and an account of syllable structure, the author traces vowel nasalization in pre-nasal consonant position through the lens of “the syllable in Creoles.” Nasalization and vowel harmony, according to the author’s findings, are not restricted to single segmental positions in Papiamentu. The Antillean creole does not have “nasal vowels,” in the view of the author; the feature [+nasal] is, rather, prosodic and “triggers nasal agreement between the consonant and the vowel in Papiamentu” (82). Tonal and intonational features co-exist in the language, which is explained as “a reinterpretation of input from typologically different sources” (200). Chapter 6, as mentioned above, is co-authored by Lucy Pickering, who collaborated with Rivera-Castillo in field work conducted in 2002, which led to co-authored papers in 2004 and 2008. The authors support the findings of previous studies on the contrastive role of stress and investigate the interplay of tone and intonation in Papiamentu.

Chapter 7’s focus on “Sentential Semantics” reveals some of Papiamentu’s most innovative features *vis-à-vis* its lexifiers and other creoles, and presents new findings on the part of the author. Animacy is marked by classifiers, which in turn also denote referential gender; this differentiates Papiamentu from its lexifier languages, which have formal grammatical gender (the author’s research suggests that the absence of gender agreement characterizes about  $\frac{3}{4}$  of creoles). Animacy and gender—bundled together by the author with the designation “animacy/gender classifiers”—are indicated, therefore, as semantic rather than grammatical classes, whose marking originates in identifiable nouns in the lexifier languages (*homber* < *hombre* and *muhé* < *mujer*, for example). Papiamentu’s classifier system follows Dahl’s (2000) “animacy hierarchy.” The author then passes on to number marking, which not surprisingly differs typologically from number marking systems in the lexifier languages and Indo-European in general. The author painstakingly breaks down combinatorial possibilities of *nan*—described in most previous literature as a plural marker—along semantic notions of count, mass, and granular mass nouns,

definiteness, quantification, cosingularity/coplurality, and association plurality, *inter alia*. *Nan*, then, is regarded as a classifier “since it has selectional restrictions regarding the type of nouns it modifies” (153), and its use is contrasted with that of the Ibero-Romance plural morpheme {-s} as exemplified by modern-day Spanish. The author asserts, “against previous descriptions” (161), that the co-presence of *nan* and 1PL and 2PL pronouns denotes an associative plural meaning.

Chapter 8 presents conclusions and further discussion on typology, posing the question: “Do Creoles constitute typologically a linguistic type?” (193). After reviewing the various positions and summarizing the analyses presented in the current study, the author asserts that “changes undergone by Creoles follow paths of language shift documented in other languages” (195), further challenging the “Creole type” hypothesis, and any claim of exceptionalism, either of creoles or Papiamentu itself. In fact, the notion of creolization as a special process is rejected altogether. The final chapter concludes by positioning the work among studies on creole structural features: the author highlights the primary data presented in the work and the resulting analyses, and underscores the volume’s careful employment of terminology common to the sort of typological research conducted. This comes after commentary on the “Correspondence Problem” in creolistics, i.e. the difficulty of comparing datasets “due to the fact that language samples have often been gathered and structured with different methodologies” (208).

The approach outlined in the concluding chapter is a welcome one and seeks to address a problem that plagues language description in general, citing the declared mission of documentary linguistics as expressed by Himmelman (2012): “documentary linguistics has the important task of making descriptive generalizations replicable and accountable [...] for many branches of linguistics” (187; cited in the reviewed volume, p. 209). The findings are extremely valuable for the study of Papiamentu to the extent that the author’s solid methodology helps to confirm other scholars’ assertions, while also legitimizing this work’s challenges to orthodoxy within the field of creolistics and language description as a whole.

Not every conclusion that the author proposes is always altogether convincing, but this is hardly ever the case in a study of this breadth; nonetheless, no assertion is without merit. Despite the sound methodologies, appropriate organization, and well-argued analyses, the weak points are formal elements in the publication itself, something that probably could have been resolved by an additional layer of editing. The work is clearly not geared toward the dilettante reader, yet some basic linguistic concepts are—one could argue—needlessly glossed within the work and again in the glossary (for example “deontic modality” [170, 211]), while some less-widely circulated concepts receive less attention (I might cite Ojeda’s, 2005 “cosingulars,” for example, neglected by the glossary and minimally explained in the text [though see p. 21], yet referenced throughout the book). Positions and findings are sometimes restated inessentially, which fragments the flow of the work. Though there is no obligation to reference lexifier languages in

a largely synchronic study of this nature, the author tends to reference Spanish asymmetrically *vis-à-vis* Portuguese (about four times as often). This imbalance is not necessarily unwarranted, given Spanish's continued adstrate influence, among other reasons, but a richer recourse to relevant varieties of Portuguese in the analyses might have yielded meaningful results, or at least elucidated readers who might see relevant structures equally or differently in Portuguese. There are also typographic miscues that sometimes cause confusion, and inconsistencies in formatting (see, for example, variations in in-text citations to the author and Chapter 6 co-author's collaborative works [2004, 2008], and their citation in the bibliography, which I have tried to represent more accurately, according to the sources, in the references below).

While the grammar's limited shortcomings cannot be ignored, they must also not be overstated. These imperfections might be attributable to editorial oversights, or in some cases to mere stylistic preference. None of this detracts from the fact that this is an entirely worthy and painstakingly researched investigation whose underlying premise—that nothing exhibited in Papiamentu is linguistically remarkable—belies this *volume's* innovations. Brill's first publication in the "Contact Language" section of its "Grammars and Sketches of the World's Languages" series constitutes an important contribution to creolistics and language typology, and will doubtless serve as an essential reference for any future formal study of Papiamentu.

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## Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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