Saramaccan
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spoken in central/eastern Suriname

around 20,000 speakers

English or Portuguese based creole
Features

“Most African” creole language in new world
- substrate influences from up to 13 west african languages
- also contributes 15% of lexicon
- quite limited superstrate contact
- tones!

Bickerton - closest approximation of Universal Grammar
Features

- SVO sentence structure
- Definite and indefinite articles
  - present in only 20% of world’s languages
- Ideophones
  - substrate influence from African languages
Initial sounds remaining from African substrate languages

- ng ➔ ngátu = thief; ngoto = ditch
- gb ➔ gbegú = turtle; gbaniní = eagle
- mb ➔ mbíi = to grind; mbéi = to make

Used solely in African-derived words, mostly ideophones
Vowel length distinction

Semantic distinction

- \textit{ba} = to draw (water)

- \textit{baa} = term of address for close friend

- \textit{ba\text{"a}a} = brother
Vowel length distinction

Degree distinction

- té = a long time
- téé = a very long time
- tééé = a very very long time
Tones

Two (three?) tones - high and low

- African-derived words transfer tones directly
- Accents from English and Portuguese words mimicked with high tones
  - guitar ➔ gitáli ;  finger ➔ fínga
- Rare exception: aqui ➔ áki = here
Robert Good's study found three distinct tones:

- A new “super-high” tone used only in ideophones.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tone Type</th>
<th>Average Pitch (Hz)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High-tone ideophones</td>
<td>162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lexical high tones</td>
<td>131</td>
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<tr>
<td>Accent high tones</td>
<td>127</td>
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<tr>
<td>Low-tone ideophones</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lexical low tones</td>
<td>104</td>
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<tr>
<td>Default low tones</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Tones

Tone Sandhi

- In this case, tone assimilation - low tones become high after other high tones
  - /wóko/ $\rightarrow$ [wókó]

- Syntax-sensitive sandhi, blocked between verb and nominal object
  - */nján gania/ $\rightarrow$ [nján gánia]

- also between two adjectives, two adverbs, and between prepositions and nouns
Sociolinguistic Aspects

Saramaccan Origin

- 50% English-derived lexicon, 35% Portuguese
- Portuguese-influenced English-based creole?
- or English-influenced Portuguese-based creole?
ethnologue.com clearly classifies Saramaccan as English-based
the SIL Saramaccan-English dictionary presents the opposing view
English-Based Theory

- 1651 - England colonizes current-day Suriname
- 1667 - England trades ‘English Guiana’ to the Dutch
  - agree to leave many slaves in Dutch care
- 1660s-70s - Portuguese-speaking Jews flee Brazil, settle in inland Suriname
- Slaves escape from both English- and Portuguese-speaking plantations
  - form mixed maroon communities
Evidence:

- Majority of words derived from English
  - Samo tēi góni, sūti di pingó: Samo take the gun, shoot the pig:
  - Hen déé ótowan tāki tāa: Then the others say that:

- Studies indicate that English words entered lexicon earlier

- Most functional words (pronouns, etc) derived from English
Portuguese Theory

- Evidence that Jewish plantations were concentrated around Saramaka River
  - little contact with English or Dutch speakers
  - development of Portuguese-based creole/expanded pidgin on plantations

- 1685 - Large groups of slaves escape, settle deep in jungle
  - 1712 - another large influx joins them
  - further development of language, deeper creolization
Portuguese Theory

Larger numbers of English-based creole speakers join the maroons

Proto-Sranan?

Undergoes partial relexification or even repidginization

Continues to exist in successfully independent communities til present day
Portuguese Theory

Evidence:

- Current day proverbs contain almost exclusively Portuguese- and African-derived words

  ex:

- Basic words related to identity Portuguese-derived

  wómi = man   from ‘homem’

  mujéé = woman   from ‘mulher’
Origin?

Biggest difference is time before English influence

- English theory - influence from beginning
- Portuguese theory - influence only after pretty deep creolization

Debate still goes on
Universal Grammar

Emergence of creole
- limited superstrate influence
- more than 13 unintelligible African languages
- polygamy

Francis Byrne quote
Sound Clip

“History in Song”
A Saramaccan Elder

Music from Saramaka: A Dynamic Afro-American Tradition
When they talk thus end, those women said that should dance.

Men say let’s dance, let’s be happy. Freedom (has) come. Then they call:

(song)

Fií kó. Báka f’én, noó hen déé mujéé baijá aléle. Hen de baijá: Freedom come. After that, well, then those women danced aléle. Then they danced:

(song)

Well, those women danced [intensifiers]. Those men danced, [continuous marker]

move him hips a long time. The house making, the village making [ideophone]

When they come move end, moving, going around, then the woman, well then,

the other one she stay behind (said) “Child, the big the (for) celebration,

at (the village) aléle big more anything. Why you, you no come?

(She said): “Oh! The man lock me, leave in house. Then make no come. That

[expletives] (name) no want me come.” Then the woman sang:
Conclusion

“Normal Creole” in that:

- has SVO word order
- has a simple grammar

Extraordinary in that:

- has tones
- has two lexifiers
- is believed to be closest approximation of Universal Grammar