



Marta Degani*
Paola Vettorel**

INTERVIEW WITH PROF. SALIKOKO MUFWENE

*Prof. Salikoko S. Mufwene is the Frank J. McLoraine Distinguished Service Professor of Linguistics and the College at the University of Chicago, where he also serves as Professor on the Committee on Evolutionary Biology and on the Committee on the Conceptual and Historical Studies of Science. His current research is in evolutionary linguistics, which he approaches from an ecological perspective, focused on the phylogenetic emergence of language and on how languages have been affected by colonization and world-wide globalization, especially regarding the indigenization of European languages in the colonies and language birth and death. Mufwene has authored three books: *The Ecology of Language Evolution* (CUP, 2001), *Créoles, écologie sociale, évolution linguistique* (l'Harmattan, 2005), and *Language Evolution: Contact, competition and change* (Continuum Press, 2008). He has (co-)edited several other books and authored close to 250 articles, book chapters, and reviews on the above topics and others. He is the founding editor of *Cambridge Approaches to Language Contact*. His distinctions include lectures at the Collège de France (Fall 2003) and teaching at Harvard University (spring 2002) and three times at the Summer Institute of the Linguistic Society of America (1999, 2005, 2015). He was also a fellow at the Institute for Advanced Study in Lyon (2010-2011).*



<http://mufwene.uchicago.edu/>

The following interview with Professor Salikoko Mufwene is structured in two parts. The first one concerns World Englishes and contains questions asked by Marta Degani. The second one is about English as a Lingua Franca and shows questions posed by Paola Vettorel

World Englishes

Marta Degani: The following questions have been in part inspired by reading your article “Colonization, indigenization, and the differential evolution of English: Some ecological perspectives” (2015a) and they also relate to your important monographs (Mufwene 2001, 2008).

* *Marta Degani (marta.degani@univr.it) is Associate Professor of English Language and Linguistics at the University of Verona. She has researched extensively on the variety of New Zealand English, focusing on phenomena of linguistic and cultural contact between English and Maori. She has also worked on semantic and pragmatic aspects of English modality and published on issues of subjectification and (inter)subjectivity. She currently has two research foci: the analysis of political discourse in the frameworks of cognitive semantics and discourse analysis and the study of bilingualism and biculturalism in the context of Aotearoa/New Zealand.*

** *Paola Vettorel (paola.vettorel@univr.it) is assistant professor in the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures - University of Verona. Her main research interests include ELF and its implications in ELT; ELF and digital media. Among her recent publications: (2014) *English as a Lingua Franca in wider networking. Blogging practices*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter (awarded an Honourable Mention, The AIA Book prize 2016 – *English Language and Linguistics*); (2015) (ed.) *New Frontiers in Teaching and Learning English*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars.*



In your publications, you have always been very much concerned with investigating issues related to language contact. In the paradigm of World Englishes, however, language contact does not seem to have played a major role so far (cf., as an exception, the latest special issue in World Englishes entitled “Language contact and world Englishes”, June 2016). In your opinion, why has this been the case?

Salikoko S. Mufwene: It may be because a central leitmotiv of the scholarship on World Englishes has been to prove that the English varieties spoken especially in former British exploitation colonies, those of the Inner Circle (in the late Braj Kachru’s terminology), are as legitimate as those spoken in the UK and England’s former settlement colonies, lumped together in Inner Circle category. Their approach has been more sociolinguistic, focusing on communicative functions and the emergence of new national and regional norms. Otherwise, both language contact and culture contact have been present in the background, as the literature has highlighted pragmatic and structural features of various Outer Circle’s English varieties that reflect communicative practices indigenous to the territories where the English varieties have evolved. I came from the study of creoles and pidgins, the epitome of language contact (so to speak). This different background, where we try to trace different features of these varieties to various languages spoken in the contact setting, prepared me to approach the subject matter somewhat differently, perhaps by bringing language contact more to the foreground.

MD: Your research makes a clear case that pidgins and creoles are languages like any other. Despite that, why are these languages not yet given full recognition in some areas of linguistics?

SSM: To some extent, linguistics has not fully emancipated itself from social prejudices of and the paradigm of genetic linguistics developed in the 19th century. People subscribed then to the ideology of the purity of language, like that of the species. Creoles and pidgins as hybrid varieties were also considered anomalous, like mules compared to horses, regardless of their adaptive fitness, which is not less good than that of horses.

This exceptionalist view of creoles and pidgins (to which I return below) was a consequence of the application of the comparative method, which yielded uniparental Stammbaums, now also referred to as cladograms. These are taxonomic classifications that are hierarchically structured and allow no crisscrossing branches, contrary to reality, which is less clearcut. The basic assumption has been that every language and its sister languages have only one parent. This is a blatant confusion of how languages are genetically related to each other with how the speciation that produced the structural differences between the related languages occurred in the first place. The cladograms do not show, let alone explain, this process. Linguists just overlooked the fact that the Romance languages, for instance, were the consequence of contact between Vulgar Latin and the substrate Celtic languages that were spoken in the relevant provinces of the now Romance countries. It didn’t matter to them that Old English too was the outcome of language contact, especially between, first of all, the Germanic languages that had been taken over to England.

So, creoles and pidgins just appeared anomalous to linguists because everybody knew that they were the outcome of language contact. If you combine this with the fact that the populations that produced the creoles and pidgins lexified by European languages were non-European, at a time when the Europeans thought non-Europeans were mentally inferior to them, you can understand. According to some French philologists of the late 19th century (e.g., Lucien Adam, Julien Vinson, Charles Baissac), the European languages were too sophisticated and refined for Africans in particular to learn. I won’t accuse modern linguists of racism and of sticking to this perception of non-Europeans who appropriated nonstandard varieties of European languages and modified them in the process, but I deplore their reluctance to question what Michel DeGraff (2003, 2005) has labeled “creole exceptionalism” (the opposite of uniformitarianism) when we should know better. This is precisely how the Romance languages emerged too (see below), although the Celts who appropriated Vulgar Latin (a cluster of nonstandard varieties of Latin) were not slaves or contract laborers. Most students of creoles have not made the time to read the relevant colonial history, which shows under what specific conditions creoles and pidgins emerged and how they compare with those under which the non-creole/non-pidgin varieties of the same European languages emerged in the colonies. That history helps



us answer the question of whether or not, say, American English varieties spoken by descendants of Europeans are outcomes of language contact and why they are different from creoles, but not in all respects. Other scholars such as Charles-James Bailey, Karl Maroldt, and Brigitte Schlieben-Lange actually hypothesized earlier, in the 1970s, that the emergence of creoles can help us explain those of Middle English (for the first two linguists) and of the Romance languages (for the third). Unfortunately, the 19th-century cultural legacy is so deeply entrenched that not much has changed in the attitude of linguists to creoles. Perhaps genetic linguists think that their paradigm needs no revisions, except that computers can be used now to produce impressive cladograms. I have elaborated Schlieben-Lange's position in Mufwene (2015b).

MD: In your article, you describe the concept of indigenization emphasizing the processes of adaptation of Englishes in their local contexts. Does your use of indigenization coincide with the concept of nativization, which is also used in the World Englishes paradigm?

SSM: The English varieties of the Outer Circle have also been called "Nativized Englishes" and "Indigenized Englishes," among other names. And then I also noticed that, in his 1966 book *Pidgin and Creole Languages*, Robert Hall not only defines creoles as nativized pidgins (a definition that I dispute) but also explains the process of NATIVIZATION as indigenization, which gives a meaning other than the acquisition of native speakers. He meant by it that the pidgin was becoming indigenous to the place where it is spoken. As I explain in my 2009 essay titled "The indigenization of English in North America," all varieties of English outside England have adapted to their new ecologies, involving the previous communicative habits of its new speakers (reflected in substrate or adstrate influence) and the pressures they feel to communicate about their natural and social environments. I thought this approach would help make more convincing what students of World Englishes have been trying to do all along. I elaborated this position in another essay "Driving forces in English contact linguistics" (2012a), in which I show that even in the British Isles, language contact had played a role in the diversification of English, for instance, in the emergence of Scots and Irish Englishes.

MD: Could the concept of indigenization also play a role in the development of learner varieties of English?

SSM: I think that it does to some extent, though learner varieties are idiolectal; they are not communal varieties. Like historical linguists, scholars of World Englishes have focused on communal varieties, which have produced their communal norms at the national or regional level. In the way I explained it, the concept of INDIGENIZATION is more applicable to communal varieties.

MD: On page 12 of your (2015a) article you point out that, "I would even go so far as to submit that Jim Crow produced AAVE, in that American northerners mistook what was really rural American Southern English for a variety that was particularly African American. This is not to say that African substrate languages have contributed nothing to AAVE. My position simply means that the relevant substrate influence may have to be sought at the level of the emergence of American White Southern English on the cotton and tobacco plantations and also in aspects of AAVE other than its morphosyntax, such as in its semantics". As critically commented by different scholars, the formal feature approach has been largely employed in the paradigm of dialectology and World Englishes. I share the view that the time is ripe for moving beyond this. I believe that in addition to phonological, morphological, syntactic and grammatical features characterizing varieties of English, semantic considerations should be given more prominence. How would you see the possibilities of such research in the future?

SSM: It's not that semantics should be given more prominence; it is as relevant as other structural aspects of the relevant language varieties. Pragmatics is equally important too. We might actually find more African substrate influence or innovations in these particular domains than in those that have received the most attention. They call for attention to discourse and the contexts in which it is produced. They highlight the specific ways in which words and phrases are being used in utterances, in their literal or non-literal



interpretations. People studying peculiarities of Hip Hop are already getting into this, in the footsteps of the work done by Geneva Smitherman, for instance. However, people can focus on the vernacular of the home too, by way of ethnography, in particular.

English as a Lingua Franca

Paola Vettorel: In your 2012b article in the *Journal of English as a Lingua Franca* you raise several interesting points about ELF, and in this interview I would like to start from some of those.

Also recalling a couple of personal anecdotes, you point to the fact that “there are still pockets of the world and of populations that make no use of English” (2012b, 366). To a certain extent, this may also be true for Europe, particularly in terms of older vs younger generations (see e.g. the 2012 *Special Eurobarometer*). Younger generations seem not only to be more exposed to English in the environment (the media, advertising, the linguistic landscape, etc.), but also to use it actively both virtually and face-to-face.

Increased mobility (e.g. the Comenius Plus programme in Europe, and the substantial growth of communication through digital media and the internet) increasingly make English work as a lingua franca of communication across traditional borders, both ‘territorial’ and linguistic. Furthermore, participatory characteristics afforded by the Web 2.0 / 3.0 social media mean that English is used – rather than ‘passively received’ – as a common lingua franca code among bi/multilingual speakers of English. How do you think this scenario will impact on the development(s) of ELF as a ‘functional use of the language’?

SSM: I don’t expect a world-wide homogenous ELF to emerge, even if English language-teaching programs were designed to accomplish this. Adult learners will not get rid of their non-native accents. Young learners interact with each other locally, which leaves a lot of room for indigenization, through the emergence of local norms. Increased interactions across national or regional borders will especially make users of ELF more familiar with each other’s’ varieties, which has been happening already; they won’t make them uniform, no more than in the local varieties themselves. I don’t think native speakers in the Inner Circle will accommodate speakers in the Outer and Expanding Circles (the latter include all the other speakers of English). It would be like asking people of darker complexion to lighten it so that they can meet, midway, all those other people who are tanning theirs. There is no such democracy in language evolution. The compromises that produce local norms work in a different way. If you hold an advantage, you stick to it.

PV: Similarly, but at the same time differently from Latin (that you mention in your article and in your 2015 lecture¹), the way in which English has spread and is used as a lingua franca (Widdowson) can also be seen to have a ‘democratizing’ role (Ferguson) – not least in the way it is appropriated by ELF users. What implications can this have, both in terms of language use and language evolution?

SSM: I beg to differ regarding the claim of democratization. There is more and more diversity occurring. Speakers in the Outer and Expanding Circles cannot even reach a common norm, no more than the varieties of the Inner Circle are converging toward the same norm. There is perhaps more and more tolerance on the part of speakers of the Inner Circle for the other varieties. That’s actually the least they can do, because the investment the other speakers have made in learning English makes life easier for them (heritage speakers of the language), as they travel and want to communicate with the rest of the world and don’t have to learn the others’ languages.

However, tolerance does not mean acceptance of the varieties as equal. There is more pressure on speakers of English in the Outer and Expanding Circles to approximate those of the Inner Circle, especially when they travel to the Inner Circle, than the other way around. We would need more population reshuffling world-wide and a redistribution of economic and military power to see the kinds of change that promoters of

¹ “Globalization and the World-wide Spread of English in Historical perspectives”, S. Mufwene, University of Chicago 2015, retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GerPWSqSCww>. Last visited September 20, 2016.



ELF are wishing for. What may not happen, given the extent of international travel and communication in today's world, is perhaps the kind of fractionalization that would produce as much lack of mutual intelligibility as among the Romance languages. However, that's the future; as a student of evolution, I refrain from speculating on it. There is a wide range of factors bearing on the process, which defy speculations.

PV: It has been shown quite extensively by ELF research that, in its additional role, ELF is intertwined with the bi/multilingual (and cultural) resources of its speakers, which constitute an integral part of their communicative repertoires -- to the point that Jenkins has recently suggested renaming ELF as 'multilingua Franca'. This goes together with the exploitation of the virtual language (Widdowson; Seidlhofer) within an appropriation perspective. How do you see this from an ecology language evolution point of view?

SSM: That's just another way of saying that people in the Outer and Expanding Circles have not been giving up their heritage and national languages for English. The latter is just an addition to their repertoires. When speakers from the same town or region with different ethnolinguistic backgrounds communicate among themselves, they sometimes mix up languages of their repertoires in codeswitched utterances, particularly when they are familiar with each other's languages. This happens more often when they choose an indigenous lingua franca and mix it with some English words and phrases. They do not do this when they communicate with outsiders, including English speakers of the Inner Circle, who do not know their heritage languages. In the latter case, English speakers of the Outer Circle stick to English; the multilingualism part of Jenkins' characterization becomes irrelevant. It is also noteworthy that English speakers of the Expanding Circle do not typically use it to communicate with each other if they are from the same country, unless they are in the company of outsiders. Even in the latter case, one should pay attention to those aside comments they make to each other in a language more familiar and exclusive to them.

I don't see what the characterization "multilingua Franca" helps us understand about the role of ELF that we did not already know without the new name. Is Jenkins arguing that the repertoire itself is a language (variety) that functions as a lingua franca? Your comment on the position includes the characterization "virtual language." This label does not mean much to me either. Isn't ELF as a set-theory union of World Englishes, including its natural inter-national and inter-regional variation, real?

PV: In the last part of your article you raise questions related to 'who sets standards of acceptability' and 'intelligibility' (2012b, 369). One of the points made by ELF researchers is that communication in ELF is jointly construed and negotiated by speakers, and often in specific ways being ELF contexts variable and constituted by 'constellations of interconnected practices', or "situational speaking communities (Hülmbauer), rather than 'communities'. In this perspective, it would not be a matter of "local or regional ELF standards" "preventing intelligibility" (ibid.), but rather of speakers working (as they seem to do in ELF research findings) towards communicative effectiveness. Could you give us your point of view on this?

SSM: It looks like I anticipated this question in one of my answers above. There are several national and regional norms that have emerged, which is quite consistent with the World Englishes scholarship. Communication anywhere, in a small vernacular or a major lingua franca, is jointly constructed. (Paul Grice reminds us of this with his cooperative maxims in pragmatics.) It is the mutual accommodations that speakers make to each other that improve mutual intelligibility and produce communal norms, unlike the standards constructed by institutions and imposed on the speakers.

The emergence of communal norms presupposes some regular interactions with more or less the same (kinds of) speakers. The process is typically local, within networks and across networks. I don't see this happening across national or regional varieties of English within any of the Kachruvian Circles. When we meet speakers of a different English variety, we do work "towards communicative effectiveness," but such interactions are neither frequent enough nor demographically extensive enough to produce the kinds of norms that would replace the national and regional norms. They require an alternative kind of population structure, which is not happening (yet), despite the fact that people travel more and use technology more extensively to communicate across national and regional borders. There is much more communication within these traditional borders, which strengthens the traditional norms.



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