

## WEST CAMEROON PIDGIN PROVERBS

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In *THINGS FALL APART* Chinua Achebe says: 'Among the Ibo the art of conversation is regarded very highly and proverbs are the palm-oil with which words are eaten.' Among Pidgin speakers in West Cameroon, too, the ability to sum up a situation succinctly or to reduce a problem to recognizable proportions by a humorous comment is indeed highly prized, and very few conversations take place in which proverbs do not occur. I have noted the proverbs listed below in the course of four years' contact with West Cameroonians, most of whom were from the Bamenda Grasslands.<sup>1</sup> I cannot claim that these proverbs are representative of West Cameroon folk wisdom, and their comprehensiveness has been further reduced by the exclusion from my list of proverbs already recorded by Gilbert D. Schneider,<sup>2</sup> but they certainly give an insight into the vitality and the range of Pidgin.

Surprisingly few of the proverbs appear to have been taken directly from Standard English. The nearest equivalents in form and meaning are (1)-(4), but (4)

na tifman di keɟ tifman    Set a thief to catch a thief

has been well and truly pidginized, and all four have counterparts in Krio. Just under 16 per cent of the proverbs which follow have close parallels in at least one of the Cameroon vernaculars, Lamso,<sup>3</sup> the mother tongue of two of my informants. I include four examples from Lamso to give an indication of how close the parallels often are. Some of the proverbs – just over 14 per cent – almost certainly arose in Cameroon, but, whether they arose spontaneously in Pidgin, were translated from the vernaculars, or were formed on the analogy of already known proverbs, is debatable. Over 40 per cent have analogues in Krio – analogues ranging from semantic similarity to well-nigh identical versions. I have listed the remaining 29-plus per cent as of unknown provenance. Some of these will almost certainly have parallels in other vernaculars, possibly those nearer the coast, or in other West Coast varieties of Pidgin.

In all cases the transcription is based on the pronunciation of one informant.<sup>4</sup> Her

<sup>1</sup> The Bamenda Grasslands are part of the Adamawa Highlands. In West Cameroon the flat coastal plain extends inland for approximately 100 miles, a plain broken only by the 13,350 ft. Mount Cameroon. The transition from low-lying forest land to the grasslands is very abrupt – the road climbs 4,000 ft. in the 20 miles between Widekum and Batibo. The Grassland plateau is among the most fertile areas of Cameroon but, as farming is the main industry of the area, many leave to seek employment in the coastal areas.

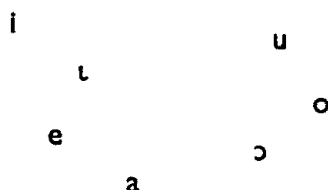
<sup>2</sup> Gilbert D. Schneider (1965*a*). See also Schneider's other works listed. I have included proverbs already recorded by Schneider where they have Krio equivalents, or vary from my own collection.

<sup>3</sup> Lamso – lam (tongue) + nsɔ (Nso) – is the language of the Nso (Nsaw) who live in N.W. Cameroon. It is spoken in and around Kumbo town.

<sup>4</sup> Miss Therese Wamey's mother tongue is Lamso. She has been to university in Britain and so her pronunciation tends to be somewhat anglicized, e.g. she invariably uses *bet*, 'bird', where other speakers prefer *bɔt*. Her form of Pidgin is representative of educated Grasslands speakers, and the phonemic notes are based upon her speech. My sincere thanks are due to her, to Kenjo wan Jumbam, another Lamso speaker, and to John Spencer, Ian Hancock and Eldred Jones for reading and commenting on the proverbs.

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primary stresses have also been indicated. In speaking Pidgin she uses seven monophthongs<sup>5</sup>



and three diphthongs, *aɪ*, *au*, *ɔɪ*. *e* tends to be lengthened and diphthongized when it occurs in final position and *ɔ* has a very short allophone in *fɔ*, one of the most frequently used words in Pidgin; and most vowels are nasalized when they occur in the environment of a nasal consonant.

My informant has nineteen consonantal phonemes:

	Bilabial		Labio-Den		Den/Alv		Pal-Alv		Pala- tal	Velar		Glottal
Plosive	p	b	—	—	t	d	—	—	—	k	g	—
Nasal	—	m	—	—	—	n	—	—	ɲ	—	ŋ	—
Africate	—	—	—	—	—	—	tʃ	dʒ	—	—	—	—
Fricative	—	—	f	v	s	—	—	—	—	—	—	h
Liquid	—	—	—	—	—	l	—	—	—	—	—	—
Semi vowel	—	w	—	—	—	(r)	—	—	j	—	—	—

*r* and *l* are allophones. *v* occurs as a variant of *f* and, in certain phonetic contexts, as an allophone of *b*. It is likely that *r*, *l* and *v* will become distinct phonemes as more lexical items containing these phonemes are incorporated into Pidgin. Already, there is a tendency for the *l* allophone to be restricted to words which have *l* in English, but so far this is only a tendency, as is attested by existing dual forms *lika alata/arata* 'rat'. In addition to the above consonants my informant also uses *mb*, *nd*, *ndʒ*, *ŋk*, *ŋg* but, as she only uses them initially and as they never contrast with *b*, *d*, *dʒ*, *k*, *g*, I have chosen to consider them as conditioned variants.

Although the Cameroon vernaculars are tone languages, tone does not seem to be significant in the proverbs, so it has not been indicated. I have used a broad phonemic transcription, and, immediately below the proverb, I have given a morpheme-by-morpheme gloss, in so far as this is possible. Below this I have given an approximate English translation. In the cases of time and aspect auxiliaries in the Verb Phrase I have indicated the semantic function, e.g. continuous, recent past, remote past, future, rather than attempted an equivalent from the English verbal system. Two distinct glosses have been given to *na*. Where it appears as an equating verb:

<sup>5</sup> Bernard Mafeni (1971) has recorded a similar 7-monophthong system for Nigerian Pidgin, though his front vowels appear to differ from Miss Wamey's. In her speech, minimal pairs can be set up for *i* and *ɪ*, e.g.

a bɪn tʃɔp bɪn dem      I (remote past) eat bean (plural),  
 whereas the *e/ɛ* distinction, made in some English dialects and apparently in Nigerian Pidgin, is not phonemic for her.  
*wét nau, wét. di tɪŋ wét, i nó dráɪ*      Wait now, wait. The thing is wet. It's not dry.

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ma ném na \*maría    My name is Mary

it has been glossed as 'be'. In such contexts it is in free variation with bi thus,

ma ném bi \*maría.

na has at least one other role, however. It can be used to highlight or foreground a word or phrase; for example,

\*maría bun síam    Mary saw him

is a simple statement in which no element is emphasized. If one wishes to draw attention to Mary, to insist that it was Mary and no one else, one might say

na \*maría bun síam

or, if one wishes to draw attention to the 'him', one might say

na í we \*maría bun sí.

This foregrounding normally applies to the noun phrase but, occasionally, the verb can also be emphasized in this way:

na rón a bun rón    I really ran.

I had, at first, considered glossing this na as 'be' also, since the usual negative forms would be

nó bi \*maría bun síam    MARY didn't see him.

nó bi í we \*maría bun sí    Mary didn't see HIM

but, since the following forms can also exist if one wants to draw particular attention to the NP

nó bi na \*maría bun síam

nó bi na í we \*maría bun sí

to emphasize that it was not MARY but SOMEBODY ELSE, and not HIM but a DIFFERENT PERSON, I felt that a separate term for the emphatic na would be useful. It has thus been referred to as the 'emphatic particle' (EP) in the corpus, where, incidentally, it is never negated.

One further term relating semantically to the English verb 'be' occurs. This is de, and it can be used to imply an existential 'be':

gót dé    God exists

and it can also have a locative reference:

\*maría dé    Mary is there

de has been glossed as 'locative be' (loc. be).

The verbal system exemplified in the proverbs which follow does not represent the full range of the Pidgin VP, being confined to the present/recent past/remote past/future/continuous/completive contrasts which may be illustrated by the following paradigm:

a síam	I see it/him/her/them
a di lúkam	I'm looking for it/him, etc.
a dɔŋ síam nau náu	I've just seen it, etc., this minute
a bun síam fɔ mɔnɔŋ tam	I saw it, etc., this morning
a go síam fɔ mɔnɔŋ tam	I'll see it, etc., in the morning

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Further extensions of the VP such as

a bɪn dɔŋ dɪ sɪam	I have just been seeing it, etc.
a fɔ dɔŋ dɪ sɪam ɪf. . .	I would have been seeing it, etc., if. . .

are possible, but a discussion of the VP is not essential to the understanding of the proverbs and has not therefore been undertaken here.

The above paradigm also sheds light on the third person pronominal, which is not marked for gender and often, in the accusative, is unmarked also for number. The pronouns can be tabulated as follows:

Person	Subject	Object
1	a, mi a	mi
2	ju	ju
3	i	am/i
1	wi	wi
2	wuna	wuna
3	dem	am/dem

There is a tendency for am to refer to non-human nouns:

wúsai ju bɪn pút dɪ kwá? a bɪn pútam fɔ tʃía  
 wúsai ju bɪn pút dɪ kwá dem? a bɪn pútam fɔ tʃía  
 Where did you put the bag (bags)? I put it (them) on the chair.  
 This bound form, can however refer to people:

- |                                      |                            |
|--------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| (a) mék ju gó faɪn ma kwá. . .       | a bɪn faɪnam bɔt a nó sɪam |
| (b) mék ju gó faɪn ma pɪkɪn. . .     | a bɪn faɪnam bɔt a nó sɪam |
| (c) mék ju gó faɪn *maría. . .       | a bɪn, etc.                |
| (d) mék ju gó faɪn ma pɪkɪn dem. . . | a bɪn, etc.                |

'Go and look for my (a) bag, (b) child, (c) Mary, (d) children. I looked for it, him, her, them but I didn't find it, him, her, them.' i could be substituted for am in (b) and (c) and dem for am in (d). I have glossed am as 'it' to distinguish it from i, which is invariably glossed as 'he'. am is the only indication of gender distinction in the pronoun set, and, as is clear, it represents only a tendency.

we can also refer to animate or inanimate, singular or plural nouns:

mán we i gét. . .	a man who has. . .
pípu we dem. . .	people who. . .
dɪ tíŋ we i. . .	the thing which. . .

we has been glossed as 'which', but I draw attention to the fact that it is neutral as to gender and number reference.

I have made the above grammatical comments so as to prevent misunderstandings. Many additional areas might have been discussed for, although much is known about pidgins and creoles, we still await even a grammatical sketch of any variety of West African Pidgin.

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### CATEGORY I: PROVERBS PROBABLY ADAPTED FROM ENGLISH, POSSIBLY THROUGH KRIO

- (1) éni man fɔ i séf gót fɔ wí ʒl  
 any man for he self God for we all  
 Every man looks after his own interests. God looks after us all.
- (2) gót nó dɛ slíp  
 God no (cont.) sleep  
 God is aware of everything.
- (3) mɔní dɛ tɔk<sup>6</sup>  
 money (cont.) talk  
 Money talks.
- (4) na tifmán dɛ kéʃ tifmán.  
 (EP) thiefman (cont.) catch thiefman  
 Set a thief to catch a thief.

According to Eldred Jones, the Krio form of (4) is closer to the English proverb.

### CATEGORY II: PROVERBS WITH PARALLELS IN LAMSO

- (5) dém bɪn kéʃ elefán fɔ kɔtʃɔt  
 them (remote past) catch elephant for cutshort  
 The elephant was caught because it took a short cut (i.e. the long way home may be the safest).

Cf. the Lamso equivalent:

ver e ko kitam i ntintin dʒəʒə  
 they (remote past) catch elephant in cut road

- (6) dɔk i lás na gót dɛ klínam  
 dog he backside (EP) God (cont.) clean + it  
 God cleans the dog's backside (i.e. God helps those who cannot help themselves.)

Cf. the Lamso equivalent:

kiɲi ke dʒwi ji jer ɲui  
 backside he dog (cont.) clean God

- (7) elefán dɛ ʃít hawé i dɛ tʃɔp  
 elephant (cont.) excrete how he (cont.) eat  
 One reaps what one has sown.

Cf. the Lamso equivalent:

kitam ki ji ɲi mu ki jiʔ  
 elephant he (cont.) excrete how he eat

- (8) éni aláta na kíŋ fɔ i hól  
 any rat be king for he hole  
 Everyone has a sphere of influence in which he is most important.

<sup>6</sup> The Krio version is kɔpɔ tɔk. West Cameroonians often substitute a local word for 'money'; e.g. I have heard Lamso speakers say mbám dɛ tɔk.

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Cf. the Lamso equivalent:

ntʃɔkʊn dʒəm dʒə fɔn i wun bi  
rat every be chief in his hole

(9) hú sábi kɪŋwɔ́man we i go bɔ́n kɪŋ?  
who know queen which he (fut.) born king?

It is easy to point out a king's wives but only time will show whose son will be the next king.

(10) i gút mék pɪkɪn daɪ fɔ i mamá i hán  
he good make child die for he mother he hand

It is good for a child to die in his mother's arms (i.e.: If misfortune has to befall someone it is better if he is present at the scene of his own disaster).

(11) mamá pɪkɪn tʃɔp<sup>7</sup> i ón papá pɪkɪn tʃɔp i ón  
mother child eat he own father child eat he own

The child's mother eats her share; the child's father eats his share (i.e.: Everyone has an allotted role).

(12) pípu we dem dɪ kɛ́f bét na dem sábi tɔ́k fɔ bét  
people which them (cont.) catch bird (EP) them know talk for bird

Only those who have been initiated into the mysteries of a subject are equipped to discuss it knowledgeably.

(13) pú<sup>8</sup> dɪ stɔ́p ɲáŋga<sup>9</sup>  
poor (cont.) stop finery

Poverty sets limits to ostentation.

(14) tifmán i fám na sósó médesɪn<sup>10</sup>  
thiefman he farm be so so medicine

A thief knows how to secure his property against theft.

(Cf. no. 4).

(15) tʃɔp brók pót  
food broke pot

Gluttony brings its own punishment.

<sup>7</sup> tʃɔp is a noun as well as a verb; it is translated as 'eat' v. and 'food' n.

<sup>8</sup> This is an interesting example of a class shift, i.e. English adjective → Pidgin abstract nominal. Cf. a similar phenomenon in *préja fɔ wi*, 'pray for us', where nominal → verbal.

<sup>9</sup> According to Schneider's dictionary (Schneider, 1960), this word, meaning 'finery', 'decorations', etc., is of Hausa origin.

<sup>10</sup> *médesɪn* has two meanings in Pidgin. We can use it as in English: *dóкта bɪn gíf mi médesɪn*, 'the doctor gave me medicine'. But it also has a much wider meaning and can refer to any charm, spell, medallion, juju, etc., which can be used to keep evil or trouble away from the possessor of the 'medicine', or to inflict it on another. For instance:

nó man nó fut hót mi fɔ séka a get sɔm trɔ́ŋ médesɪn

Nobody can hurt me because I have strong 'protection'.

a get sɔm médesɪn we i fut kíl sɔm mán I have 'medicine' which can kill.

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- (16) wán mán lébɔ anóda bɔn  
 one man labour another born  
 Frequently someone gets rewards which someone else worked for.
- (17) wen hán dɪ rɔp fút dɪ fút tú dɪ rɔp hán  
 when hand (cont.) rub foot the foot too (cont.) rub hand  
 Good actions bring their own reward

### CATEGORY III: PROVERBS WHICH PROBABLY AROSE IN CAMEROON<sup>11</sup>

- (18) áfia<sup>12</sup> dɪ kúl hát  
 'asheca' (cont.) cool heart  
 Sympathy consoles.
- (19) búf dɔŋ ópɪn gráfiman<sup>13</sup> dɪ sábi búk  
 bush (recent past) open grasslandman (cont.) know book  
 Wonders will never cease when even a grasslander is educated.
- (20) dɪ mún na twénti hɔŋgri<sup>14</sup>  
 the moon be twenty hungry  
 There is poverty everywhere. It's a bad time of the month to try to borrow money.
- (21) dɪ tɪŋ we i bun dú kakáo dɪ sém tú go dú kɔfí<sup>15</sup>  
 the thing which he (remote past) do cocoa the same too (fut.) do coffee  
 That which brought disaster to the cocoa industry will also ruin coffee (i.e. we rarely learn from past misfortunes).
- (22) i go wáf wi áɪ wɪt mímbɔ<sup>16</sup>  
 he (fut.) wash we eye with mimbo (alcohol)  
 He's a generous man and knows how to treat guests.
- (23) ju fúl lauk \*mókándzɔ<sup>17</sup>  
 you fool like 'mokanjo'  
 You are very easily fooled.

<sup>11</sup> References in the proverbs make this assumption likely.

<sup>12</sup> áfia – a sympathy formula which seems to be peculiar to Cameroon, though a similar form ɔfia is used by some Krio speakers. Schneider has not found the origin of áfia.

<sup>13</sup> gráfi 'grassfield' is a term used to refer to the Bamenda highlands. There was, and to some extent still is, a feeling among the people living near the coast that Bamenda people are less educated, less advanced. Schneider gives 'grassfield' as the origin of gráfi.

<sup>14</sup> The payment of monthly salaries has given rise to this proverb. After the salary has been paid, there is a period of plenty, but by the 20th of the month money is usually scarce.

<sup>15</sup> Cocoa used to be of much more value to Cameroon farmers than it is now. After the slump in prices many switched their attention to coffee-growing and many fear that good prices for coffee will not last either.

<sup>16</sup> mímbɔ is palm-wine, but can be extended to mean any alcoholic drink or even soft drink taken on festive occasions.

<sup>17</sup> mókándzɔ is a type of stockfish. According to one of my informants this fish was sold in such quantity in West Cameroon that people concluded it must be a very stupid fish to be so easily caught. Sometimes an additional ju bi sɔm prɔpa mumú sakaría ('You're an absolute fool'), 'you be some proper mute Zachary', is tagged on, indicating Biblical influence.

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- (24) kóntri tók spól \*mólíwe<sup>18</sup>  
country talk spoil Moliwe

Too much clannishness can be a bad thing. (One can give the wrong impression if one uses one's vernacular in front of strangers who do not understand it.)

- (25) mán gét pikín i drínk mímbó  
man get child he drink mimbo

Responsibilities often bring their own reward.

- (26) mímbó ði kúl hát  
mimbo (cont.) cool heart

Alcohol consoles

- (27) mímbó kéf aláta plénti séf i nó ði flíp fɔ púsi i bét  
mimbo catch rat plenty self he no (cont.) sleep for pussy he bed

No matter how drunk a rat is he does not go to sleep in a cat's bed.

Eldred Jones has recorded<sup>19</sup> a Krio proverb of very similar meaning:

arata na big mɔriman bɔt i nɔ go pre na pus kanda

and Ian Hancock in his unpublished collection of Krio proverbs records:

arata nɔba ple na pus in mɔt

- (28) pípu we dem ði gó \*mutíka<sup>20</sup> na dem sábi hau mbónḡa ði  
people which them (cont.) go Mutika (EP) them know how mbonga (cont.)  
kós  
cost

You should only seek advice from the experienced.

Schneider has the variant:

man, we i go mutika na i sabi hamos mbunga kɔs

- (29) watá fit drál fɔ \*ndónḡo<sup>21</sup> tú  
water fit dry for Ndongo too

Even the largest reserves can be drained.

CATEGORY IV: PROVERBS WITH PARALLELS IN KRIO<sup>22</sup>

- (30) bát búf nó dé fɔ trowé bát pikín  
bad bush no (locative be) for throw + away bad child

No matter how bad a child is his parents will not want to get rid of him.

Cf. the Krio equivalent: bád búf nó dé fɔ trowé bad pikín

<sup>18</sup> Moliwe is a C.D.C. (Cameroon Development Corporation) camp, not far from Victoria. It is said that at one time most of the workers there were Bakossi, and so they spoke Bakossi most of the time. The other workers reacted strongly, suspecting that the Bakossi were conspiring against them. This resulted in the transfer of almost everyone working in the camp. The story is possibly apochryphal because I have not been able to get a more precise date than 'between the wars'.

<sup>19</sup> Jones, 1971.

<sup>20</sup> Mutika is a fishing village on the West Cameroon coast and mbónḡa is a highly prized fish which is, reputedly, very hard to catch.

<sup>21</sup> The Ndongo or Donga river flows into the Benue.

<sup>22</sup> I owe my knowledge of Krio proverbs to Ian Hancock, who put his collection of proverbs at my disposal, and to Eldred Jones, who read a provisional draft of this article and commented on those Cameroon proverbs which had parallels in Krio. All Krio proverbs



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- (31) dʒám pás dáu mɔŋki tʃɔp pepé  
jam pass die monkey eat pepper

When pressed by necessity one will make do with very little.

This proverb is often abbreviated to dʒam pas dau

Schneider has recorded

jam pas day mɔnki chɔp pepe, sey, na njakakato  
say be garden egg

Cf. the Krio equivalents na aŋgri mek mɔŋki tʃam pepe and wé éléya mit mɔŋki i yit pépe, i sé na dʒakató

- (32) émti tánkju nó go fulɔp belé  
empty thank you no (fut.) full-up belly

A 'thank you' without tangible proof of gratitude is not very satisfying.

Cf. a Krio parallel belé nɔ get tɛŋki

- (33) gót dé  
God (locative be)

All is well. God exists.

Cf. the Krio form gód dé

- (34) gót i kót nó apil  
God he court no appeal

God's decisions are irrevocable.

Schneider records an interesting variant: kɔt keys no apiyl

- (35) gót we i gif mán krɔkrɔ na í tú  
God which he give man skin-disease (EP) he too

gif man fɪŋga fɔ kráfam  
give man finger for scratch it

If we are faced with a difficulty we are usually presented with the means of dealing with it.

Schneider records the variant: gɔt we i gif man kɔɔkɔɔ na i gif fɪŋga fɔ krasam

- (36) hɔri hɔri brók trɔʃis  
hurry hurry broke trousers

More haste less speed.

Schneider records this with the form trɔsis, which also occurs in Krio: ɔri-ɔri bɔs trɔsis.

- (37) hú nó laik fɔ tʃɔp awúf<sup>23</sup>  
who no like for eat 'awoof' (something for nothing)

Everybody likes something for nothing.

with tonal indications are from Ian Hancock. (Note that the acute accent in the Krio versions indicates high tone, in my own Cameroon Pidgin notation I consider it as indicating stress.)

<sup>23</sup> I am indebted to Ian Hancock for the information that this word, also found in Krio, is from Yoruba: àwúùfù, 'in the compound', and owó àwúùfù, 'money got without effort, by sheer luck'. Schneider glosses it as 'a bribe'.

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(38) i dé lauk i nó dé bɔt i dé  
 he (loc. be) like he no (loc. be) but he (loc. be)  
 He may not look it but he is well aware of all that is going on.

(39) i gét séns pas kíŋ<sup>24</sup> pas gómna pas díó  
 he get sense pass king pass governor pass D.O.  
 Intelligence-wise, he is unbeatable.

(40) i ʃwít fɔ tʃɔp ɔda man i gót  
 he sweet for eat other man he goat  
 One delights in sampling the fruits of another man's labour.

Cf. the Krio version: ɔda man bon swít fɔ sɔk – other man bone sweet for suck

(41) kɔní man dái kɔní man bériam  
 cunning man die cunning man bury it  
 There is loyalty among thieves.

(42) mán nó fít lúk fɔ ɔda man i ánus we i nó ʃó i ón  
 man no fit look for other man he anus which he no show he own  
 You cannot pry into another's inadequacies without revealing your own.

Krio suggests a similar meaning by

babú laf pan í bróda wes  
 chimpanzee laugh upon he brother waist (i.e. buttocks)

(43) mán nó fít slíp wɪt ɔda man i áu  
 man no fit sleep with other man he eye  
 There are certain things for which a man must rely on himself.

(44) mán we i bón i bíabía na í go fɔs hía<sup>25</sup> dɪ smél  
 man which he burn he hair (EP) he (fut.) first hear the smell  
 You will be the first to suffer from your own rash actions.

Schneider records the following variant: man, we i bɔn biabia, na i go hia simel

(45) mán we i gét krɔkrɔ no dɪ wiá wáit trɔʃis  
 man which he get skin-disease no (cont.) wear white trousers  
 Nobody deliberately reveals his own shortcomings.

Schneider has the following variant: kɔɔkɔɔ las no di wea wayt baf

This proverb does not actually occur in Krio but, according to Eldred Jones (private communication), *get séns pas kíŋ* occurs as a description of a folk-tale hero. *séns pas kíŋ* is the name of a folk-hero in Cameroon Pidgin tales as well. According to my informant the story of a boy who outwits a chief/foŋ/king and so is *séns pas kíŋ* exists in many of the vernaculars. In Lamso versions he is referred to as *séns pas kíŋ*, although the remainder of the story is in Lamso. Probably this hero is common to much of West African folk tradition and I have no way of ascertaining whether his name was first translated in Cameroon, in Sierra Leone or in both places.

<sup>25</sup> The usage of *hía*, meaning 'sense, understand', seems to be confined to Cameroon Pidgin and is probably a semantic carry-over from the vernaculars. Cf. the following: a nó wél, a hía sɔmtɪŋ fɔ ma béle – I'm not well; I have a pain in my stomach. pút ju hán só, ju nó dɪ hía sɔmtɪŋ – Put you hand thus; do you not feel something? a hía sɔm smél – I smell something. a nó bun hía nó nótɪŋ – I didn't understand a thing. nó tók! a tɪŋk se a dɪ hía sɔmtɪŋ – Ssh! I think I hear something.

Lamso also uses one verb *ju* where Pidgin uses *hía*: cf. *mu ju kifa* – I hear something; *mu ju kirum* – I notice a smell; *mu ju ɲar* – I feel a pain; *mu ju* – I understand.

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- (46) mɔni hát wɔman no sábi  
money hard woman no know

Women rarely realize how hard it is to earn money.

Schneider has the following variant: mɔni hat wɔman no no

- (47) mɔni nó bi sansán  
money no be sand

Money does not grow on trees.

- (48) mɔŋki dáu mɔŋki kóm  
monkey die monkey come

Nobody is indispensable.

Schneider records the same form and Krio has babú dáu babú kám (babú = baboon)

- (49) ɔda man gót i swít fɔ súp  
other man goat he sweet for soup

Cf. (40.)

- (50) smól smól kɛf mɔŋki  
small small catch monkey

As long as your advance is forward, no matter how gradual it is, you will arrive.

- (51) sɔfri sɔfri kɛf mɔŋki  
softly softly catch monkey

Gently does it.

(Cf. the different emphasis of 50.)

Schneider records sɔfli sɔfli kas mɔŋki

- (52) smól nó bí sík  
small no be sick

To be small or weak is not necessarily a disadvantage.

Schneider has the same form and Krio has smól nɔto sík

- (53) tánkju we swít na tánkju we i gó wáka wuti smól dáj  
thank you which sweet be thank you which he go walk with small dash

Gratitude is appreciated more if it comes in tangible form.

(Cf. 32).

- (54) tít<sup>26</sup> an tɔŋ dɛ mék paláva  
tooth and tongue (cont.) make palaver

Even the most closely allied can quarrel.

Cf. the Krio version: tit ɛn tɔŋ kɛn jam

<sup>26</sup> This is the singular form. The plural is tít dem. Usually, it was the singular form which was adapted, e.g. fút, 'foot', fút dem, 'feet'. Again, it was usually the base form of the verb that was borrowed: a bun sí 'I saw', a bun dú 'I did', but, occasionally, a marked form was adapted: i dɛ brókam 'he is breaking it'.

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- (55) wán dé bi wán dé  
one day be one day

(Almost a threat). Things will not always be the same. One day the tables will be turned.

Schneider has the form wan dey go bi wan dey which is even more similar to Hancock's Krio version: wan de go bi wan de

- (56) wán hán nó fít tái bóndu  
one hand no fit tie bundle

We must co-operate with others if we are to succeed.

Schneider has the same form.

- (57) wen gót gíf mán krókró i du gífam fínga fɔ kráfam  
when God give man skin-disease he (cont.) give it finger for scratch it

(Cf. 35.)

- (58) wen jú du lúk fɔ mán i lás óda man tú du lúk ju ón  
when you (cont.) look for man he buttocks other man too (cont.) look you own  
When you are concentrating on another's human limitations you are thereby revealing your own.

(Cf. 42.)

CATEGORY V: PROVERBS FOR WHICH I HAVE NOT FOUND PARALLELS

- (59) aí nó du fút bíf<sup>27</sup>  
eye no (cont.) shoot animal

It cannot do any harm to look.

- (60) awúf i nó get bón  
something for nothing he no get bone

One will not thrive on something one has not earned.

- (61) bat lók bíf nó du sí hóntaman  
bad luck beef no (cont.) see hunterman

One who is dogged by ill-luck will not see the trouble that is coming his way.

- (62) du gút tɔn bát  
do good turn bad

One's good deeds often rebound to one's own detriment.

- (63) éni mán wán tʃóp tʃía fɔ óda man  
any man want eat chair for other man

Everyone wants something that someone else has.

<sup>27</sup> bíf has a much wider application in Pidgin than 'beef'. It can refer to meat of any description, even chicken, but its basic meaning is 'animal'. Cf. búf bíf: 'bush' animal, i.e. an animal which has not been tamed or reared.

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- (64) gút kómbi<sup>28</sup> fáin pás bát bróda  
 good friend fine pass bad brother  
 Friendship can surpass blood ties.

Schneider records the variant: gut kɔmbi pas bat brɔda

- (65) gút lók nó bi médesɪn  
 good luck no be medicine

Luck cannot be manipulated. It cannot be brought in the market.

- (66) i laík mɔní lauk satán laík dáuman  
 he like money like Satan like dieman  
 He's exceptionally avaricious.

- (67) ju tíŋk se na kápenta klín mí?  
 you think say (EP) carpenter clean me?  
 Do you think I am a stick, without feelings?

- (68) mán pás jú hól i bát  
 man pass you hold he bad

If someone is better than you, you can always find consolation by concentrating on his weaknesses.

- (69) mán we i gét bák get i ón bét  
 man which he get back get he own bed

A self-reliant man will always find ways of coping with difficulties.

- (70) mán we i nó dɪ wáka nó fít bríŋ sɔmtíŋ  
 man which he no (cont.) walk no fit bring something

You cannot expect good fortune to be dropped into your lap. You must seek it.

- (71) mán we i nó fía wáitman i nó fía gót  
 man which he no fear whiteman he no fear God  
 If you respect God, respect his white messenger!

- (72) mbóma<sup>29</sup> bun tók se dé nó bi wán  
 boa (remote past) talk say day no be one

We can learn from the experienced that there will always be other opportunities.

This proverb is also often used in the form recorded by Schneider: dey no bi wan.

- (73) pípu sábi laík mán we i nó dɪ wáka benbén wuti dém  
 people know like man which he no (cont.) walk bendbend with them  
 People like those they can trust and rely on.

<sup>28</sup> Probably from 'companion', or Portuguese 'companheiro'.

<sup>29</sup> Schneider (1965a) gives mboma as of 'unknown African origin', Hancock has traced it to Kikongo. In West Cameroon a tale is told of how 'Mboma' one day caught 'Bif', an animal, by the tail. He was about to swallow the animal when the captured animal told him that he would taste better if Mboma started eating him from the head. Mboma let go the tail so as to begin at the head but his prey escaped. Mboma decided he would be wiser in future for dé nó bi wán.

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- (74) pú man laík fɔ mék paláva fɔséka i nó gét nótɔŋ fɔ lós  
poor man like for make palaver forsake he no get nothing for loss  
One who has little to lose will risk even that little if there is a chance that he may thus improve his position.

- (75) sí néva dráu  
sea never dry  
Some things last forever.

Schneider has the variant: si no di dray

- (76) tróbu dé kaín bai kaín  
trouble (loc. be) kind by kind  
There are all sorts of misfortunes that can befall one, so who can escape scot free?

- (77) tróbu dé kaín bai nóm̄ba  
trouble (loc. be) kind by number

Variant of (76) but with strong overtones of 'When your number is up you've had it'.

- (78) tudé ju di tʃɔp tumóro ju dé fɔ dɔŋ<sup>30</sup>  
today you (cont.) chop tomorrow you (loc. be) for down  
Good fortune does not last forever.

- (79) wáka man nó di kúk ŋkánda<sup>31</sup>  
walk man no (cont.) cook hide  
A traveller has no time to cook tough meat (i.e. Strangers and travellers are rarely in one place long enough to undertake long-term projects).

Schneider has recorded the variant: trenja no di kuk nkanda.

- (80) watá bun wáka i wán gó mék misték  
water (remote past) walk he one go make mistake  
Water set out on its own but took a wrong turning (i.e. Loneliness is the father of error).

- (81) wóman we i gét pikín na i sabi sɔfa fɔ pikín  
woman which he get child (EP) he know suffer for child  
The fact of suffering to get something enables one to suffer to retain it.

- (82) wóri wóri spóil bísɔnɔs  
worry worry spoil business  
Worrying will only make things worse.

The origin of West African pidgins and creoles is still a hotly debated issue. Are they the remnants of a Portuguese pidgin that has been relexified towards English and certain vernaculars? Or the result of the africanization of a nautical jargon? Are they the descendants of a creole which grew up in the New World and which came to Africa with the manumitted slaves? Or, was there, perhaps, an early West African pidgin which went across the Atlantic in the first half to the seventeenth century and returned again, in

<sup>30</sup> Cf. the theme of the very popular high-life record: 'No condition is permanent in this world.'

<sup>31</sup> Schneider has not found the origin of ŋkánda. He lists it as of 'unknown African origin'. Hancock has found lkandal in Kikongo and lŋkandal in Kabundu.

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modified form, to Sierra Leone, from where it has radiated to influence the pidgins along the entire West African coast? If the answer is to be found, the pidgins and creoles will have to be probed not only for linguistic but also for sociological and cultural evidence. It is in the hope of making a small contribution in this direction that I offer the above proverbs. The lexis and much of the grammatical structure closely resembles English, but the embedded wisdom owes little to the culture associated with this parent language. In it, we find reflected Cameroonian comments on the way of life which came in the wake of the colonizer, thoughts and expressions which closely reflect indigenous patterns, isolated words from Yoruba, Hausa, Kikongo and Kabundu, and, at first sight, a surprising degree of correspondence with Krio. The evidence of over 40 per cent of the proverbs having analogues in Krio certainly lends credence to Hancock's contention<sup>32</sup> that 'it (i.e. Cameroon Pidgin) appears to have begun to take on its present form only during the nineteenth century when intercourse between Freetown and the Cameroons region became more frequent'. That Krio should have exerted an influence on Cameroon Pidgin is not surprising in view of the historical links – links going back at least to Alfred Saker's establishment of Victoria in 1858. What is surprising is that such a high percentage of Krio-type proverbs is to be found in the Pidgin of Bamenda speakers.<sup>33</sup>

Does one assume that the Krio influence has extended so far inland or does one postulate the existence of a common core of West African proverbs which are reflected in both Krio and Cameroon Pidgin? Perhaps the analysis of proverbs in other vernaculars and in other pidgins will help provide a solution, and such an analysis will also shed light on the sources, the structure and the potential of West African pidgins and creoles.

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<sup>32</sup> Quoted from Hancock (1971).

<sup>33</sup> This is somewhat surprising in view of the fact that travellers from Victoria to Bamenda still experience considerable difficulties (there are 450 bridges to be crossed between Buea and Mamfe and Mamfe is still in the forest zone!), parts of the route being open to north-bound traffic three days a week and to south-bound traffic the other three. Three sections are supposed to be free of traffic on Sundays but permission can be obtained to travel in either direction if one's business is urgent. The Bamenda Highlands are bounded in most places by steep cliffs, often 4,000 ft. high. The road to Mankon rises 4,000 ft. in twenty miles. Such natural boundaries would have prevented intimate contact with the coast. It is hard to say when Pidgin reached the Highlands but, according to Harry Rudin (1938), it was already a flourishing lingua franca there in the time of the Germans: 'In the grasslands of North Western Cameroons there were so many dialects that the various tribes spoke, and still do speak Pidgin English, to make themselves understood by others in their periodic market days' (p. 38).

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