An 18th-century novel from the Miskito Coast
What was creolized?*

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William Williams (1727–1791) wrote a novel entitled Mr. Penrose: The Journal of Penrose, Seaman about an English sailor marooned on the Caribbean coast of Nicaragua, partly based on the author’s own experience. Internal linguistic evidence confirms that the castaway’s contact was with the Rama and Miskito Indians of this area. The novel’s 350 printed pages are in the formal English of the times, but also include dialogue in the local vernacular English that was still undergoing creolization. It includes words not only from Rama and Miskito, but also Spanish and African languages and phrases suggesting convergence with modern English Creole structures (“Harry was sick, sick”). This article uses lexical and morphosyntactic data from the 18th-century manuscript to cast light on the origin of synchronic features of Miskito Coast Creole English.

Keywords: Miskito Coast Creole English, Rama, Miskito, Spanish, Nicaragua, creolization

1. Introduction

Mr. Penrose: The Journal of Penrose, Seaman by William Williams (1727–1791; see Williams 1969) “... is very probably America’s first novel” (Dickason 1969: 13).

* This article is the revision of a paper of the same title presented at the meeting of the Society for Pidgin and Creole Linguistics in Accra, Ghana from August 3 to 5, 2011. I would like to thank Professor Edgar W. Schneider and an anonymous reviewer for their helpful suggestions for improving it; any remaining shortcomings are my sole responsibility. I would also like to thank Professor Sarah Wadsworth (Marquette University in Wisconsin) for encouraging me to undertake this research project and for providing me with a copy of Williams 1969, and for succeeding in getting the book reprinted in 2013. I am also grateful to Professors Barbara Assadi (Glendale Community College in California) and Colette Grinevald (University of Lyon in France) for sharing with me their knowledge of the Rama and Rama Cay Creole languages as well as their redeeming sense of humor during the unusually long gestation of this study.
The narrative is an “account of a young Welsh lad, Llewellin Penrose, who ... is deserted by his shipmates on the Moskito Coast of Central America. Here he not only survives but establishes amicable relations with the local Indians (evidently of the Rama tribe)” (Dickason 1969: 14). In 1747 the 20-year-old author arrived in Philadelphia from the tropics. He was later described by a contemporary as often relating

his adventures among the Caribs and and Negro tribes, many of which adventures were strictly the same as related in your manuscript of Penrose... He spoke the Negro and Carrib tongue, and appeared to me to have lived among them some years (Dickason 1969: 17).

Because of my work on the local English-based creole (Holm 1978), I was asked to help provide internal linguistic evidence from the narrative that would confirm that the contact was in fact with the Rama and Miskito of Nicaragua’s Caribbean Coast. Such evidence is indeed there, and brings with it what a creolist can hardly hope for: some 350 printed pages in not only the formal English of the times, but also dialogue in the local vernacular that was still undergoing restructuring. This evidence, discussed below, includes words from Rama, Miskito, Spanish and African languages and phrases suggesting convergences with Creole structures. “[T]he novel as a whole is enriched and enlivened by Williams’ sensitivity to linguistic variations and his ability in echoing them” (Dickason 1969: 29), all preserved in the original spelling of the manuscript.

This study uses lexical and morphosyntactic data from the unedited manuscript to cast light on the origin of synchronic features of Miskito Coast Creole English. Section 2 discusses the author and manuscript, and Section 3 describes the current sociolinguistic situation on Nicaragua’s Miskito coast, including the major ethnic groups and their languages. Section 4 examines various lexical areas such as words with grammatical implications and semantic areas such as flora and fauna. The conclusion, Section 5, evaluates the relevance of Williams’ manuscript to what we know about the development of Miskito Coast Creole English in particular and creole languages in general.

2. Williams and his manuscript

Williams was born in Bristol (England) in 1727, the son of a sailor. He dreamed of becoming a painter, but dropped out of grammar school to become an apprentice seaman. On his second voyage to Virginia, he left his ship for another going to the West Indies. He appears to have had first-hand experience in a number of the Caribbean ports visited by Penrose, the narrator of Williams’ fictional travel
account (here referred to as *Mr. Penrose* because of the difficulty of assigning it a definite date of publication, as explained below). As Dickason notes, “[w]hile Williams himself lived for two or three years at the most in the Caribbean, his hero Penrose spent twenty-seven years in voluntary exile …” (1969: 16). Although the shipwrecked hero resembles Daniel Defoe’s popular *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) in some respects, the setting and language of *Mr. Penrose* seem authentic enough to the present writer to suggest substantial influence from the author’s life experiences.

Williams arrived in Philadelphia from the tropics in 1747 at the age of 20. He eventually set himself up as a painter of portraits, and continued to enjoy success as such after he moved to New York City in 1769, and then returned to England in 1776. As for *Mr. Penrose*, “[i]nternal evidence strongly suggests that Williams worked on his long manuscript over many years, and carried with him from New York the essentially completed tale” (Dickason 1969: 20). In Bristol the aging Williams found a benefactor in Thomas Eagles, to whom he gave a copy of the manuscript. After Williams’ death in 1791, Eagles rewrote the manuscript to make it “… syntactically correct, polite and conventional … with the intention of making it more literary, more printable — but thereby destroyed much of its original vigor, color, and directness” (Dickason 1969: 21). Eagles’ son inherited both versions of the manuscript, and in 1815 the edited (or bowdlerized) one was published by John Murray in London. A pirated German translation appeared two years later as *Der Neue Robinson, oder, Tagebuch Llewellin Penroses, eines Matrosen. Aus dem Englischen* (Williams 1817). That this translation provided meticulous footnotes in German and Latin with the scientific names of the tropical plants and animals is another indication of the factual basis of much of Williams’ description in *Mr. Penrose*.

Finally Dickason found Williams’ original, unbowdlerized manuscript with the help of archivists in Bristol and in 1969 he had it published by Indiana University Press, who reprinted it in 2013.

3. The Miskito Coast

The Miskito Coast includes the northeast coast of Honduras and the eastern coast of Nicaragua. In these areas of the two officially Spanish-speaking countries, Creole English serves as the lingua franca among various ethnic groups. The Miskito are the principal inhabitants of the Honduran area, but the Nicaraguan area is more heterogeneous. In 1982 its population of 118,000 was made up of 57% Miskito (Afro-Indians), 22% Creoles (Afro-Europeans), 15% Ladinos (Spanish-speaking mestizos), 4% Sumu (Amerindians), 1% Garifuna (Afro-Indians), and 0.5% Rama
(Amerindians) as well as 0.5% Chinese and foreigners. Creole English is the first language of the Creoles and most Garifuna and Rama; it is the second language of most Miskito and some Ladinos. The only more recent figures that I have been able to find are in Bartens and Farquharson (2012:174), indicating that Miskito Coast Creole is spoken by approximately 27,000 Creoles as well as by the Rama and Garifuna and some Miskito, but according to other sources speakers may total 35,000 or “Creoles may number up to 50,000 or 19.5% of the autonomous regions.”

People who are not from Central America are often surprised to learn that many inhabitants of its eastern coast on the Caribbean are native speakers of English — especially Creole English — rather than Spanish. English predominates not only in Belize (formerly British Honduras) but in many communities right down the coast to Panama. The cultural differences between eastern and western Central America date back to pre-Columbian times.

The western parts of Honduras and Nicaragua were originally inhabited by Mayan and then Aztec groups from the north, who farmed the fertile soil. The rain forests of the east were populated by hunter-gatherers speaking Macro-Chibchan languages from northern South America. The Spaniards’ conquest of this area in the 1520s established their dominance of the western part of Central America, but there was little to attract them in the east.

3.1 The English and the Creoles

In 1631 British began to settle Providence island off the Caribbean coast of what is today Nicaragua, leading to contact that was welcomed by the coastal Indians, since the alliance strengthened both them and the British against the Spaniards, who had virtually enslaved the western tribes. As English buccaneers became increasingly powerful in this region in the late 17th century, they continued this alliance by taking local men with them on expeditions to act as harpooners to help feed their crews. The custom arose that the buccaneers would take local women in informal conjugal arrangements in exchange for metal tools and arms while at anchor in the coastal lagoons, hiding from the Spaniards whose ships they attacked for gold and silver. Thus a new ethnic group arose, the Miskito, whose political and family links to the British increased their power along the coast and their contempt for the Spanish.

During the early 18th century the English buccaneers were replaced by British traders, loggers, and planters who brought African slaves with them from Jamaica. In 1740 the British organized the area, which they called the Mosquito Shore, into a protectorate with a superintendent appointed from Jamaica. In 1786 a Spanish military victory forced Britain to evacuate all her settlers from the coast; most went to what is now Belize, but a significant number of Creoles stayed on. Spanish
attempts to settle the area failed, and after 1821, when Central America became independent, the British in Belize tried to re-establish a protectorate on the Miskito Coast. However, because the United States was interested in this area as a possible site for a canal across the isthmus, the Americans forced a treaty on the British and Miskito in 1860 giving Nicaragua authority over the foreign affairs of the “Miskito Reserve”, whose king was demoted to chief. With Creole and foreign businessmen wielding the real power, North American firms began banana plantations as well as rubber and logging operations in the late 19th century, strengthening the position of the English language on the coast. Nicaragua forcibly incorporated the Miskito Coast in 1894, taking authority for its internal affairs as well, but leaving the foreign enterprises in peace. The imposition of Spanish as the official language of government and schools left the Creoles and others politically and economically marginalized. In the 1980s the Sandinista revolutionaries and following Nicaraguan governments began trying to rectify language discrimination, particularly in education, by offering literacy courses in Creole English, Miskito and Rama as well as Spanish.

3.2 The Miskito

The fall of Providence to Spain in 1641 seems likely to have brought a large number of escaped slaves to the mainland (Holm 1978:175–87). In 1710 they were joined by the African captives in a rebellion on two ships of the Danish West India Company coming from Fort Christiansborg near what is now Accra in Ghana. A 1757 report states: “[t]he natives, or Mosquito people, are of two breeds; one are the original Indian, the other (who are called the Samboes), a mixture of these with the negroes … Their posterity are become as numerous as the others, and there is no distinction either in their rights or customs” (Hodgson 1757:45). Apparently the Africans had full access to the Indians’ culture and the Miskito language was never creolized (Lehmann 1910:714). The name of the ethnolinguistic group seems to come from the name of the Mosquito Shore:

(1) “Who are those you Call Sancoodas?” said I. Nunez then told me they were the same we call’d Moskeetos and that they were the most inveterate Enimies to all Spaniards (Williams 1969:329).

This is supported by the equivalent in local Spanish above: zancuda ‘mosquito’. There are thousands of words of Miskito origin in modern Miskito Coast Creole English (MCC); one such word that occurs in Mr. Penrose is the following:

(2) He told me they were a kind of Hog with white faces. Therefore I imagined them to be what I had heard called Warrees (Williams 1969:104).
Compare Miskito *wuari* ‘pecari, chancho de monte’ [peccary, wild hog] (Vaughan Warman 1962: 283). Because the Miskito traveled widely, the current MCC form *waari* is known to Creole English speakers all along the Caribbean coast of Central America. Belizean Creole has some 35 words from Miskito (Holm 1977).

### 3.3 The Rama

The Rama appear to be the remnant of a group of Indians speaking a Macro-Chibchan language which once occupied a much larger area extending south to Costa Rica but which was decimated and displaced during contact with the Spanish, English and Miskito. Today several hundred of them occupy the small island of Rama Cay in Bluefields Lagoon and speak Rama Cay Creole, an archaic form of Miskito Coast Creole influenced by their ancestral language, Rama (Assadi 1983; Holm 1989: 475–7). Rama is an endangered language now spoken by some two dozen people living on the mainland (Craig 1986).

Most Rama have lived on Rama Cay since the late 18th century; they were subjugated by the Miskito, who exacted tribute from them or sold them into slavery. In the mid-19th century they found allies in two Moravian missionaries, a husband and wife who came to live on their island to convert them. Since they were so few in number and the men already knew some English from trading in Bluefields, the German-speaking couple decided not to learn Rama but to teach them the Gospels in English. The Miskito king, himself a convert, no longer permitted his men to raid Rama Cay and the missionary couple became its virtual rulers. Its inhabitants all converted and adopted a modified form of the missionaries’ culture and language as well. It was observed that “[a]ll the [Rama] children are taught English as their mother tongue … [but] the teachers themselves — all Germans — were by no means proficient; indeed, only learners themselves” (Pim and Seemann 1869: 282). Later, when the group’s transition from Rama to Rama Cay Creole was well advanced, a visiting German-speaking anthropologist noted that “[t]he Rama Indians speak English with a certain strange intonation and pronunciation, which is strikingly reminiscent of the English spoken as a foreign language by Germans” (Conzemius 1927: 339). For example, Rama Cay Creole has expressions like *for triy deyz* ‘three days ago’ (cf. German *vor drei Tagen*).

Conzemius (1932: 168) wrote of “a tailless anthropoid ape … supposed to carry off human beings of the opposite sex … the Rama and the Creoles call this ape *yohó or yuhó*. Conzemius (1927: 340) derives the Creole term from Rama. It occurs in *Mr. Penrose*:

(3) One evening … I chanc’d to hear the Yoho’s cry (Williams 1969: 90);
… a noise I often heard of moon-light nights … was a hollow treble tone, as thus: Yaoho, Yaoho … a sort of Nocturnal Animal who walked upright as a Man and the same size … by the track of their feet one would think their heels were placed foremost (Williams 1969: 78–9).

3.4 The Spanish

Like the New York City term Spanish, the Miskito Coast Creole term Spanya or Panya man refers to Spanish-speaking people of the New World, who are usually of mixed race in the Caribbean area.


Like other areas where Spanish has long been in contact with English from Texas to Puerto Rico, local English in Nicaragua has taken on hundreds of words from Spanish, often with a slightly different connotation from their English equivalents, just as in Portuguese a sombreiro is distinct from a generic chapeu.

(5) Sambraro or broad brim’d straw hat (Williams 1969: 110).

Note that other terms above are also from Spanish, e.g. Sancoodas ‘mosquito, Miskito’ (cf. zancudas idem.) or Samboe ‘Afro-Indian’ (cf. zambo idem.), both in Section 3.2. It should be noted that Spanish was already influencing English grammar (and vice versa) in the 18th century:

(6) “My young Master Came home from the Havannah” (Williams 1969: 352).

(Note that in Spanish the Cuban capital always takes the article, la Habana.)

3.5 The Africans

The Africans who came to Nicaragua arrived by many routes. As noted above, some got there by way of Jamaica, others directly from the Guinea Coast, especially from what is today Ghana. To judge from the Dictionary of Jamaican English (Cassidy and Le Page 1980), languages like Twi played an important role in shaping the lexicon and morphosyntax of the New World creoles, including that of the Miskito Coast:

(7) I got one of the large Callabashes and oiled it round, and then I palmed clay all round it without and by this means made a huge ugly sort of Yabba. After it had stood to dry a time we burnt it, and it answered very well to hold our Water and would boil things very well” (Williams 1969: 133). “… pots or Yabbas of our making” (Williams 1969: 139).
Cassidy and Le Page (180: 483) define *yaba* as ‘a native-made heavy earthenware vessel of any size (quite small bowls up to cooking pots holding several gallons)’; they derive it from the word *ayawá* in the Akan dialect of Twi, meaning ‘earthen vessel or dish’. Their earliest citation is 1889, which the Williams manuscript predates by a century. Since their lexicography served as a model for my own (Holm 1978, Holm with Shilling 1982), I should point out one of their criteria for considering a word “Jamaican” for inclusion in their dictionary: “[w]ords (or senses) now (or once) general in English but of which the earliest or latest record is in a book about Jamaica by one who had been there or otherwise had direct knowledge of the island” (Cassidy and Le Page 1980: xii). By this criterion, *yabba* could be considered a Miskito Coast Creole word that was borrowed into Jamaican, but of course it is also possible that the undocumented word made its way into MCC from Jamaican before Williams wrote his manuscript of *Mr. Penrose*.

### 4. Lexical areas

While the section above discussed the various languages and their speakers that were in contact on the Miskito Coast when Williams wrote his manuscript of *Mr. Penrose*, this section discusses several areas of lexicon in that work which are particularly relevant to this study’s aim of using lexical and morphosyntactic data from the unedited manuscript to cast light on the origin of synchronic features of Miskito Coast Creole English. Some of these areas are semantic (e.g. local flora and fauna), but not all.

#### 4.1 Words with grammatical implications

Williams used a number of words which have standard meanings and usages in modern English, but in a slightly different way that suggests that his usage had been influenced by the varieties of English of his times, including the Creole English of the Miskito Coast.

##### 4.1.1 Morpheme boundary shift

Certain changes in the shape of words are associated with language contact, such as the shift in the boundary between two morphemes due to reanalysis. The French phrase *un napperon* for ‘a tablecloth’ underwent such a change when it became the English phrase *an apron*. Similarly, many English plural nouns were reanalysed as singulars in English-based creoles, such as MCC *one matches*, in which the second element constitutes a single morpheme. Such words are found in *Mr. Penrose*:
(8) Patty lost her daughter Matty in a kind of *fitts* and we buried her by the side of Luta” (Williams 1969: 148).

In modern MCC *fits* means ‘fit’ or ‘seizure’ as in *fitsbush* or *fitsweed*, names of medicinal plants.

### 4.1.2 Change of syntactic category

Williams uses the nautical word *shoal* as a noun meaning ‘a shallow area of water’:

(9) We came on the *shoal* and and haled up our boat (Williams 1969: 92).

He also uses it as an adjective, as in modern Miskito Coast Creole:

(10) … a very *shoal* place (Williams 1969: 78) …. It became *shoaler* by degrees (1969: 97).

He even uses it as a verb meaning ‘to become shallow’:

(11) … when the water should *shoal* (Williams 1969: 303).

As it happens, the *Oxford English Dictionary* lists both usages in (9) and (10), but when I was doing my fieldwork as a young landlubber in 1976 they struck me as odd and I assumed they were Creole usages. I had noticed that many English adjectives were actually verbs in MCC:

(12) A did *tayad* ‘I was tired.’ (Holm 1978: 252)

This follows a pattern found in many substrate African languages, and is found in Atlantic creole languages from the Caribbean to Africa (Holm 1988: 189–90).

### 4.1.3 Change of subcategory

The syntactic category of nouns can be divided into subcategories such as count nouns (e.g. English *table*, *two tables*) vs. non-count or mass nouns (*furniture*, *two pieces of furniture*). Subcategorizational rules vary from one language to another: in Spanish *pan* ‘bread’ is a count noun (*un pan* ‘a loaf of bread’) while in English it is a non-count noun. In MCC one can say *one bread*. Conversely, some English count nouns are mass nouns in MCC: *beans* seems to be a mass noun consisting of a single morpheme, like *fitts* in (8) above, and the only way to refer to a single bean is with a unit of measurement, i.e. *one grain of beans*. This non-English usage is found in *Mr. Penrose*:

(13) These Beans … are about the size of a Dollar … 3 or 4 *grains* will relieve the most racking cholic (Williams 1969: 318).

The syntactic category of verbs can be divided into subcategories of those that are intransitive (taking no direct object), transitive (requiring a direct object),
etc. Again, these subcategories vary from one language to another and those of MCC do not always match those of English. In MCC one can say *They curse me black* ‘They cursed me, saying I was black’ (Holm 1978: 136). A similar structure is found in the *Mr. Penrose* manuscript:

(14) They often say “Curse your colour” to poor Blackmen… (Williams 1969: 359).

4.1.4 Reduplication

The repetition of words or morphemes is associated with children’s speech in European languages (e.g. *poopoo, bonbon*) but not in the Atlantic creoles and their substrate languages. The reduplication of adjectives to intensify their meaning can be seen in Creole English *big-big* and Yoruba *nlánlá*, both meaning ‘huge’ by repeating the word meaning ‘big’. An analogous structure is found in *Mr. Penrose*:

(15) Harry was sick, sick (Williams 1969: 165).

4.1.5 Miscellaneous

A characteristic of many Atlantic creoles also found in their substrate languages is the use of the word meaning ‘with’ to join noun phrases or other parts of sentences as opposed to the word meaning ‘and’ to join entire sentences (Holm 1988: 206–7). This is rare in modern MCC but it does occur: *The captain with everybody was there* (Holm 1978: 291), as it did in *Mr. Penrose*:

(16) The next day the Captain and I with Harry and the Negro went away to the Sloop … (Williams 1969: 212).

Finally MCC, like many other English-based creoles, uses the compound *rock-stone* where English would simply use *rock or stone*; this also occurs in *Mr. Penrose*:

(17) These [whelks] I broke against the rock stones … (Williams 1969: 56).

4.2 Archaic usages

In early Modern English *on* was used with the verb plus -*ing* to indicate progressive aspect, e.g. “He is on writing” meaning ‘He is writing’. With time *on* was reduced to *a*, which has survived in regional varieties of English and occurred in *Mr. Penrose*:

(18) I … returned in order to go a fishing (Williams 1969: 62).

In modern MCC *a* serves as one of several verbal markers indicating progressive aspect, e.g. *You a goin’ now* while in the creoles of Jamaica and Guyana *a* can be used this way with the verb stem: *You a go*. 
Modern MCC uses *from* with the meaning of ‘since’: “He start to work *from* he nineteen years old” (Holm 1978:78). This usage is also found in *Mr. Penrose*:

(19) ... having *from* a Child ever taking much delight in prying into the works and wonders of Nature” (Williams 1969:267).

The *Oxford English Dictionary* cites “from a child” in a 1611 translation of the Bible, describing it as an “idiomatic phrase”.

4.3 Regional dialect usages

As in many parts of the English-speaking world, on the Miskito Coast *learn* can be used in the non-standard sense of ‘teach’: “You must *learn* him English” (Holm 1983:102). This usage is also found in *Mr. Penrose*:

(20) I took it into my head to *learn* her to make a Courtesy (Williams 1969:107).

Nearly half of the regional British usages in Miskito Coast Creole come from Scotland and the North of England (Holm 1978:88). These include words like *junks* for ‘chunks’, also found in *Mr. Penrose* (Williams 1969:139).

4.4 Nautical usages

The only way Europeans and Africans could get to the Miskito Coast — and the other maritime colonies in which creoles arose — was by sea. Ships’ crews spoke distinct nautical varieties of European languages resulting from the contact of individuals’ dialects and languages that reflected their distinct origins. Williams and his hero Penrose were sailors and their speech included nautical terms such as *abaft* (Williams 1969:36) referring to the stern or rear of a ship. This was the location of the *poop* deck, which acquired the general meaning of ‘rear’: today the MCC term for a black widow spider is *red poop* because of its marking. Penrose refers to these spiders as

(21) Red poops ... having their after parts as red as Vermillion” (Williams 1969:309).

MCC *taat* is a seat in a canoe, which has become the Miskito word *tat*. Williams mentions

(22) ... a *thout* to fix amidships [of a canoe] (Williams 1969:107),

which the editor glosses as ‘thwart.’ The *Oxford English Dictionary* gives 1721 as the latest use of *thout* (under *thwart*) meaning a seat in a boat, suggesting that there is a direct link between it and the MCC term since both lack /w/.
4.5 Flora and fauna

As noted in Section 2, the inclusion of the scientific names of the tropical plants and animals in Williams 1817 is an indication of the factual basis of much of Mr. Penrose.

For this reason, this section will provide a full account of those terms that match in Mr. Penrose and MCC, giving the former with the page on which it occurs in Williams (1969) and the latter in the writing system used in Holm (1978) and explained in Cassidy and Le Page (1980:xxxix–xl). When known, the scientific name follows; note that sp. is the abbreviation of species or ‘variety’ in such names.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Penrose term</th>
<th>page</th>
<th>item</th>
<th>scientific name</th>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>cedar tree</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>síida trii</td>
<td><em>Cedrela odorata</em> (not <em>Cedrus</em> genus)</td>
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<td>cocoplumbs</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>kuoko plom</td>
<td><em>Chrysobalanus icaco</em></td>
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<td>coliloo</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>kalaloo</td>
<td>Spinach-like greens</td>
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<tr>
<td>corritoo</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>karito</td>
<td>maguey plant (<em>Agave</em> genus)</td>
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<tr>
<td>cotton tree</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>katin trii</td>
<td>silk-cotton tree (<em>Ceiba pentandra</em>)</td>
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<tr>
<td>goat pepper</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>guot pépa</td>
<td>chili pepper (<em>Capiscum</em> genus)</td>
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<tr>
<td>green heart</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>griin haat</td>
<td>valuable hardwood tree</td>
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<td>manchinel tree</td>
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<td>manjeniil trii</td>
<td><em>Hippomanemancinella</em></td>
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<td>papanack</td>
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<td>papanak</td>
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<td>doctor fly</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>dákta flai</td>
<td>a flying insect that stings</td>
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<td>red poop</td>
<td>309</td>
<td>red puup</td>
<td>black widow spider (<em>Latrodectus mactans</em>)</td>
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<td>fish</td>
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<td>beakfish (<em>Hemiramphus</em> sp.)</td>
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<td>horse mackerel (<em>Caranx hippos</em>)</td>
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<td>cuckold fish</td>
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<td>kókl fish</td>
<td>a horned fish (<em>Acanthostracion</em> sp.)</td>
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<td>dákta fish</td>
<td>fish with spines (<em>Teuthia</em> sp.)</td>
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<td>gyaad fish</td>
<td>fish with beak-like jaws</td>
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<td>gillambour</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>glámba</td>
<td>fish resembling parrotfish</td>
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<td><em>Diplectrum sp.</em></td>
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<td>gront</td>
<td>fish that grunts when caught (<em>Scianidae</em> sp.)</td>
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<td>76</td>
<td>juu(n)fish</td>
<td>a large lagoon fish (<em>Promicrops itaira</em>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>old wife</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>uol waif</td>
<td>alewife (<em>Balistes</em> sp.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Penrose term</td>
<td>page</td>
<td>item</td>
<td>scientific name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------</td>
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<td>----------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>porgie</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>páagi</td>
<td>a sea bream (<em>Sparus calamus</em>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rasp ray</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>rasp rie</td>
<td>the sting ray fish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>snook</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>snuk</td>
<td>a pike-like fish (<em>Centropomus sp.</em>)</td>
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<tr>
<td>sucking fish</td>
<td>327</td>
<td>sókin fish</td>
<td>the Spanish mackerel</td>
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<tr>
<td>tango</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>tiénggo</td>
<td>a fish; the drummer?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>whip-ray</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>wípri</td>
<td>the manta ray (<em>Manta birostris</em>)</td>
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<tr>
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<td>kangks</td>
<td>conch, edible sea snail (<em>Strombus sp.</em>)</td>
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<td>hedge hog</td>
<td>303</td>
<td>héjag</td>
<td>sea urchin (<em>Echinoidea sp.</em>)</td>
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<tr>
<td>sea crab</td>
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<td>sii krab</td>
<td>swimmer crab (<em>Callinectes sp.</em>)</td>
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<td>suólja</td>
<td>hermit crab (<em>Paguridae sp.</em>)</td>
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<td>261</td>
<td>bárba puol</td>
<td>striped coral snake</td>
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<tr>
<td>galliwasp</td>
<td>284</td>
<td>gáliwas(p)</td>
<td>a kind of lizard (<em>Celestus sp.</em>)</td>
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<td>gwána</td>
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<td>trunk tortoise</td>
<td>318</td>
<td>tronk táatis</td>
<td>leatherback turtle (<em>Dermochelys sp.</em>)</td>
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<td>ud-sliev</td>
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<td>bald pate</td>
<td>228</td>
<td>baal piet</td>
<td>pigeon sp. (<em>Columba leucocephala</em>)</td>
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<td>gallding</td>
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<td>g(y)ál(d)in</td>
<td>various heron sp.</td>
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<tr>
<td>ground dove</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>groun dov</td>
<td>small dove sp. (<em>Columbi gallina</em>)</td>
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<tr>
<td>poke</td>
<td>192</td>
<td>puok</td>
<td>a heron sp.</td>
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<td>tiger</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>táiga</td>
<td>jaguar (<em>Feliz onca</em>)</td>
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<td>warree</td>
<td>297</td>
<td>wáari</td>
<td>white-lipped peccary</td>
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</table>

5. Conclusion

I would like to conclude this study by considering the relevance of the Williams manuscript to our understanding of the development of modern Miskito Coast Creole English — and creole languages in general. Williams was not the first European to write about the Miskito Coast: he was preceded by Dampier (1681), Exquemelin (1684) and Raveneau de Lussan (1689), followed by Sloane (1707)
and a half dozen others who published in the 18th century. So the Williams manuscript is not the best place to look for the earliest occurrences of MCC words that eventually made their way into general English, such as *dory* ‘a kind of boat’ from MCC *duóri* ‘dugout canoe’ from Miskito *duři*, dated as first occurring in 1709 by Merriam-Webster’s *Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary* (1983).\(^1\) They also list *tarpon*, the deep-sea sport fish of the Gulf of Mexico (*Tarpon atlanticus*) as “[origin unknown] (1685)”\(^2\) although I contacted them about MCC *táapom* from Miskito *tahpam* referring to the same species. The MCC form occurs in the Creole English of the Bahamas and Jamaica, so apparently it is only rich white deep-sea sports fishermen who insist on saying *tarpon*. I convinced Cassidy and Le Page (1980:438, 507) that the etymology was not unknown because *tahpam* must have originated with the Miskito rather than the sportsmen since it also occurs in the related languages of the Miskito’s Indian neighbors.

So what is the value of a novel using phrases from a creole language less than a century after the pidgin English of the Miskito had become the only language of the Creoles? (Of course it was more complicated given immigration from Jamaica, language shift among the Rama, *etc*.) It is precisely because Williams’ manuscript includes not only the formal English of the times, but also dialogue in the local vernacular, which — according to Arends’ 1993 theory of gradual creolization — was still undergoing restructuring. As the above lexical and grammatical data demonstrate, Penrose was not only teaching the Indians his English, he was also learning theirs. Nothing else can explain the un-Englishness of his locutions such as “grains of Beans”. It is conceivable that this usage may some day be discovered in some remote British dialect, but I doubt that will happen any more than the discovery of a dialect that deletes copulas, as in “White Man good?” (Williams 1969: 346).

These are features characteristic of European languages in intense contact with African languages. I remain convinced that the Williams manuscript is what a creolist can hardly hope for.

References


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1. The *OED* gives the first occurrence of *dory* in this sense as 1798.

2. The *OED* also gives the first occurrence of *tarpon* as 1685 but gives *tarpom* and *tarpum* as alternative forms.


Esquemeling [Exquemelin], John. 1684 [1893]. The Buccaneers of America: A True Account of the Most Remarkable Assaults Committed of Late Years upon the Coasts of the West Indies by the Buccaneers of Jamaica and Tortuga (Both English and French). London.

Hodgson, Colonel Robert. 1757. Some Account of the Mosquito Territory [contained in a memoire written in 1757 etc., now first published from the Ms. of the late Col.Robert Hodgson, Edinburgh, 1822; British Library, London].


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