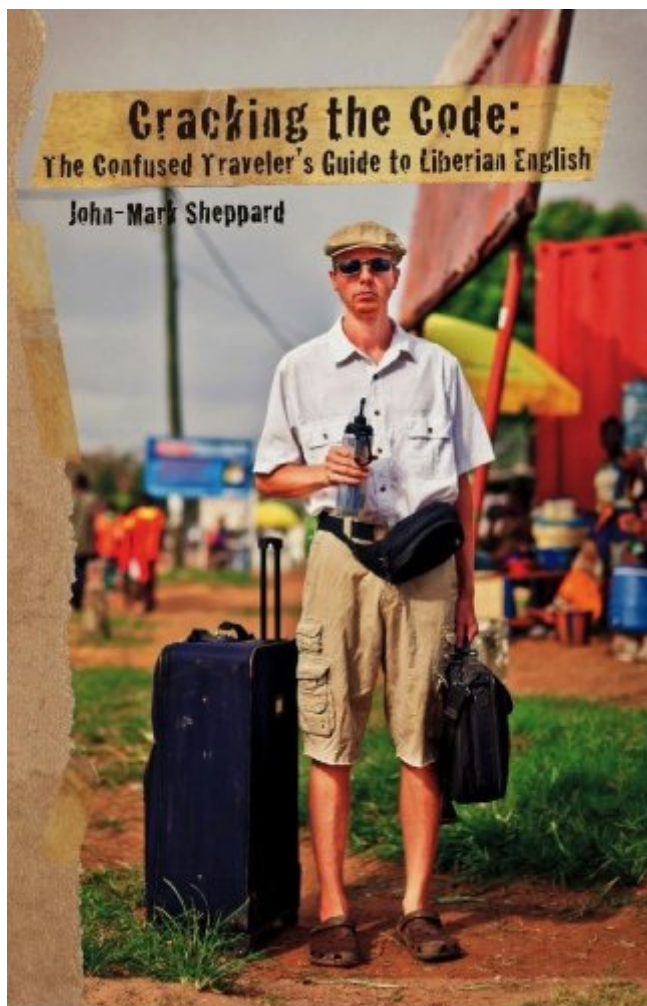


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Cracking The Code: The Confused Traveler's Guide To Liberian English



Synopsis

"Cracking the Code: The Confused Traveler's Guide to Liberian English" is the brainchild of John Mark Sheppard, who moved with his family from the United States to Liberia when he was just three years old. He learned Liberian English as a second language as he spent his childhood and teen years immersed in the Liberian culture. After college in the United States, John Mark returned to Liberia and began a more formal study of Liberia's history, customs and languages. In this truly fascinating book, John Mark combines his training in linguistics with an extensive knowledge of the language he has grown to love. Besides the more than one thousand helpful explanations of specific words or phrases, "Cracking the Code: The Confused Traveler's Guide to Liberian English" includes a fascinating history of the people groups and languages of the region, a pronunciation guide, a list of Liberian proverbs and practical, how-to-avoid-embarrassing-yourself advice for Westerners.

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Customer Reviews

Occasional typographical errors and minor lapses in editing barely distract from the reading of this

deceptively easy to understand treatment of Liberian English, which includes a succinct summary of rigorous linguistic analysis of Liberian English. Far from putting readers off though Sheppard opens a reader's mind to the patterns in and logical explanations of the adaptations of Standard English to conform to the style of speaking in Liberia English's underlying Niger-Congo linguistic environment—written in everyday language that scholars and ordinary readers alike can enjoy. Sheppard alerts his audience to the alternate phrasing of verb forms and the often colorful and vivid expressions and sayings speakers have developed in the unique English of Liberia. Surprisingly, some of the patterns in Liberian English and patterns of French are alike—though their linguistic origins are dramatically different—the dropping of the pronunciation of final consonants of words and the nasalization of preceding vowels in lieu of pronunciation of nasal consonants. Sheppard raises knowledgeable objections to subtle cultural biases against Liberian English by speakers of Standard English, sending readers to engage Liberians in conversation with a respect for the complex linguistic environment in which Liberian English evolved. Sheppard cautions his audience that a Liberian who very well knows and takes pride in a fluency in Standard English far from admiring a speaker's fluency in Liberian English may think that a speaker who chooses to speak in the vernacular views the Liberian as an unsophisticated rube and is "talking down"—an insult. A wonderful and valuable little book from Sheppard that indeed gives readers the means to "crack the code" of Liberian English.

I lived as a Peace Corps volunteer in Sinoe County for 3 years. We were never taught Liberian English, and my work required that I work in this language (too many other tribal languages in the area to learn one and use it throughout the county.). This author understands the language well and provides good insight into its logic. Wish I had this when I was there, as it would have helped me avoid some settling in problems. Thanks for this great contribution! .

I agree with the premise that "speaking", or more precisely, hearing, the language is key to understanding culture. I've not finished reading the book, but I have enjoyed what I have read, which is about one half of the book. I lived in Liberia for 3 1/2 years, 1985 - 1988, in two areas of the country that were both quite some distance in different directions from Nimba County where the author lived. I think at the end of the book that I am going to think that there is much more to be added to the definitions and proverbs, that perhaps the author needs more listening experience in other parts of the country, and I will be wondering if some of the words, phrases/idioms used in 1985-88 have by now evolved to meanings somehow different from what they were then. In his

sequel, I think he should emphasize the importance of listening. :) But as I said I am very much enjoying the trip back to Liberia through reading his book.

After having my own hard time understanding English in Liberia, I really appreciate the work that went into this guide. John adds some good background and explanations to the myriad ways to talk and speak in Liberia. It's extremely helpful and practical to solve some communication troubles before they begin.

It proved to be pretty much what I expected. We lived there for almost ten years as adults, but to truly get a grasp of the language and its nuances, you have to start as a child. I have known the author's parents for a number of years and know where he grew up. He took that life experience and with his later linguistics training, maps out the origins and regional variations of what is known as Liberian Vernacular English. He includes guides on sentence structure and how pronunciation often heard there will differ for English learned in America or the UK. I wish I would have had something like this when we first arrived and even now it is helpful in restoring memories that are fading.

Liberian English has evolved into its own Creole, on par with the spoken languages along the west African coast. In *Cracking the Code*, John Mark Sheppard gives a very useful history of the roots and development of "Liberian Vernacular English" and inadvertently exposes why so many Liberians today have difficulty mastering standard English. The dictionary and lexicon that form most of the book are also extremely useful for newcomers. All we need now is a standard orthography for Liberian English and we'll be set.

This book is worth every penny and more. I plan to get the hard copy. Helpful not only to foreigners but locals as well as anyone who has been out of Liberia for a while. Very funny as well as enlightening. First time I've read a dictionary from cover to cover.

Author does a great job explaining the history and linguistic culture of Liberia. He obviously has invested many years immersing in the culture and language. It is a great guide for anyone who wants to learn this unique dialect of English and find out why things are the way they are in Liberia.

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