

DISCUSSION NOTE

Against Creole exceptionalism*

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1. A POSTCOLONIAL AGENDA FOR CREOLISTS.

1.1. THE MOTIVATION. Ferdinand de Saussure (1916 [1986:7]) warned us that ‘no other subject [outside of language] has fostered more absurd notions, more prejudices, more illusions and more fantasies . . . [I]t is the primary task of the linguist to denounce them, and to eradicate them as completely as possible’. But, what if ‘prejudices’, ‘illusions’, and ‘fantasies’ underlie some of the foundations of Creole studies?

Many creolists throughout the history of Creole languages have relied on a variety of dualist assumptions whereby Creole languages constitute a special class of languages apart from ‘normal’/‘regular’ languages (see critiques in DeGraff 2001a,b, 2003a). Some of these assumptions were implicitly handed down to us from (neo)colonial history without any ‘break in transmission’, so to speak. In the colonial era, these anti-egalitarian assumptions were part and parcel of the imperialist construction of political, cultural, and racial hegemony and the concomitant discursive elaboration of scientific authority through scholarly(-looking) texts (this tradition can be compared with Edward Said’s (1979) concept *ORIENTALISM*). These ‘power/knowledge’ systems of hegemony would have made it impossible to conceive of any analytical framework whereby Caribbean Creole languages are on a genealogical or structural par with European languages. In this vein, uniformitarian creolistics would have been ‘un-thinkable’, in Foucault’s (1980) sense (see Prudent 1980 and Mühleisen 2002 for related arguments).

1.2. THE SOCIOHISTORICAL AND EPISTEMOLOGICAL BACKGROUND. As documented below, the terms *CREOLE* and *CREOLIZATION* have long been taken to involve sui generis linguistic-structural and cognitive-developmental properties that have no equivalent in the synchrony and diachrony of so-called normal languages.

In my own recent work, I have adopted a language-external, sociohistorical definition of ‘Creole languages’ (also see Mufwene 2000, 2001). This definition is strictly atheoretical: it does not presuppose any operational structural criteria. For me, ‘Creole’ is an ostensive label that, in the Caribbean case for example, points to certain speech varieties that developed between Europeans and Africans during the colonization of the so-called New World. In a related vein, the term ‘creolization’ refers to the sequence of sociohistorical events that led to the formation of these languages known as Creoles.

In uniformitarian fashion, it can be reasonably assumed that the language-learning and language-creating capacities of our human ancestors have generally remained uniform across the species in the past few millennia, notwithstanding (neo-)Darwinian and often race-based approaches to linguistic phylogenesis as surveyed in, for example,

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DeGraff 2001a,b. In effect, the structural viability and cultural vibrancy of Creole languages attest to the robustness of the intrinsically human capacity for language — as hypothesized, for example, from Descartes 1637 to Chomsky 2000 — even among the psychosocially most adverse conditions.

Yet, the belief that Creoles are structurally inadequate finds reinforcement on the academic front: hypotheses based on Creole exceptionalism are still at the forefront of Creole studies, and Creole exceptionalism is promoted even by some Creole-speaking intellectuals. At the same time, the under- or misutilization of Creole languages in the schools (e.g. in Haiti; see Y. Dejean 1975, 1993, 1997, 2003) is apparently due to, *inter alia*, the widespread belief that these languages, unlike their European sources, are expressively inadequate because of *INTRINSIC* structural deficiencies.¹

In the remainder of this essay, I critique exceptionalist trends in Creole studies, with frequent references to my native Haitian Creole (HC). HC emerged from the contact between French and Africans in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in colonial Haiti (Saint-Domingue). Its lexicon, among other linguistic modules, is mostly derived from French.

There are at least four reasons for this focus on HC: First, HC speakers constitute the Creolophone community that I am most familiar with, as both creolist and Creolophone. Second, Haitians constitute by far the largest Creole-speaking community, more than eight million strong. Third, HC is perhaps the most and the best studied of all Creoles. HC may well be ‘the best described of French Creole dialects, if not of all Creole languages’ with ‘Haiti . . . becoming the lighthouse of Creoleness [‘le phare de la créolité’]’ (Valdman 1971:202, 1979:100); see Védrine 2002 for a recent bibliography of writings on HC.² Lastly, the specifics of eighteenth-century Saint-Domingue fulfill the sociohistorical criteria of typical creolization scenarios (see DeGraff 2001b:§2.1). HC should thus be one of our best benchmarks for evaluating any theory that makes empirical predictions about Creole languages as a class, and my discussion of the particulars of the case of HC certainly bears on Creole studies at large.

2. THE UNEXCEPTIONAL LIFE CYCLE OF CREOLE EXCEPTIONALISM.

2.1. AN ‘ARCHEOLOGY’ OF CREOLE EXCEPTIONALISM. The canonical tropes that recur in the discourse on Creole genesis effectively segregate Creole languages in ‘linguistic exile’ (Corcoran’s phrase, 2001:§4) in one of these categories: (i) *DEGENERATE DESCENDANTS* of their European ancestors aka *SUPERSTRATES* and *LEXIFIERS*, (ii) languages that emerged from *ABNORMAL TRANSMISSION* or a *BREAK IN TRANSMISSION*, (iii) *LIVING LINGUISTIC FOSSILS*, (iv) *SPECIAL HYBRIDS* with exceptional genealogy.

Creole exceptionalism seems to have started in earnest, at the very latest, in the eighteenth century with amateur philologists like Girod-Chantrons (1785 [1980:157f.]), who described the colonial precursor of HC as ‘weak’, ‘dull’, ‘unclear’, ‘insipid’, an ‘imbecile jargon’, ‘nothing but French back in infancy’. Girod-Chantrons’s characterization already announces the linguistic marginalization of Creoles. This *MINORATION LINGUISTIQUE* (see Prudent 1980:7) was to persist through the twenty-first century.

¹ In the case of Haiti, this belief is illustrated in Delorme 1870, Bellegarde 1934, 1949, H. Trouillot 1980, Métellus 1997, 1998, among many others. Also see n. 14 and the discussion in §3.

² Védrine’s (2002) 700-page bibliography provides some 3,000 entries for HC-related publications from colonial times to 2000. These entries fall in a variety of categories, some of them overlapping: periodicals, agriculture, authors, dictionaries, folklore, geography, history, grammar, health, orthography, novels, playwrights, poetry, religion, sociolinguistics, teaching materials, theoretical linguistics, dissertations, interviews, biographies, and so on.

Following Meijer and Muysken (1977:21), it seems reasonable enough to historically relate this early mismeasure of Creole languages to the inferior sociopolitical, economic, and biological status initially accorded the Africans by European observers (see Davis 1966). In a more benign mode, Posner (1985:167) notes: 'In the case of creoles, commentators perceive, from the very beginning, that there is a break in tradition . . . commentators [from the sixteenth century on] were only too ready to believe that speakers of obviously different ethnic origin would favour languages of quite different type'. (See Boas 1911 for one classic critique of similar beliefs vis-à-vis Amerindian languages.)

It can also be speculated that the minoration linguistique of Creoles was reinforced on pragmatic opportunist grounds. Here we need to do a bit of 'archaeology [of the sort that] reveals relations between discursive formations and non-discursive domains (institutions, political events, economic practices and processes)' (Foucault 1969 [1972a:162]). The (pre)colonial agencies that funded many early writers on Creole languages — call them EARLY CREOLISTS if you will, even if they were 'accidental' creolists — relied on the very imperialist coffers that benefited from chattel slavery; Chomsky 1993:ch. 1 is a concise survey of 'the great work of subjugation and conquest' that started in the New World in 1492 and continues still. Early creolists came from, and were in the service of, imperialist Europe and its MISSION CIVILISATRICE. They were fulfilling their 'white man's burden'. One of their tasks was to document, and to make usable as instruments of control, their objects of study, namely the 'new' languages of the 'New World'. As the seventeenth-century Jesuit missionary Pelleprat candidly tells us: 'With this way of speaking [i.e. the Africans' way of speaking French], we make them understand all that we teach them . . . Death won't care to wait until they learn [our version of] French' (1655 [1965:30–31]).

Here is a typical nineteenth-century scholarly definition of Creole languages: 'Creole languages result from the adaptation of a language, especially some Indo-European language, to the (so to speak) phonetic and grammatical genius of a race that is linguistically inferior. The resulting language is composite, truly mixed in its vocabulary, but its grammar remains essentially Indo-European, albeit extremely simplified' (Vinson 1889:345–46). This definition seems representative of a popular trend in European thought about Creole languages and their speakers, from the seventeenth century through at least the nineteenth century. This trend is illustrated in that period's scientific encyclopedias, scholarly treatises, and so on (see the relevant references in n. 4).

As illustrated in Humboldt 1836 [1988:182–229] and Schleicher 1863 [1869:36f., 49–54, 79] and as critiqued in Boas 1911:11 and Sapir 1921:ix, 207ff., 219, somewhat similar prejudices — including the belief that 'primitive' peoples speak 'primitive' languages and that 'evolved' people speak 'evolved' languages — were once prevalent toward many non-Indo-European languages, which were viewed as evolutionarily and intellectually inferior. Bloomfield (1933:8) critically reports related attitudes vis-à-vis non-'classical' or 'corrupted' versions of Indo-European languages as spoken by the 'common people': it was 'believed, accordingly, that the speech-forms of books and of upper-class conversation represented an older and purer level, from which the "vulgarisms" of the common people had branched off as "corruptions" by a process of "linguistic decay"'.³

In the particular case of Creole-related writings in the context of the colonial Caribbean, the early creolists' 'programmes of perception', in Bourdieu's terminology (1982

³ I thank Brian Joseph and an anonymous referee for their input on this issue.

[1991:128]), were congruent with the race theories that provided philosophical apologia for New World slavery. These ‘programmes’ were perforce antithetical to any sort of egalitarian universal grammar (see Corcoran 2001, DeGraff 2001a,b, and Mühleisen 2002 for critiques of Humboldtian and Schleicherian creolistics).

The DEGENERATE OFFSHOOT view of Creole genesis—the notion that Creoles are degenerate variants of their European norms—is an explicit case of minoration linguistique in Prudent’s sense (1980:7). It was received wisdom in the comparative-historical linguistics of the late nineteenth century. Scientific encyclopedia entries such as Larousse (1869:490) defined Creole as ‘corrupted French’ (see also Vinson’s aforementioned definition (1889:345–46)). Similar views are rehearsed in scholarly work continuing in the early twentieth century and including, for example, Meillet 1924 [1951:68] where it is claimed that ‘“Creole” modes of speaking—Spanish Creole or French Creole— . . . constitute varieties of Spanish or French that are deprived of almost all their grammar, weakened in their pronunciation, reduced to a small lexicon’. Even the proud and patriotic Black Trinidadian scholar J. J. Thomas, in all likelihood the first Black Caribbean grammarian, accepts, though ambivalently, the Eurocentric view that, because of ‘[its] richer vocabulary, [its] synthetic structure, and other matters, . . . French asserts its superiority over the [Trinidadian French-lexicon] Creole’ and that the latter, as ‘a dialect framed by Africans from a European tongue’, is the product of a ‘barbarous nation’ learning, or rather ‘distorting’, a superior language (Thomas 1869: v, 1, 4, etc.).

Early creolists’ claims that Creoles are structurally inadequate appear congruent with the racial ‘degeneracy theory’ of Buffon and his followers, including Blumenbach, whom Montagu (1942 [1997:62]) claims to be ‘the founder of physical anthropology’. In this theory, White is the genuine, and the most beautiful, human race, from which all other races—Blacks, Amerindians, Jews, and so on—are ‘degenerated’ (see e.g. Davis 1966 [1988:457], Popkin 1974:136f., Gould 1996:410f.). In Davis’s words: ‘Blackness was therefore [considered] a kind of aberration or disease . . . the Africans had “degenerated” . . . from their white ancestral type’ (1966 [1988:45]). Creoles, as the offsprings of European languages created by a so-called linguistically inferior race, were also viewed as ‘a kind of aberration’. In the early part of the twentieth century, no less than an American Secretary of State, William Jennings Bryan (1860–1925), would remark about Haiti: ‘Dear me, think of it, Niggers speaking French’ (Chomsky 1993:201).

In the twentieth century, the degenerate-offshoot view was made most (in)famous and most explicit by Bloomfield (1933:472–74), notwithstanding his aforementioned critique of prescriptivists’ purism: ‘Speakers of a lower language may make so little progress in learning the dominant speech, that the masters, in communicating with them resort to “baby-talk”. This “baby-talk” is the masters’ imitation of the subjects’ incorrect speech . . . The creolized language has the status of an inferior dialect of the masters’ speech. It is subject to constant leveling-out and improvement in the direction of the latter’. Even in the latter half of the twentieth century, certain linguists still claim that ‘morphological simplicity’ and a ‘vocabulary [that] is extremely poor’, are among the ‘greatest obstacles to the blossoming of Creoles’ (see e.g. Valdman 1978:345 and Samarin 1980:221). Seuren tendentially claims that ‘Creole grammars . . . are, in a sense, simplified in that they lack the more sophisticated features of languages backed by a rich and extended cultural past and a large, well-organized literate society’. The alleged extraordinary simplicity of Creole languages has even been elevated, so to speak, to the status of a ‘historical universal’ (Seuren 1998:292–93), one that is also taken by some as a ‘cognitive handicap’ (Whinnom 1971:110). This is reminiscent of

the nineteenth-century notion that the morphology of certain languages (e.g. Semitic) makes them 'deviants from the most appropriate path of mental development' (Humboldt 1836 [1988:221]). Fortunately, not all creolists uphold such minoration linguistique (see e.g. Greenfield 1830, Muysken 1988, Mufwene 2001 for nineteenth- and twentieth-century examples of uniformitarian approaches to Creole genesis).

Elsewhere (DeGraff 2001a,b, 2003a,e), I survey degeneracy claims spanning more than three centuries of Creole studies and conclude that there is no reliable empirical or theoretical basis to support the claim that Creole languages (e.g. HC) are degenerate versions of their European ancestors (e.g. French).⁴ It can be documented quite straightforwardly that CERTAIN properties of HC grammar, a bona fide Caribbean Creole, signal an INCREASE in complexity vis-à-vis French to the extent that these structural properties of HC have no counterpart in French. Consider, for example, these two sets of HC phenomena: the morphophonologically conditioned allomorphy, with at least four allomorphs in each case, for the prenominal indefinite determiner and the postnominal definite determiner; some of this allomorphy exhibits 'anti-markedness effects' (Klein 2001); predicate-clefting strategies with either a resumptive pro-form or a predicate copy in situ (see DeGraff 2001b:284f. for a more extensive list). More generally, it can be argued that the mental processes underlying Creole genesis are similar to those underlying language change (DeGraff 1999b,d, 2003b,c,d). What about Creoles' alleged lexical poverty? Speakers of any language create vocabulary items as needed to fulfill their evolving representation and communication requirements (Sapir 1921:223), and this is what happened in the evolution of, say, the Romance languages as they progressively replaced Latin and Greek in scientific writing. Creoles are no exception to the rule.

As for nineteenth-century HYBRIDOLOGIE LINGUISTIQUE à la Adam 1883, the race-theory hypothetical correlates are quite obvious. In a nutshell, HYBRIDOLOGIE LINGUISTIQUE entails the existence of different linguistic templates for different 'races', with the following properties: because of biological evolution, different races belong to distinct evolutionary rungs, and their respective linguistic templates exist in a corresponding hierarchy of structural complexity. Upon language contact, these templates will cross-fertilize (i.e. 'hybridize') at the lowest common denominator: the most primitive grammar—in this scenario, the grammar of the 'lower' race of speakers (i.e. the non-European speakers)—imposes an upper bound of structural complexity on the hybrid grammar. In such a scenario, the European contribution to the hybridization of European and African languages is limited to superficial and easy-to-acquire European traits such as the phonetic shapes of words. In 1936, Haitian linguist Suzanne Sylvain, like Lucien Adam in 1883, readily assumes 'early crystallization of the mental powers of the black race' (p. 36f.). Adam's and Sylvain's are spectacular instances of race-based and quasi-Darwinian creolistics. They both conclude that Creole languages with European lexifiers are made up of non-European (e.g. African) grammars coupled with words that superficially, and only superficially, look European.⁵

⁴ Variations on the degenerate-offshoot theme can be found in, for example, Pelleprat 1655, Girod-Chantrons 1785, J. J. Thomas 1869, Saint-Quentin 1872, Baissac 1880, Vinson 1889, Poyen-Bellisle 1894, Meillet 1924, Bloomfield 1933, Hall 1953, Hockett 1958, Valdman 1992, Métellus 1997, 1998.

⁵ Sylvain adopts the above race-theory dogma even though she, unlike Adam, allows for the possibility that 'the African, in order to communicate, was able to adopt the basic patterns of French morphosyntax [while] he was also able to retain his old speech habits according to his emotional and cogitative modes' (1936:36f.). Sylvain's conclusion that '[HC is] French cast in the mold of African syntax or . . . an Ewe tongue with a French lexicon' (1936:178) actually contradicts the comparative data in her book (see Mufwene 2001:213, n. 14).

As noted in Lefebvre 1998:3, Adam's hybridologie linguistique is the precursor of her modern RELEXIFICATION HYPOTHESIS. What is not noted by Lefebvre is that her own version of hybridologie is propitiously far removed from Adam's problematic race-theoretical stipulations. In Lefebvre's relexification hypothesis, it is because the Africans in Haiti 'had very limited access' to French that they, qua adult language learners, had to adopt, and adapt, words — or just phonetic strings — from the target 'lexifier'/'superstrate' language and overlay these words on their native 'substrate' grammars, with the latter being kept virtually intact in the original Creole languages (see Lefebvre 1998:36, 65, 386, 394).

Relexificationists, along with other substratists of various theoretical stripes, are clearly right to the extent that African languages in the Caribbean did, at least to some degree, influence the shape of the emerging Creoles, as various African traditions influenced much else in the formation of Caribbean cultures. Links between African and Creole cultures are found at virtually all levels of life in the (Greater) Caribbean (see Price-Mars 1928, Brathwaite 1971, Alleyne 1988, Bellegarde-Smith 1990, Price & Price 1991; pace Chaudenson 1992 and Chaudenson & Mufwene 2001). Now consider HC. That it shows various patterns that were shaped by, inter alia, substrate influence is quite expected given what psycholinguists have taught us about language transfer in second-language acquisition. What is more controversial is the kind of strict, exclusive, and overarching constraints that strict-relexification scenarios impose on the structural make up of Creole grammars.

As I have documented elsewhere, past and present strict-relexification proposals (e.g. Adam 1883 and Lefebvre 1998) make incorrect empirical predictions for HC.⁶ Moreover, these proposals share one strikingly non-uniformitarian property: they assume that the interlanguages constructed by Creole creators, unlike the interlanguages of second-language learners elsewhere, cannot escape the structures of their native grammars. In effect, Creole creators in strict-relexification scenarios seem unable to learn anything abstract about the target European language. Lefebvre's Creole-genesis scenario claims that the results of second-language 'learning' by Africans in colonial Haiti are virtually identical to the native languages they started with, modulo phonetics. Yet, the lexicon and morphology of HC demonstrate that Creole creators were able to segment and parse target speech (here French) down to the phonetic forms of many affixes. Such segmentation and parsing — a cognitive feat — contradict the claim that the creators of HC did not access or use any abstract property of French phonology, lexicon, morphosyntax, or semantics. Segmentation and parsing of fluent speech in any language necessitate intricate implicit knowledge about the ABSTRACT structure of that language. Thus, strict-relexification accounts of Creole genesis make assumptions (for example, about language acquisition) that apply nowhere else outside of Creole studies.

Let us now turn to two related dogmas: Creole genesis as ABNORMAL/BROKEN TRANSMISSION and Creole genesis as RECAPITULATION OF HUMAN LANGUAGE GENESIS. These dogmas transform Creoles into some unique sort of LIVING LINGUISTIC FOSSILS, one generation removed from the 'macaronic' (i.e. structureless) pidgin speech that allegedly resembles the protolanguage of our evolutionary ancestors at a former stage of cognitive development.

When considered in a Foucauldian discourse-analysis perspective, the persistent broken-transmission and linguistic-fossils dogmas each intersect with another evolution myth, that of Edenic primitivism à la Rousseau. This myth is perhaps at the core of

⁶ See, for example, DeGraff 1994a,b, 1999c, 2001a, 2003a,b,c,d, and the relevant references therein.

Europeans' conceptualizations of Africa and the Caribbean during the age of 'discoveries'. Recall Adam's (1883:3) statement that 'In Europe, Creole speech is universally accepted as an infantile jargon'. Moreover, 'Africa [itself is] the land of childhood, . . . lying beyond the day of self-conscious history' (Hegel 1836 [1970:91]). Davis (1975: 48) confirms that 'for many Europeans, . . . the African was an innocent child'. About the Caribbean, Columbus himself 'concluded in August 1498, that . . . the original Garden of Eden was nearby' (Davis 1966 [1988:4]).

Given the postulated congruence in nineteenth-century philology between the evolution of races and that of languages (Schleicher 1863; see DeGraff 2001b for an overview), it is not surprising that a neo-Darwinian linguist like Adam would attribute 'primitive' languages (which he called 'langues naturelles' in opposition to 'langues civilisées') to the 'primitive' people of Africa at a supposedly lower evolutionary rung. In a similar vein, Saint-Quentin (1872 [1989:40f.]) would take Guyane Creole as 'a spontaneous product of the human mind, freed from any kind of intellectual culture', designed to demand 'little strain on memory and . . . little effort from those with limited intelligence'. Saint-Quentin is quite explicit that 'it's a property of emerging languages to be naive' (p. 169). The following 1902 title, as quoted by Reinecke (1980:11, n. 52), sums this all up: 'Isle de France Creole: An infantile language for an infantile race'.

It thus seems that early creolists, on a par with philosophers and historians like Hegel, may have been nearly unanimous in considering the speech of nonwhites in the Caribbean and elsewhere as a reflex of primitive cognitive capacities. The latter, in turn, would set Creole languages apart from their corresponding European sources, notwithstanding the oft-noted parallels between the emergence of French-lexicon Creoles and the emergence of Romance languages via contact-induced language change (see J. J. Thomas 1869:v, 1, Saint-Quentin 1872 [1989:131, 171], and Baissac 1880: 24–30, 49–54, 57–59, etc.; see DeGraff 1997, 1999a,b,d,e, 2000, 2003b, for more recent case studies in the generative framework).

Given the context of Europe's mission civilisatrice, Creole exceptionalism in the colonial era, alongside similar exceptionalist claims vis-à-vis Amerindian languages, was a relatively unsurprising development in the history of linguistics. What's more surprising, if not totally unexpected, is that, although nineteenth-century race theories have by and large been rejected by twentieth- and twenty-first-century linguists, some of the empirically and theoretically problematic aspects of nineteenth-century Creole-related writings continue to be found in modern linguistics.

In twentieth-century linguistics, the abnormal/broken transmission dogma posits that Creole genesis falls outside the scope of the COMPARATIVE METHOD (CM) and takes Caribbean Creoles to represent new linguistic phyla altogether, outside the Indo-European and Niger-Congo language families. Thus, Creoles are considered to be phylogenetically unrelated to the languages whose contact triggered Creole genesis.⁷

The broken transmission dogma is related to another myth of origins, that of Creoles as contemporary Ursprachen or contemporary 'linguistic fossils' in Bickerton's termi-

⁷ Distinct versions of the abnormal/broken transmission dogma can be found in Schuchardt 1914, Jespersen 1922, Bickerton 1981, 1984a,b, 1988, 1990, 1999, Thomason & Kaufman 1988, McWhorter 1998, 2001, and Thomason 2002. Arguments against this dogma and its antecedents are quite old, even if still unheeded, going back to at least Greenfield 1830. More recent counterarguments, from somewhat distinct theoretical perspectives, include Posner 1985, Fattier 1998, Chaudenson & Mufwene 2001, Mufwene 2001, 2003, DeGraff 2001a,b, 2003b,c,d.

nology, as quoted in Begley 1982. In Bickerton's (1990) scenario, the development of these so-called living fossils recapitulates the first (i.e. most primitive) stages of the evolution of *homo sapiens*' language from *homo erectus*'s protolanguage. This myth transforms Creole speakers into linguistic 'Adams and Eves', in Richard Price's analogy (cited in Corcoran 2001:§1). According to this myth of origins, one *sui generis* process that supposedly 'breaks' Stammbaumtheorie-friendly 'normal' language transmission and leads to exceptional and catastrophic language genesis *ab ovo* is some form of radical pidginization, which is postulated as the first step of a hypothetical PIDGIN-TO-CREOLE LIFE CYCLE. This sort of pidginization is an all-powerful structural simplification process that is claimed to, among other things, obliterate virtually all morphology and to lead to a pre-Creole early contact language—a 'macaronic' jargon or 'early pidgin'—whose extraordinary lack of structure makes it unlike any full-fledged human language and more like some protolanguage that may have been spoken by our (pre)-hominid ancestors. It is this early pidgin, WITH EXTRAORDINARILY REDUCED STRUCTURE, that is argued to eventually seed the Creole when the former becomes the target of first-language acquisition by locally born children.

Taken together, the broken transmission and linguistic fossils myths turn Creoles into languages with no historical past and with extraordinarily simple structures. In a number of writings by professional linguists (e.g. Bickerton 1990) and popular-science writers (e.g. Begley 1982 and Berreby 1992), the broken transmission and linguistic fossils dogmas appear as the alpha and omega of Creole studies. In Bickerton's evocative summation, 'Creole languages are the missing linguistic fossils . . . the equivalent of the Galapagos to Darwin' (Begley 1982). Almost twenty years later—in the twenty-first century!—this Bickertonian/neo-Darwinian myth of Creoles as contemporary *Ursprachen* is still alive: 'I suspect that [Creoles] most approximate some of the early languages. Creoles begin as pidgin languages . . . Creoles . . . are the only languages which have started again' (John McWhorter as quoted by Claudia Dreifus in the *New York Times*).⁸

The broken transmission and linguistic fossils dogmas are robustly disconfirmed by a range of comparative data and empirical and theoretical observations. For example, we do find robust evidence for systematic lexical and morphosyntactic correspondences between 'radical' Creoles and their lexifiers. We also find evidence of substrate transfer into Creole grammars. Given the available evidence, Creoles could not have arisen from the sort of macaronic 'protolanguage' that is postulated in the Bickertonian pidgin-to-Creole life cycle. Besides, the magnitude of certain structural 'discrepancies' or 'drastic mismatch' in the history of non-Creole languages seems comparable, and sometimes even greater, than that of their counterparts in Creole diachrony, *pace* Thomason and Kaufman (1988:8–12, 206) and Thomason (2002:105).

From a conceptual perspective, Bickerton's 'living linguistic fossil' metaphor seems to rest on an unlikely assumption, namely that the structureless protolanguage of our early (pre)hominid ancestors one million years ago (*homo erectus*) and the pidgins of modern humans—communication systems produced by speakers endowed with a thoroughly human *faculté de langage*—evolved by similar cognitive processes. If the transition from *homo-erectus* protolanguage to *homo-sapiens* human language is a reflex of brain reorganization, then Bickerton's hypothetical pidgin-to-Creole cycle has noth-

⁸ Examples of neo-Darwinian creolistics can be found in Saint-Quentin 1872, Adam 1883, Jespersen 1922, Bickerton 1981, 1984a,b, 1988, 1990, 1999, Seuren & Wekker 1986, Seuren 1998, and McWhorter 1998, 2001. For overviews and critiques, see DeGraff 2001a,b, 2003a,e.

ing to say about such brain reorganization in the course of human evolution. Indeed, pidgin speakers — who, by the way, also speak one or many fully-fledged human languages — duly belong to *homo sapiens*, and definitely not to *homo erectus*. As Mufwene (2002) points out:

[B]oth modern children and the inventors of pidgins have sophisticated modern minds, which have evolved far beyond the mental capacities of our (pre-)hominid ancestors. . . . In the case of pidgins, one must note that the conditions of sporadic contact associated with their development did not cause the minds of the people who produced them to regress to a (pre-)hominid state.

Furthermore, and this is again noted by Mufwene (2002), it is not, and could not be, the case that ‘the ecological conditions of the development of pidgins and creoles are similar to those in which [(pre-)hominid] protolanguage emerged’: the former include instances of full-fledged human language whereas the latter included nothing more complex than (pre)hominid protolanguage. It is therefore dubious that pidgins and their nativized descendants could provide evidence about (pre)hominid grammar or absence thereof.⁹

In the specific case of HC (a *bona fide*, even ‘radical’, plantation Creole), the overwhelming majority of HC morphemes, whether free or bound, have French etyma. More generally, HC’s structural patterns appear to not instantiate the sort of extraordinary break in transmission that would set the genesis of HC apart from other instances of language change via language contact. In fact, core aspects in the development of HC grammar (with respect to sound patterns, verb and object placement, and inflectional morphology, for example) fall within developmental patterns that are commonly manifested in Stammbaumtheorie-friendly instances of ‘regular’ language change (e.g. in the history of Romance and Germanic), modulo the speed at which structural innovations spread within the corresponding speech communities (but see Mufwene 2001:130, 140 for an argument that ‘Creoles did not develop more rapidly than other languages’). It could also be argued that along CERTAIN parameters, such as presence vs. absence of lexical case morphology and of movement-related properties like free word-order scrambling, French and HC are more similar to each other than French and Latin are. It can also be argued that, along the same parameters, English and Jamaican Creole are closer to each other than English and Proto-Germanic are.

Such (dis)similarities are, it must be stressed, an artifact of what parameters we choose to compare, how, and why. As Meillet notes, ‘neo-Latin [i.e. Romance] languages fall into a typological class that is quite remote from the structural type represented by Latin’ (1929 [1951:80]). For example, ‘[t]he use of word order in French and English to express relations between phrases is a creation of these languages: such innovation did not have any model in Latin or Proto-Germanic’ (1912 [1958:148]). The lesson here is that there is, as far as I can tell, no precise and operational structural

⁹ Slobin (2003) offers data that contradict Bickerton’s claim that children under two exhibit the sort of ‘pre-grammatical’ macaronic speech that is found among *homo erectus*, pidgin speakers, and apes. For example, under-two Turkish children produce a substantial range of grammatical morphemes, including case morphology, that are allegedly absent in protolanguage. Slobin also examines the ways in which cognitive development in humans differs from its counterpart in nonhuman primates, shedding further doubts on Bickerton’s claims that both creologeny and ontogeny recapitulate protolanguage-to-language evolution. Also note that it has been argued that second-language learners — this presumably includes pidgin creators — have ‘full access’ to UG at every stage of the learning process (Epstein et al. 1996, Schwartz & Sprouse 1996). This contradicts Bickerton’s postulation that pidgin creators, being second-language learners in the early stages of acquisition, have access, not to their full-fledged language faculty, but instead to some PROTO-language subfaculty.

litmus test, and no coherent theoretical tools, for deciding, on the one hand, where the ‘innovations’ of language change qua ‘normal transmission’ end and, on the other hand, where the ‘drastic mismatches’ of creolization qua ‘abnormal transmission’ begin. Let’s assume with Thomason (2002:103) that ‘the rigorous criteria of the [CM] . . . include the establishment of recurring phonological correspondences in morphemes of identical or similar meanings, including much basic vocabulary, . . . the establishment of systematic morphosyntactic correspondences [etc.]’. If so, then the available evidence puts HC, a most ‘radical’ Creole, squarely in the scope of the CM, pace Thomason.

Of late, ‘separative’ arguments have even been presented to promote Creole studies as an academic discipline whose viability crucially depends on the postulation of fundamental qualitative distinctions between Creole and non-Creole languages, in diachrony and/or synchrony (see e.g. McWhorter 1998:812f. and Parkvall 2001:147). This separative view is somewhat reminiscent of the nineteenth-century prototypical view on the ‘special nature’ of Creoles (Vinson 1889:345–46).

The empirical, theoretical, and sociological flaws in such separative theories were already pointed out by Greenfield back in the earlier part of the nineteenth century. In the early twentieth century, Schuchardt, the father of Creole studies, boldly posited ‘universal linguistic structures’ as crucial to understanding Creole genesis, and, as boldly, he claimed that Creole genesis was crucial to understanding language change everywhere (1914 [1979:73f., 77]). For Schuchardt, Creole languages ‘have not yet been fully appreciated for their general linguistic significance’ (1914 [1979:73]).

As surveyed in this essay, the theoretical existence of a CREOLE PROTOTYPE has traditionally depended on the postulation of *sui generis* ‘abnormal’ processes that are assumed to never apply vis-à-vis the diachrony and synchrony of ‘normal’/‘regular’ languages. If Creole languages, as a class, are to be excluded — ‘separated’ — from the set of regular/normal languages, then insights about Creole genesis and Creole structures can barely teach us anything substantial about the regular/normal operation of our *faculté de langage*, contra Schuchardt’s sensible exhortation.

What about the myth that ‘the world’s simplest grammars are Creole grammars’ (McWhorter 2001)? As Arends (2001:181f.) reminds us, McWhorter’s ‘Prototype Theory bears some remarkable similarities to Bickerton’s Bioprogram Theory. In one of its versions, Bickerton (1984a:178) claimed that the bulk of Saramaccan grammar could be captured in less than ten rules of syntax, a simple grammar if ever there was one!’. Yet Saramaccan’s ‘simple grammar’ exhibits ‘rules of syntax’ that are unheard of in English, such as the following, as reported in Muysken and Law’s (2001:49–51, 53) brief survey: (i) two copulas, one ‘presentative’ and one ‘locative’; (ii) reduplication processes that derive adjectives and nouns from verbs; ‘with reduplicated predicates [the locative copula] is obligatory’; (iii) tonal contrasts and tone sandhi; (iv) predicate clefting with doubling of the predicate head. Be that as it may, Arends (2001:180) also reminds us that the 1971 *Guinness book of world records* claimed Saramaccan Creole (Guyana) as the world’s simplest language (cf. Price & Price 1991:xii). Thus defined, the study of the Creole prototype has actually little to contribute to our insights into the definitely-not-so-simple mechanics of universal grammar and no relevance to current debates about the correct analyses of an array of complex Creole structures. (See DeGraff 2001a,b for a more elaborate critique of alleged Creole prototypes.)¹⁰

¹⁰ Another usage of separative claims in Creole studies seems sociological and may have evolved from the stigmatized history of Creole languages and from recommendable efforts to legitimate their study. These separative claims try to define creolists as a specific kind of scientific community either with special status (‘Creole is king’ in Bickerton’s (1984b) words) or in need of special protection (from the act of ‘cutting off the branch [the discipline] is sitting on’, Parkvall 2001:148, 150). Separative creolists declare themselves

For now, it seems to me that, if there is one central difference between language change and creolization, it is at best a SOCIOHISTORICAL one. For example, the conquered peoples in the Caribbean Creole genesis scenarios came from many more different language groups than their analogues in, say, the genesis of the Romance languages, and these two groups had to face distinct ecologies (see Mufwene 2000, 2001 for an extended argument that creolization is a social, not a structural, process). But these sociohistorical differences do not vitiate the fact already noted in Greenfield 1830:51f. and elsewhere that the individual speakers engaged in language contact, whether in the genesis of Creole or Romance languages, would have used ‘the same [mental] process [for the] formation of [their respective new] language’.

2.2. CREOLE EXCEPTIONALISM OUTSIDE OF LINGUISTICS: THE CASE OF HAITI. Regardless of their empirical and theoretical flaws, the sociological correlates of Creole exceptionalism did make sense for neocolonial thinkers and so-called nation builders inside post-independence Haiti. There, Francophilia and ambivalence toward HC became part of larger sociological complexes and intricate networks of vital self-interests as educated Haitians started to define themselves as a people—‘Who are we?’.

Among the small percentage of socially dominant Francophone Haitians in post-independence Haiti, one type of answer was taking shape, which can be somewhat simplistically paraphrased as ‘we are colored Frenchman’. This (mis)identification denotes what Jean Price-Mars (1928 [1983:8]) calls the ‘collective bovarism’ of the Haitian elites (see references in n. 1). In Price-Mars’s analysis, this collective bovarism could for the most part be explained by the need for ‘social cohesion’; this is Francophilia as an illusory tool for nation building.¹¹

But there is a more realistic analysis along Marxist lines. HC has long been the language of the numerical majority in Haiti. This monolingual majority lives in the ‘calm possession’ of their native language (P. Dejean 1993:81). A popular Haitian maxim labels French a *lang achte*—literally: a ‘bought language’—to be obtained at great psychological and socioeconomic costs. In reality, this bought language has, throughout Haiti’s history, been spoken by only a numerical—if socioeconomically and politically powerful—minority, while the numerical majority of monolingual Creolophones have remained socioeconomically and politically marginalized. With all social classes having total access to HC, Francophilia in post-independence, then contemporary, Haiti became, among other things, a tool, not for nation building, but for ‘differentiation’ as an ‘expression of class self-interest’ (Hoffmann 1984:57–63).

French’s international prestige has long made HC relatively unattractive in the eyes of Haiti’s neocolonial elites anxious to gain respect in the Western world: French-speaking Haitian elites felt they would stand a better chance to appear as ‘equals’ vis-à-vis both the former metropole and their neighbors in the New World order (soon to be) dominated by a United States viewed as blatantly racist. (Recall the aforementioned early nineteenth-century U.S. Secretary of State’s comment about Haitians as ‘Niggers speaking French’; Chomsky 1993:201.)

defenders of Creole studies, against ‘assassination’ or ‘disciplinary suicide’ by uniformitarian (i.e. ‘integrative’) creolists.

Besides its empirical and theoretical shortcomings, such defense is methodologically misguided, notwithstanding its presumably good intentions: ‘there is nothing wrong with delineating a group of languages on sociohistorical grounds and making them the subject matter of one’s research’ (Mufwene 2000:79). To wit: Romance linguistics, African linguistics, Germanic linguistics, and so on, none of which are ‘separative’.

¹¹ *Oxford English dictionary*: ‘Bovarism: From the name of the principal character in Flaubert’s novel *Madame Bovary* (1857). (Domination by) A romantic or unreal conception of oneself.’

The 'linguistic exile' of monolingual Creole speakers in Haiti, along with the 'apartheid' that excludes them from power (P. Dejean 1993:123–24, cf. Y. Dejean 1975, 1999:§16, 2003, Devonish 1986:16, 30), seems to have been imposed by both outsiders and insiders via widespread dissemination of (neo)colonial stereotypes (see e.g. M.-R. Trouillot 1990:ch. 4 and Chomsky 1993:200–206). The maintenance of anti-Creole stereotypes by the Haitian élite increases the economic, social, and symbolic 'capital' (in Bourdieu's 1982 [1991] sense) that French-speaking Haitians can accumulate at the expense of their monolingual Creole-speaking compatriots. This capital has often subtle and somewhat ambiguous correlates in ethnicity, race, and class (see e.g. Hoffmann 1984:57–63, Bellegarde-Smith 1985:171, 1990:7, M.-R. Trouillot 1990:114–18). From that perspective, Creolophobia-cum-Francophilia by (aspiring) middle- and upper-class Haitians who crave socioeconomic and political advantages can be analyzed as a sensible investment strategy in the linguistic markets made available by Haiti's history.

3. TOWARD POSTCOLONIAL CREOLISTICS. The ultimate goal of postcolonial creolistics as I would like to define it here is to fully deconstruct: (i) the linguistic fallacies, both empirical and theoretical, of Creole exceptionalism; and (ii) the relationship among: (a) these fallacies, (b) the sociohistorical context of the development of both Creole languages and Creole studies, and (c) future educational opportunities, or lack thereof, for Creole speakers. This sort of postcolonial creolistics can be described as reflexive, Cartesian-uniformitarian, and scientifically and socially responsible.

What is REFLEXIVE scholarship? Bourdieu (1980 [1990:1]) writes that '[T]he progress of knowledge presupposes progress in our knowledge of the conditions of knowledge'. Reflexive scholarship, or 'epistemic reflexivity' (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992:36–46), tries to elucidate these 'conditions of knowledge'. Bourdieu's 'invitation to reflexive sociology' can double as an invitation to reflexive linguistics, perhaps of the sort attempted in this essay where linguistic research is complemented by an interdisciplinary Foucauldian approach that enlists historical and historiographical evidence in order to trace and elucidate the time course and sociological causes of various 'categories of thought' in Creole studies (cf. Mulheisen 2002). In the case at hand, reflexive creolistics questions the scientific and methodological conditions that have underlied our knowledge or LACK of knowledge about Creole languages. Creole exceptionalism persists even in the face of readily available evidence that robustly contradicts it.

In recent work, the joint investigation of language contact, language change, and language acquisition suggests that there is not, and could not be, any deep theoretical divide between the outcome of language change vs. that of creolization. Cartesian-uniformitarian approaches to Creole genesis can all be, in principle, extrapolated from Descartes — 'Reason . . . is by nature equal in all men' (Descartes 1637 [1962:1]; cf. Chomsky 1966). In Creole studies, such rationalist approaches were already adumbrated by Greenfield's (1830:51f.) dictum that 'The human mind is the same in every clime; and accordingly we find nearly the same process adopted in the formation of language in every country'. Greenfield's egalitarian approach somewhat anticipates neogrammarian uniformitarianism (cf. Osthoff & Brugmann 1878 [1967:204]), which relies on the assumption that grammars, in the theoretical linguistic sense, are based on species-uniform properties of brain/mind. In other words, every language is 'normal' and so are the processes whereby they are created in the minds of native speakers.

Modern linguistics reaches explanatory adequacy when, among other things, it 'suggests an explanation for the intuition of the native speaker' (Chomsky 1964:28, 1965:24f., 1975:95f., 101–3). The epistemological foundation of Chomskyan linguistics thus

puts Creole speakers' native intuition and knowledge at the heart of theoretical Creole studies.¹² And, in fact, this is not peculiar to the Chomskyan paradigm or to Creole studies. The crucial methodological import of native speakers' knowledge is shared by linguists across theoretical affiliations, from neogrammarians, to anthropological linguists, to structuralist behaviorists.¹³

Lastly, let us turn to scientifically and socially responsible creolistics. Dubious myths about the structural inadequacy of Creole languages get further credence among Creole speakers when some of the most prominent Creole-speaking intellectuals proclaim that Creole is 'unable to express abstract ideas'.¹⁴ This myth is false, as argued since, at least, Greenfield 1830, Boas 1911, and Sapir 1921, 1933. Yet, such mythologizing gains prescriptive power when found in scholarly treatises with the imprimatur of prestigious scientific societies and/or the signature of Creolephone luminaries.

Recall that we even find influential contemporary creolists who explicitly consider the mythical extraordinary simplicity of Creole languages as a 'historical universal' (Seuren 1998:292–93) that, for some, doubles as a supposedly pan-Creole cognitive handicap (Whinnom 1971:110; also see the references in §1.2 and n. 1 and n. 14). It has even been claimed that this alleged structural handicap entails an evolutionary handicap. For example, decreolization is considered an 'improvement' (Bloomfield 1933:474), and it is believed that 'Creole languages that are used alongside their lexifiers are doomed by an irremediable fate: descended from major languages of international communication for the modern world, Creole languages are inexorably destined to dissolve in these major languages via the process of decreolization' (Valdman 1987: 107); also see Jespersen 1922:235, and d'Ans 1968:26. The sort of handicap postulated by Jespersen, Bloomfield, d'Ans, Whinnom, Valdman, and Seuren allegedly threatens the very viability of Creole languages, as per the claim that Creole morphology, or

¹² This view seems in opposition to that of creolists such as Samarin and Valdman. Samarin (1967:42) considers that an informant's 'sophistication' can get in the way: 'If the informant should become only partially sophisticated, he may take more liberty in talking about his language than he is qualified to . . . The investigator's task in training the informant therefore involves restraining both his imagination and his discussion. The full responsibility for analysis lies on the shoulders of the investigator'.

In a related vein, Valdman (2001a:532, 535f.) considers that, in absence of corpora, native speakers' intuitions and observations are 'anecdotal', 'subjective', and 'not adequate with respect to the requirements of modern empirical studies'. Incidentally, Valdman's remarks also apply to a good chunk of modern linguistic theory, thus discarding most of the results of generative syntax and other linguistic frameworks (see n. 13).

¹³ For a sample of linguists who put native speakers' knowledge at the epistemological center of their research, see Paul 1890 [1970:10], Boas 1911:81 (also see Haas 1976:67, 69, n. 2), Saussure (see Bouquet 1997:117–24), Bloomfield 1922:277, Harris 1951:12–14, Hockett 1955:211f., Chomsky 1964:28, 1965:24f., 1975:95f., 101–3, 1997:46, 171, Hale 1972, 1973, 1976, 1992, 2001, Hymes 1976:19.

¹⁴ Here are three surprising quotes from prominent and progressive Creole-speaking thinkers:

'[We] would not have been able to write in Creole . . . I don't even know if this is conceivable . . . One aspect of Martinique's cultural backwardness is the [expressive] level of its Creole language, . . . which level is very low . . . The Creole language has remained . . . in a stage of immediacy, unable to express abstract ideas.' (Césaire 1978:x–xi)

'The problem [with Creole] is . . . dealing with a language in which you don't think abstractly.' (Raphaël Confiant as quoted in Mooney 2000)

'But [HC] is not a language that can be used for basic science or that can be used in the advancement of knowledge.' (Métellus 1997:18)

These quotes may seem all the more surprising that they come from scholars whose literary and pedagogical works have enhanced the status of Creole speakers in and outside academia.

lack thereof, limits ‘internal creation of lexical enrichment’ and creates ‘obstacles to the blossoming of Creole languages’ (Valdman 1978:345).¹⁵

My own contention is that perhaps the main impediment to the ‘blossoming of Creoles’ and the most likely cause of any eventual Creole ‘doom’ is the profound, if sometimes subtle, ambivalence toward Creoles in various quarters of the linguistics community and, especially, in Creole-speaking societies.

Cartesian-uniformitarian linguistics is anti-exceptionalist: it aims at understanding the speaking mind, and thus our very humanity, which includes the humanity of Creole speakers, notwithstanding the ‘accidents’ of (post)colonial history. Cartesian-uniformitarian linguistic research on the origins and structures of Creole languages questions and ultimately invalidates the epistemological and conceptual bases of the neocolonial and inegalitarian paradigms of much work in contemporary creolistics, whereby Creole languages are effectively devalued as ‘beginning’ languages, ‘less advanced’ languages, ‘simplest’ languages, ‘abnormal’ languages, ‘broken’ languages, ‘corrupted’ languages, and so on.

In conclusion, postcolonial linguistics — with its scientific results and its reflexive meditations about, and criticisms of, certain (mis)practices in Creole studies — draws attention to the sociohistorical determinants and sociological consequences of metalinguistic attitudes in, and outside, linguistic research. Such results will, one must hope, help improve the quality of life of Creole speakers in at least two ways, one theoretical, the other applied: (i) through progress in our current knowledge about the history and structures of Creole languages and about the genealogy and sociology of Creole studies; (ii) eventually through application of our improved knowledge to new and truly progressive paradigms in research, in education reform, and language policy (cf. Cameron et al. 1992). It is thus that postcolonial creolistics can indeed be ‘appli[ed] . . . to language planning, education, and social reform in Creole-speaking societies’ (see masthead of the *Journal of Pidgin and Creole Languages*). In Bourdieu’s words, ‘Every theory . . . is a programme of perception . . . Many “intellectual debates” are less unrealistic than they seem if one is aware of the degree to which one can modify social reality by modifying the agents’ representation of it’ (1982 [1991:128]).

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¹⁵ But see Valdman 2000, 2001b for recent correctives vis-à-vis his earlier allegations of morphological ‘obstacles’ to HC’s lexical enrichment.

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