

## **Linguists' most dangerous myth: The fallacy of Creole Exceptionalism**

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### ABSTRACT

“Creole Exceptionalism” is defined as a set of beliefs, widespread among both linguists and nonlinguists, that Creole languages form an exceptional class on phylogenetic and/or typological grounds. It also has nonlinguistic (e.g., sociological) implications, such as the claim that Creole languages are a “handicap” for their speakers, which has undermined the role that Creoles should play in the education and socioeconomic development of monolingual Creolophones. Focusing on Caribbean Creoles, and on Haitian Creole in particular, it is argued that Creole Exceptionalism, as a socio-historically rooted “régime of truth” (in Foucault’s sense), obstructs scientific and social progress in and about Creole communities. Various types of Creole Exceptionalist beliefs are deconstructed and historicized, and their empirical, theoretical, and sociological flaws surveyed. These flaws have antecedents in early creolists’ theories of Creole genesis, often explicitly couched in Eurocentric and (pre-/quasi-)Darwinian doctrines of human evolution. Despite its historical basis in colonialism and slavery and its scientific and sociological flaws, Creole Exceptionalism is still enshrined in the modern linguistics establishment and its classic literature, a not unexpected state given the social structure of scientific communities and the interaction between ideology and “paradigm-making.” The present Foucauldian approach to Creole Exceptionalism is an instantiation of a well-defined area of the linguistics/ideology interface. The conclusion proposes alternatives more consistent with Creole structures and their development, and more likely to help linguists address some practical problems faced by Creole speakers. (Colonialism, Creole languages, Darwinism, Haitian Creole, history of linguistics, ideology, language evolution)\*

What is the prognosis? . . . The prognosis is in the hands of those who are willing to get rid of the worm-eaten roots of the structure. (Fanon 1952 [1991:11])

COLONIAL, NEO-COLONIAL AND POSTCOLONIAL CREOLISTICS

*Preliminaries: The (neo-)colonial vs. the postcolonial*

One of my arguments in this essay is that Creole languages remain, in Alleyne's (1994:8) phrase, among "the most stigmatized of the world's languages" for reasons that can be traced back to now-defunct race theories of the colonial era. I make this argument while I narrow my focus to Caribbean Creoles – language varieties created primarily by peoples of African descent in the Caribbean. My principal case study is Haiti, my country of birth.

In the course of my argument, I will sketch the ways in which various scholars – both linguists and nonlinguists, both within and outside the Caribbean – have misapprehended the developmental and structural nature of Caribbean Creoles. At present it appears, to some of us at least, that much, though certainly not all, scholarly work on Creoles has for far too long been tainted by certain colonial, and then neo-colonial, biases, at the theoretical, methodological, and sociological levels. It is these biases that this essay addresses and attempts to redress in some preliminary fashion (also see DeGraff 2001a,b, 2002, 2003, 2004).

Let me quickly add that my project here does not include any comprehensive analysis of the oeuvres of the authors of whose claims I analyze a subset; nor does it include a systematic overview of the history of Creole studies (see, e.g., Holm 1988 for such a survey). My interest here is specifically in the analysis and demystification of a selected set of arguments by selected authors, thus my narrow focus on specific claims that seem to instantiate a particular (neo-)colonial tradition in Creole studies. Fortunately, such a tradition, though a popular one with many prominent scholars as its exponents, is only one among many trends in contemporary creolistics.<sup>1</sup>

Borrowing a phrase from Montagu's (1942) famous title, it seems to me that the "most dangerous myth" inherent in the work of many, though not all, creolists is that of CREOLE EXCEPTIONALISM: the postulation of exceptional and abnormal characteristics in the diachrony and/or synchrony of Creole languages as a class. In this essay, I argue that from the perspective of intellectual history, this exceptionalist position is a rather banal correlate of, and a predictable addition to, a series of epistemological dualisms that have been associated with racism and slavery through much of world history.

Some of these slavery-related epistemological dualisms are surveyed and analyzed in Davis 1966. He argues that, in order for New World racial slavery to become acceptable when it did, a complex and often contradictory set of religious and philosophical dualisms had to permeate European intellectual thought, from its interpretation of Christianity to its human sciences. The basic

dualism can be approached via some straightforward questions: How can the slave be both a full-fledged human being and a chattel? Thus the apparent problem posed for Europeans by the formation of European-like Creole languages: How can the slave (a lesser human?) speak a language that sounds like the full-fledged language of his or her (fully human?) European master? C. L. R. James (1938 [1963:362]) cast the problem in these terms: "They enslaved the Negro, they said, because he was not a man, and when he behaved like a man they called him a monster." And so the linguistic behavior of the enslaved Negro in the Caribbean came to be viewed as abnormal, a "linguistic monstrosity," to borrow a phrase from Foucault (1969 [1972a:223]). As expressed by Fanon (1952 [1991:17]), this ideology's "major artery is fed from the heart of those various theories that have tried to prove that the Negro is a stage in the slow evolution of monkey into man."<sup>2</sup>

In sum, the history of Creole Exceptionalism can be interpreted as one discursive link in the colonial dialectic chain connecting "the problem of slavery" in the New World to European scientific racism. In turn, the discourse of Creole Exceptionalism can be textually linked to certain tropes within a (pseudo-) scientific hegemonic narrative that runs throughout the history of the (post-) colonial Caribbean from the earliest descriptions of its Creole languages. This narrative, in some of its central aspects, has suffered no break in transmission (see DeGraff 2003, a synopsis of the present essay).

"Postcolonial creolistics," as I propose in this essay (also see DeGraff 2003: 402–4),<sup>3</sup> becomes an effort at breaking the exceptionalist dialectic chain in Creole studies. To me, the term suggests certain predispositions toward the scientifically and sociologically sound study of Creole languages. These predispositions are truly universalist, and thus humane (read "egalitarian"), unlike the inhumane "humanism" of the colonial period's ethnocentric race theories, which postulated the existence of human races to be ordered by an evolutionary hierarchy dominated by White male Christians; thus the "white man's burden" vis-à-vis the supposedly lesser kinds of (non)humans – Jews, Arabs, Blacks, Amerindians, and so on.

Postcolonial creolistics aims at an "organic" alliance with its objects of study, in the sense of Gramsci:

- (1) [While] elaborating a form of thought superior to 'common sense' and coherent on a scientific plane, [organic scholarship] never forgets to remain in contact with the 'simple' [i.e., the non-'intellectual' strata of society] and indeed finds in this contact the source of the problems it sets out to study and to resolve. . . . If [the philosophy of praxis] affirms the need for contact between intellectuals and simple it is not in order to restrict scientific activity, but precisely in order to construct an intellectual-moral bloc which can make politically possible the intellectual progress of the mass and not only of small intellectual groups. (Gramsci 1971:330, 332f.)

As we will see below, "intellectual progress" of, and about, the "masses" of Creole speakers is not easily defined, and much tension arises from deciding what is in the best interests of Creole speakers and from determining who makes such

decisions. I will try in this essay to follow one specific sort of organic scholarship, one that focuses on two related goals: (i) to demystify through historical, textual, and linguistic analyses the neo-colonial ideology that clouds our views on Creole diachrony and synchrony; and (ii) to oppose and reverse the sociological and epistemological effects/defects of such ideology. I hope that this sort of organic scholarship will eventually contribute to intellectual progress of, and around, Creole speakers, somewhat along the lines envisaged by Gramsci.

Gramsci's exhortation toward organic scholarship should imbue our work with what I interpret as Aristotelian *phronesis* ('prudence'). *Phronesis* takes into account both theoretical universals and historical/practical contingent particulars, and it "can aim, by the help of . . . calculation, at the best of the goods attainable by man" (Aristotle 1976:213).

Postcolonial creolistics, and postcolonial linguistics in general, need not be, and are not, coextensive with the scholarship of linguists from any one particular ethnic or intellectual background. On the one hand, Aristotle took *phronesis* to be a universal desideratum. On the other hand, the all-too-familiar internalization of racism, or the self-division entailed by it (see, e.g., Fanon 1952, Ngugi wa Thiong'o 1986), can even lead to subtle or blatant cases of what might be considered anti-Black scholarship by Black scholars (see note 21, the section below on "Unbroken and unexceptional transmission," and the case studies and references in DeGraff 2001a,b, 2003). Borrowing a few *mots justes* from Ken Hale (2001:100), the ultimate success of this postcolonial linguistics "will be measured by the extent to which work on the language is integrated in a meaningful way into the life of the community of people who speak it."

In the remainder of this section, I will set the stage by providing some telling illustrations and an overview of Creole Exceptionalism and of my stance against it; then I will sketch some of the relevant sociohistorical and epistemological background. The second section hints at the genealogy, archaeology, and transmission of Creole Exceptionalism, both within and outside Creole studies, and both within and outside academia. The third section suggests signposts for the future of postcolonial creolistics, along the path of reflexive, Cartesian-Uniformitarian, and scientifically and socially responsible linguistics.

### *Against neo-colonial anti-Creole creolistics*

One goal of this essay is to help elucidate the epistemological and sociohistorical bases of the (neo-)colonial myths that have often undermined both descriptions of Creole languages and the role that these languages should play in the education and socioeconomic development of their speakers.<sup>4</sup> As in DeGraff 2003, I take as my starting point the following admonitions from Saussure:<sup>5</sup>

- (2) [O]f what use is linguistics? . . . In the lives of individuals and of societies, language is a factor of greater importance than any other. For the study of language to remain solely the business of a handful of specialists would be a quite unacceptable state of affairs. In practice, the study of language is in some degree or other the concern of everyone. But a

paradoxical consequence of this general interest is that no other subject has fostered more absurd notions, more prejudices, more illusions and more fantasies. From a psychological point of view, these errors are of interest in themselves. But it is the primary task of the linguist to denounce them, and to eradicate them as completely as possible. (Saussure 1916 [1986:7])

The postcolonial creolist faces significant extra hurdles in the “primary [myth-denouncing] task” advocated by Saussure in (2). What if “a handful of specialists” – in this case, specialists on Creole languages – have unwittingly “foster[ed] absurd notions, . . . prejudices, . . . illusions and . . . fantasies” about their very objects of study? Worse yet, what if “prejudices,” “illusions” and “fantasies” underlie some of the foundations of Creole studies? In such an event, myth-making by professional linguists unfortunately converges with myth-making by “folk linguists” as defined in Hoenigswald 1966 and more recently in Niedzielski & Preston 2000. The folk linguists’ errors may thus seem nearly impossible to eradicate. If so, these errors will have an even greater effect on “the lives of [Creole-speaking] individuals and societies.”

This paradox, which was apparently not anticipated by Saussure, may well be at the core of Creole studies. As I will document in this essay, many creolists throughout the history of Creole languages have relied on a mythical set of anti-egalitarian dualist assumptions that separate creolistics from the rest of linguistics and establish Creole languages as a special class of languages apart from “normal”/“regular” languages. I will argue that these assumptions were tacitly handed down to us from our field’s (neo-)colonial history, without any “break in transmission,” so to speak.

Creole Exceptionalism begins with the epistemological baggage that is entailed by the very term “Creole” and its derivative “creolization”: As documented below, both terms have long been taken to involve *sui generis* linguistic-structural and cognitive-developmental properties that have no equivalent in the synchrony and diachrony of “normal” languages (see, e.g., Greenfield 1830; Posner 1985; Chaudenson & Mufwene 2001; Mufwene 2001; see DeGraff 2001a,b, 2002, 2005 for recent extended critiques within distinct frameworks). This exceptionalist baggage, a legacy of the race-theoretical assumptions that were promoted as part and parcel of Europe’s *mission civilisatrice* in Africa and the Americas, has been forcefully dragged across time and space, and it is still central to much work in contemporary creolistics, independent of theoretical orientation.

Consider, for example, the quotes in (3) and (4), which were written a century apart yet carry the same basic message about the alleged inferiority of Creole languages and their speakers. These quotes, plus the contemporary ethnographic commentary in (5)–(6), are worth a close reading because they conveniently, if somewhat theatrically, encapsulate the spirit of Creole Exceptionalism, the antithesis of postcolonial creolistics as defined above.

- (3) [T]he proper meaning of this word [Creole] is ‘native inhabitant of a European colony in Africa or in the Americas.’ Thus, any language that develops in a new colony can be

called a Creole Patois . . . One of the races [that participate in the daily contact situation] necessarily gains dominance due to its numerical importance, its power or its moral superiority; and so does its language gain dominance or, at least, becomes the model for the colony-wide lingua franca, to which each of the races in contact contributes its special share of expressions and constructions. It is precisely the artificial nature of Creole languages that distinguishes them from our patois: the latter is a natural language that is anterior, coexistent and secondary vis-à-vis the literary language whereas 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.

Thus, Creole Patois are dialects of a SPECIAL NATURE, dialects that are affiliated with a Indo-European prototype – French, Spanish and Portuguese, in particular. (Vinson 1889: 345–46)

- (4) Whoever has tried even a little bit to speak [the Santiago dialect of Capeverdean] Creole will quickly realize that its vocabulary is extremely poor: only a few thousand words . . . Creole can spare only one single word where any civilized European language has many words to offer.

This obviously doesn't imply that the Badaïas people [i.e., the inhabitants of the Capeverdean island of Santiago] are more stupid than Europeans or that their language is less expressive. It's just that Badaïas speech is a Creole, that is, a mixed language (in this case, a mixture of Portuguese and African languages) that is also a young, very young, language. . . .

BESIDES, THE FASHION IN WHICH CREOLE WAS BORN PRETTY MUCH EXPLAINS ITS LEXICAL, AND EVEN CONCEPTUAL, POVERTY. . . .

. . . This is born [Capeverdean] Creole: Portuguese words and a West-African syntax.

But the unique source of Creole words is what the masters wanted to tell their slaves. . . . Creole is thus a practical and utilitarian language, born out of raw and immediate necessity. (Quint 1997:58–59)

Both Julien Vinson and Nicolas Quint<sup>6</sup> illustrate the long-held and popular view that associates “creolization” with some extremely impoverishing form of simplification whose maximally degraded and primitive output, namely a “Creole” language, is to be evaluated with the European target language as sole yardstick. Both authors explicitly consider Creoles to be vastly inferior to the corresponding European “civilized” languages. What they perceive as Creoles’ drastic inferiority they attribute to some “special nature” that is intrinsic to the very process of creolization and/or to the latter’s agents.

In the Capeverdean case, Quint defines creolization in (4) as the assemblage of “Portuguese words [with] a West-African syntax.” In this extremely simplistic version of the relexification scenario, there is “[n]o discussion of exactly which West African grammar(s) were involved or how these words and grammars interacted to produce a new language” (Arends 2001:14). These are difficult methodological problems given the multitude of West African languages and the complex sociohistorical and cognitive processes that are involved in any type of language change/creation. What Arends calls the “naïveté” of the remarks in (4) applies to linguistic writing across four centuries, from 1665 onward (see the following section; for extended arguments against relexification, see the references cited in note 23).

In one way or another, both Vinson and Quint suggest the superiority of European speakers over their Creole-speaking counterparts. This alleged superiority is supposedly moral, linguistic, racial-biological, sociocultural, and/or conceptual. About Quint's book, Arends (2001:14) writes: "Everything is being measured according to a western – especially French – norm: From the amount of milk produced by local cows [p. 53] to the meaning of Ash Wednesday [p. 75], from the mourning of the dead [p. 82] to the Capeverdean way of thinking [p. 86]." For Quint (1997:86), typical Capeverdean thought is still pre-Cartesian. This is historical-comparative linguistics-cum-ethnography as seen through Europe's "normative gaze," in West's (1982:53f) sense – that is, from the perspective of the European "ideal from which to order and compare observations." Arends again: "Sadly, two hundred years of *pensée cartésienne* later, Q[uint] still displays the prejudice and narrow-mindedness of our ignorant ancestors."

The quotes in (3) and (4) only begin to substantiate the main theme of this essay: that a great deal of Creole-related scholarship is not so much a body of knowledge about Creole structures as it is a peculiar "body of discourse" in the sense of Foucault 1966. The body of discourse that is hinted at in (3) and (4) and that is illustrated throughout this essay with quotes from a wide variety of authors is essentially hegemonic.<sup>7</sup> Let us examine our introductory sample above a bit closer.

Unlike the 19th-century statement in (3), its 20th-century analogue in (4) makes no direct association between race and language. But elsewhere Quint's travelogue is peppered with explicitly, and often mockingly, negative statements about his subjects' "conceptual poverty" and cognitive and moral deficiencies:<sup>8</sup>

(5) Often, one is surprised by the Badaia's lack of curiosity. Westerners find them stupid or passive. But how can intelligence be stimulated in an environment so cramped and with so little variety? (Quint 1997:108)

(6) The moral looseness of women in Mindelo [another Capeverdean island,] makes Badaia's and other islanders dream. They fascinate the entire [Capeverdean] archipelago: they are either despised (they are all prostitutes) or admired (it is rumored elsewhere that certain girls in Saint-Vincent can make love one thousand times before the age of 12). (Quint 1997:134)

The linguist-cum-ethnographer quoted above also arrogates to himself the role of standard-bearer for "good Creole," even though he himself is not a native Capeverdean Creole speaker. Yet according to his prescriptive judgment, "good Creole" is outside the reach of many Capeverdeans because of their (mis)education:

[M]any students, including even high-school seniors, remain unable to adequately transcribe their thoughts into Portuguese, and in general THEY ARE NO LONGER ABLE TO EXPRESS THEMSELVES IN GOOD CREOLE. What remains is an hybrid patois that would make any Portuguese speaker laugh and that sounds like refined Creole to peasants and to those who are poorer. Instead of being bilingual, these students happily mix the country's two languages



[Portuguese and Capeverdean Creole] and BOTH LANGUAGES ARE SPOKEN IMPERFECTLY. (Quint 1997:134)

In (6), sociolinguistic phenomena that should straightforwardly fall under the rubric of “Creole continuum” or, more generally, “language variation” – a common pattern across all speech communities – are tendentiously reinterpreted as a comical hodgepodge of “imperfections.”

The above specimen of Creole Exceptionalism is not unique. It finds a long-standing parallel in, for example, the literature on Haitian Creole (HC). Already in the colonial era, Michel Étienne Descourtilz, a French amateur philologist with relatively little experience in HC (he spent less than 5 years in Haiti from 1799 to 1803), decided to “rectify” some Creole utterances he was transcribing for his book (1809:v3:135). Almost two centuries later, we read: “In the speech of the [educated urban HC-French bilinguals], HC and French show so many mutual interference phenomena as to render highly suspect the HC of any bilingual” (Valdman 1971:203; also see Valdman 1984:89, 2001a). This argument makes the linguistic intuitions of the bilingual Creole speaker – and, thus, of the Creole-speaking linguist – “highly suspect” vis-à-vis all of his or her native languages. In a rather peculiar, but perhaps not unexpected, methodological twist, these arguments force the Creole-speaking linguist into an extraordinary epistemological predicament. This predicament is fundamentally unlike the rather frequent and actually quite normal situation of the many multilingual and polylectal non-creolophone linguists whose native-speaker intuitions are not usually considered “highly suspect”: In a rather exceptional methodological dictum, the native Creole speaker is asked to defer to the NON-Creole speaker as the arbitrator of “good Creole!” (Cf. note 33 and the discussion in Dejean 1999a, to appear.)

The bluntly explicit ethnocentrism displayed in (4–6) is fortunately atypical of modern creolistics. The reasoning and rhetoric in these quotes will surely surprise many readers, including creolists, to whom these statements will appear, in the main, to be based on “evidence” that is anecdotal, biased, empirically problematic and/or conceptually incoherent. Perhaps many scholars will wish for the claims in (3)–(6) to be quickly discarded as outliers, and this is a welcome wish. Unfortunately, these quotes can be embedded in a larger set of “absurd notions,” “prejudices,” “illusions” and “fantasies” of the myth-making sort hinted at by Saussure in (2), except that, in the Creole case, linguists themselves have actively participated in the myth-making. In my own narrative in this essay, quotes such as those in (3–6) will be highlighted and analyzed as part of a particular discursive “régime of truth” in Foucault’s (1980:131,133) sense; that is, a “‘general politics’ of truth [i.e.] the types of discourse which [a given society] accepts and makes function as true” with “‘Truth’ [being] linked in a circular fashion with systems of power which produce and sustain it, and to effects of power which it induces and which extend it.”



The régime of truth that will occupy my analysis here can be argued to have lasted through the entire twin lives of Creole languages and Creole studies and to have spanned continents, ethnicities, theories, and professions. The case studies that support this argument, here and elsewhere (see note 4), concern both folk linguistics and bona fide linguistic descriptions, analyses, and discussions, all of which are related to Creole languages. I thus hope in this essay to document and elucidate a subtle, and sometimes not so subtle, power-inducing and power-full sort of Creole-related neo-colonial discourse by influential authors, including prominent Creole speakers. While these authors' texts display a tortured ambivalence toward Creole languages, their declared and seemingly sincere agenda paradoxically includes both the advancement of Creole speakers and the advancement of our knowledge about those speakers. The paradox is exacerbated when these authors are able, because of their status and through their writings, to negatively affect crucial issues in, and about, Creole society – for instance, Creole-related research, the use of Creoles in education, or Creole-based literacy programs.

My goal is to expose – actually, to try to defamiliarize, question, and challenge – the basic implicit assumptions of still prevalent neo-colonial discourse about Creole languages so that it becomes easier to (re)define a new kind of “Cartesian-Uniformitarian” creolistics, one that assumes no aprioristic fundamental differences between Creole and non-Creole languages in regard to both development and structure.<sup>9</sup>

#### *Sociohistorical and epistemological background*

Etymologically, the word “Creole” derives from Portuguese *crioulo* and/or Spanish *criollo*, which mean ‘raised in the home’ (from *criar* ‘to raise, to breed’; cf. Latin *creare* ‘to create’). In the Caribbean colonial context, the use of “Creole” in respect to human beings and other biological species seems to have preceded its use in respect to speech varieties. In both cases, certain non-indigenous varieties that were grown locally (i.e., in the “New World”) were identified as “Creole” in opposition to their counterparts imported from the “Old World” of Europe and Africa. (For more complex terminological and historical details, see, e.g., Moreau de Saint-Méry 1797 [1958:28–111]; Mufwene 2001:3–11; Chaudenson & Mufwene 2001, chap.1 and references therein.)

In my own recent work (e.g., DeGraff 2003), I have adopted an atheoretical, language-external, and sociohistorically based semantics for the label “Creole languages” (also see Mufwene 2000, 2001). In such usage, the label “Creole languages” is strictly ostensive. In this essay, it refers to the speech varieties that developed in many of the newly created communities – the “Creole” communities – in and around the colonial and slave-based plantations of the New World in the 17th through 19th centuries. In the Caribbean, these Creole communities emerged relatively abruptly as the result of Europe’s colonization efforts, subsequent to Columbus’s expeditions. Caribbean Creole languages thus developed among Europeans and Africans as restructured versions of some (erstwhile) “tar-

get” language. The sociohistorical factors underlying the development of Creole languages out of extensive language contact include a continuum of power asymmetries. At the extreme end of this continuum, we find drastic psychological and social distance separating the sociopolitically dominant and dominated groups – speakers of the “superstrate” and “substrate” languages, respectively. In effect, Creole languages are the linguistic side effects of a peculiar type of border crossing and “globalization,” as occasioned by the slave trade and other mercantilist practices of the British, French, Portuguese, Dutch, and Spanish in Africa and the Americas.

One related terminological note: The native speakers of Caribbean Creoles call their own speech either “Creole” (in, e.g., Haiti), “Creolese” (e.g., in Guyana), “Patwa” (in, e.g., Jamaica), “Broken English” (in, e.g., Carriacou), or “Gumbo” (in Louisiana). In some estimates, there are around 20 million speakers of Creole languages worldwide, and this number immediately quadruples or quintuples if languages like Nigerian Pidgin English are, perhaps controversially, included in the count (Faraclas 1996:1–2).

In uniformitarian fashion, it seems reasonable to assume that, in terms of fundamental language-learning capacities, the aforementioned Europeans and Africans alongside their Caribbean-born (i.e., “Creole”) descendants are on a par with one another and with language learners everywhere else. Yet one still frequently encounters the claim, somewhat in the manner of Vinson and Quint, that Creole languages, because of their allegedly catastrophic development, suffer from intrinsic structural deficiencies that severely limit their expressive adequacy. This view is so widespread that it is found even among the most prominent and progressive Creole-speaking intellectuals from the Caribbean (though see caveats in notes 1, 9, and 16). This is shown in the textual samples in (7), to be expanded below:<sup>10</sup>

- (7) [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)

And this is where folk linguistics, or “epilinguistique” in Prudent's (1980:8) terminology, meets professional linguistics. Indeed, the beliefs expressed in (7) are echoed in the conclusions of professional linguists who study Creole languages. The *communis doctorum opinio* and the folk-linguistics consensus appear to be somewhat in agreement with each other and with the overtly ethnocentric statements of Vinson and Quint in (3–4), though without the overt racism of the latter.

As I will discuss in the following section, a host of influential linguists have postulated that the “young, very young, age” of Creoles (cf. ex. 4) is necessarily associated with extraordinarily reduced structures that give them “[t]he

world's simplest grammars" (McWhorter 2001) and that drastically limit expressiveness (e.g., Whinnom 1971, Valdman 1978, 1992, Seuren & Wekker 1986). Such "deficient" structures allegedly "constitute a handicap to the Creole-speaker's personal intellectual development" (Whinnom 1971:110). Such hypothetical structural impoverishment (e.g., alleged absence of morphology) in Creoles has even been promoted to the status of a "historical universal" by Seuren (1998:292–93). Also witness the categorical pronouncement that "there is consensus ... that Creole languages have little or no morphology" and that "the absence (or extreme poverty) of morphology in Creole languages seems to be a solid datum and a highly significant one" (Seuren & Wekker 1986:61). It has also been claimed that the *sui generis* history of Creole languages – with Pidgin ancestry and with no historical past – can be taken as a privileged window on language at its evolutionary incipience (Bickerton 1990). Creoles are thus opposed to "normal" and "regular" (i.e., non-Creole) languages (see, e.g., Valdman 1978:345, 1992:81; McWhorter 1998:793, 798–99, 809–12); only non-Creole languages are considered mature languages with ancient pedigrees, deep phylogenetic histories, and full-fledged linguistic structures.

It has even been claimed, also erroneously, that Creole languages are expressively so inadequate that they will ineluctably "decreolize" when confronted with older and fitter languages of culture; that is, the former will eventually die out by merging into the latter. Further, it is assumed that socioeconomic development in Creole-speaking communities is intrinsically incompatible with the continued use of un-"decreolized" Creole language (see, e.g., Jespersen 1922:228, 235; Valdman 1987:107).

Taken together, the above and related claims by both linguists and nonlinguists imply that Creoles as a group are, theoretically at least, unusable for "advanced" cultural and intellectual purposes in the modern world. Creole languages are thus vastly underutilized in the education of their speakers because of, among other things, the widespread if controversial belief that these languages, unlike their European sources (e.g., French, English, Portuguese), are expressively inadequate because of built-in and insuperable structural deficiencies.

In a long series of publications, Yves Dejean (1975, 1993, 1997, 1999b, to appear, Dejean 2004) samples and critiques the irrationality that permeates the Creole-related discourse of a wide assortment of intellectuals who still wonder whether Creole languages are normal languages that can be used as viable media for, and viable objects of, instruction.<sup>11</sup> In the case of Haiti, Dejean convincingly argues, against the views of many educated Haitians (see note 21 and the discussion in the next section), that Haitian Creole should indeed be the main instrument of education in Haiti, as it is the country's only national language and the one language spoken by virtually all Haitians, including an overwhelming majority of monolingual Creolophones.

In the remainder of this essay, I will follow Dejean's lead and critique exceptionalist orthodoxies about Creole languages, with frequent references to one

particular Creole, the one I know best, my native Haitian Creole (HC). HC, a Creole with a French-derived lexicon, is the result of contact between French and Africans in the 17th and 18th centuries in colonial Haiti, then known as Saint-Domingue. HC also happens to 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). The specifics of 18th-century Saint-Domingue – intensive slave trade, heavy multilingualism, a large-scale slave-based plantation economy, and varying degrees of exposure to the socially dominant European varieties – fulfill the sociohistorical criteria of typical creolization scenarios (see DeGraff 2001b:2.1) and make HC a perfect testing ground for the empirical claims of Creole Exceptionalism.

THE UNEXCEPTIONAL LIFE CYCLE OF CREOLE  
EXCEPTIONALISM

*A genealogy and archaeology of Creole Exceptionalism*

*Whence Creole Exceptionalism, and why?* What are the sociohistorical factors that made Creole Exceptionalism possible – even desirable – during the colonial era? In particular, what are the ideological characteristics of the intellectual milieu that have allowed exceptionalist and erroneous statements such as those sampled above to become truisms both inside and outside scholarly circles?

Below I will show that the theoretical claims that comprise Creole Exceptionalism in contemporary linguistics all overlap textually with the dualist narratives of thinkers in the 17th through 19th centuries who were struggling to reconcile racism-cum-slavery with their “humane” Christianity and/or “enlightened” humanism. These dualist narratives share a number of guiding metaphors with the beliefs that currently constitute Creole Exceptionalism, and it could be argued that the latter initially emerged, at the beginning of Creole studies, as byproducts of similar philosophical and moral struggles. It is such struggles that Davis 1988 takes as constituting “the problem of slavery in Western culture.”

Whatever the ultimate sources of their exceptionalist discourses, certain basic aspects of the early creolists’ views on the alleged abnormality of Creole languages’ development and typology now seem fully entrenched in modern linguistics, perhaps as parts of a “social embodied” or a “socialized subjectivity,” in the sense of Bourdieu & Wacquant (1992:120–40). This “habitus of thought,” in Bourdieu’s (1982) terminology, is explicit in the ongoing (neo-)colonial discourses of Creole Exceptionalism. What Bourdieu writes about nonreflexive sociology also applies to Creole Exceptionalism as characterized in this essay:

- (8) [T]his half-scholarly science BORROWS ITS PROBLEMS, CONCEPTS, AND ITS INSTRUMENTS OF KNOWLEDGE FROM THE SOCIAL WORLD, and . . . it often records as a datum, as an empirical given independent of the act of knowledge and of the science which performs

it, facts, representations or institutions which are THE PRODUCT OF A PRIOR STAGE OF SCIENCE. In short, it records itself without recognizing itself . . .  
(Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992:236)

It is perhaps via such socialized epistemological heuristics that Creole Exceptionalism “records itself without recognizing itself.”

Beyond this essay, a thorough Foucauldian analysis of creolistics’ “body of discourse” and of the genealogy and archaeology thereof will require more comprehensive and detailed treatments by historians, sociologists, philosophers, and postcolonial theorists. In Bourdieu & Wacquant’s (1992:238) words, “One of the most powerful instruments of rupture [from the underhanded persuasion of the social world] lies in the social history of problems, objects, and instruments of thought.” Though I am neither a sociologist nor a historian, I will still try to follow Bourdieu’s dictum: I will step outside of linguistics *per se* and take a too-brief look into history in order to better recognize and understand the genealogy of (neo-)colonial heuristics in creolistics. The paragraphs below will perforce be somewhat repetitive – though hopefully not to numbness – as they draw concentric circles around, and similarities among, some of the theoretical assumptions and empirical claims in a number of fields (e.g., linguistics, anthropology, history, philosophy) in the colonial and post-colonial periods, all of which claims are ultimately related to (neo-)colonial race theories. The ultimate goal of this abbreviated genealogy-cum-archaeology is to strip the camouflage from the history and ontology of Creole Exceptionalism, so we can help undo this myth, and perhaps, in Foucault’s (1980:133) words, “ascertain . . . the possibility of constituting a new politics of truth.”

As in DeGraff 2003, my camouflage-stripping strategy here will proceed in two basic steps: I will isolate certain long-running tropes in Creole Exceptionalism, and then I will relate these tropes to their discursive and nondiscursive counterparts outside of (folk) linguistics. (Below I highlight in small capitals the major tropes that run through the core of Creole Exceptionalism.)

The canonical tropes that recur in the discourse on Creole genesis effectively segregate Creole languages in “linguistic exile” (Corcoran’s 2001: Sec. 4 phrase) either (i) as DEGENERATE OFFSHOOTS (i.e., radically simplified versions) of their European ancestors (a.k.a. superstrates and lexifiers); (ii) as languages that, because of the structural degeneracy in (i), are subject to DECREOLIZATION QUA LANGUAGE DEATH; (iii) as SPECIAL HYBRIDS with exceptional genealogy – languages with African-derived grammatical structures and European-sounding words; (iv) as the only contemporary languages with a history of ABNORMAL TRANSMISSION (i.e., languages whose genesis corresponds with a BREAK IN TRANSMISSION), an abnormal break that results from pidginization, with Creoles emerging from the linguistic scratch of a structureless Pidgin; (v) as the contemporary languages that most closely resemble the earliest, the archetypal, human language in the history of human evolution. According to this trope, the alleged “Pidgin-to-Creole life cycle” in (iv) recapitulates the emergence of human lan-

guage from pre-sapiens protolanguage, and Creoles are thus CONTEMPORARY URSPRACHEN or LIVING FOSSILS of human language at its evolutionary incipience. Each trope is discussed in one of the sub-subsections that follow. (Various aspects of the theoretical hypotheses in i–v are analyzed and empirically disconfirmed in DeGraff 2001a,b, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, in preparation a; also see references therein.)

Whence this “linguistic exile”? To answer this question, I will look at creolistics through history, as a myth-making or, in Kuhn’s (1970) terminology, as a “paradigm”-making community. According to Kuhn (1970:179f), science being a community-based activity, “[a] paradigm governs, in the first instance, not a subject matter but rather a group of practitioners. Any study of paradigm-directed or of paradigm-shattering research must begin by locating the responsible group or groups.”

How do we locate the group or groups initially responsible for the major paradigm(s) in Creole studies? Creolistics, from the moment of its genesis as part of Europe’s imperialist project in Africa and the Americas, is also “paradigm-directed research” of a rather consistent and stable sort. Who were the ideological and intellectual founders of Creole Exceptionalism – that is, of creolistics as a study of languages to be developmentally and/or structurally opposed to languages that are “real”, “correct”, “normal”, “regular”, “civilized”, “old”, “advanced”, “expressive”, and so on?

Hale suggests one piece of the puzzle:

- (9) Anthropological linguistics, no less than anthropology itself, is ‘a child of Western imperialism.’ . . . [A]nthropological linguistics . . . developed as a discipline during ‘the period in which the Western nations were making their final push to bring practically the whole pre-industrial, non-Western world under their political and economic control’ (Gough 1968:12–13). During this formative period, field work, which has been the essential nutritive component of both disciplines [linguistics and anthropology], was carried out, primarily by Westerners, in aboriginal communities which were to a greater or lesser extent subjugated in the course of Western imperialist expansion.

In effect, anthropology and anthropological linguistics became disciplines in which Westerners studied, published, and built teaching and research careers around the cultural and linguistic wealth of non-Western peoples. (Hale 1972:384)

Hale’s suggestion that certain aspects of anthropological linguistics may have served as organic scholarship on behalf of imperialism finds its Creole-related counterpart in Meijer & Muysken’s (1977:21) observation that “[m]ost of the 19th-century views on Creoles were shaped by the same racism that characterized slavery,” a racism in which the cultural and linguistic profiles of Creole speakers were often caricatured as deviations from European norms. The role of scientific racism in the foundations of anthropology has been well documented (see, e.g., Popkin 1974:136f; Gould 1996:401–12; Bernasconi 2001b:17). According to Popkin (1974:152), race theories designed by early anthropologists were all “designed to explain the diversity of mankind so that Caucasians must be the best.”<sup>12</sup>

Slavery and race theories at the colonial inception of Creole studies would have made it impossible – or “unthinkable” – to consider Caribbean Creole languages on a genealogical or structural par with European languages. After all, Creoles were by and large perceived as languages created by slaves. In order to justify slavery, the Africans had to be equated to “lesser” human beings belonging to a separate and inferior species, and it was inconceivable that these lesser humans could speak full-fledged human languages lest it turn out that they actually were not Aristotelian “slaves by nature” (see note 12). In Popkin’s (1974:132) words, “different origins implied different human natures [this is polygenesis]; or . . . being nonwhite or non-Christian was a biological or psycho-spiritual disease, making those so infected presently inferior [this is monogenesis-cum-degeneracy].” As Popkin points out, these racist theories are fundamentally anti-Cartesian: Descartes’s “thinking substance” was postulated as a universal of human nature, an intrinsically human property. 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 16th century onward] 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 a similar belief regarding Amerindian languages.)

It is thus unsurprising that Creole languages were originally perceived as languages created through “corruption” or “abnormal transmission” mainly by “linguistically inferior” slaves, be they Aristotle’s “slaves by nature” or Montesquieu’s “slaves by climate” (see note 12). In the case of Haiti, the colonial ancestor of HC was described in the 18th century as “weak,” “dull,” “unclear,” “insipid,” an “imbecile jargon,” “nothing but French back in infancy” (Girod-Chantrons 1785 [1980:157f]).

In the colonial period, race theories in the style of Aristotle or Montesquieu had scope beyond linguistics and beyond anthropology, infiltrating much of scientific knowledge, including medicine (see, e.g., Fanon 1959 [1989:140]), to Eurocentric hegemonic ends. Politicized creolistics in the colonial era would have also been in the service of White supremacy “colonizing the mind” via (e.g.) misrepresentations – devaluations, really – of the linguistic capacities and linguistic profiles of colonial subjects (cf. Fanon 1952 [1991:17–40]; Ngugi wa Thiong’o 1986).

Corcoran (2001: Sec. 4) tackles related issues. Concluding with a section on “hypermetropic linguistics” (cf. Mufwene 1989), she contends that Creoles’ “linguistic exile” was a Humboldtian function of “European languages being spoken by non-Europeans.” But the sort of dualism noted by Corcoran, and illustrated by Vinson among many others, actually preceded Humboldt’s ethnocentrist linguistics: It goes back to the colonial beginnings of Creole studies and to the colonial sociohistorical context of Creole genesis (see DeGraff 2001a:92–98). The history of such dualisms throughout Western culture is carefully documented in Davis 1966.



As in DeGraff 2003, I will speculate that the *minoration linguistique* of Creoles, in the sense of Prudent 1980:7, was reinforced on pragmatic opportunist grounds, and I will 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, so to speak – relied on the very imperialist coffers that benefited from chattel slavery.<sup>13</sup> Early creolists came from, and were in the service of, imperialist Europe and its *mission civilisatrice*. One of their tasks was to document, and to make usable as instruments of control, their objects of study, the “new” languages of the New World. As the 17th-century Jesuit missionary Pelleprat (1655) 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]).

Recall from Vinson’s definition in (3) (we return to this and similar definitions below) that early creolists’ objects of study were, according to them, languages created by speakers of a “linguistically inferior race” trying to learn the languages of a superior race. Another task of early creolists was to document what Creole speakers did not, and allegedly could not, know about European languages, and why. The normative template used by the creolist was provided by the “evolved” grammars of European languages, especially Greek and Latin. This was, *grosso modo*, the ideology and epistemology that framed early creolists’ “grant proposals” (see, e.g., Prudent 1980 and Holm 1988 for overviews). The winning paradigms for research bids, the doctrines of Creole Exceptionalism, were by necessity incompatible with the Cartesian-Uniformitarian linguistic doctrine that “the human mind is the same in every clime” (in the words of Greenfield 1830:51f) and that every language constitutes sophisticated complex knowledge (Osthoff & Brugmann 1878; Boas 1911; Sapir 1921, 1933).

In the context of this essay and of possible replies to it, it cannot be stressed enough that the philosophical and anthropological justifications for both slavery and Europe’s *mission civilisatrice* would have inevitably favored the *minoration linguistique* of Creole languages, lest Africans (supposedly “slaves by nature”?) be deemed equal to Europeans, and the slave trade be deemed unethical and un-Christian. “It is impossible for us to suppose that these beings should be men; because if we supposed them to be men, one would begin to believe we ourselves were not Christians” (Montesquieu of the French Enlightenment, as quoted in Davis 1966 [1988:403]; also see note 12 and Davis 1984:107–226). It has even been argued that “[c]olonization provided the most potent impetus for the transformation of European ethnocentrism into scientific racism” (M.-R. Trouillot 1995:77). The British philosopher John Locke himself (1632–1704) was a proponent of degeneracy theory, whereby Indians and Blacks had lost their liberty and property rights BECAUSE OF THEIR OWN FAIL-

INGS. It is not accidental that Locke was also “one of the architects of English colonial policy (and the drafter of the Constitution for the Carolinas)” (Popkin 1974:133).

In summary, then, even if Creole languages were worth studying for some reason or other, it can be reasonably surmised that their descriptions would have had to serve and advance Europe’s *mission civilisatrice* and, above all, its mercantilist mission, following the logic of the founders of the Caribbean colonies and of those of Creole studies. Notwithstanding what Creole speakers actually spoke, the colonial régime of truth would have to stipulate that Creoles were genealogically and structurally “lesser,” and this is the very manner in which Creoles are still often described today. This discursive strategy relies on what Bourdieu (1982 [1991:128]), in a different context, critiques as the “capacity to prescribe while seeming to describe and to denounce while seeming to enunciate.” Indeed, “[e]very theory, as the word itself suggests, is a programme of perception.”

In the particular case of Creole-related writings in the colonial era, the “programmes of perception” (e.g., the five exceptionalist doctrines previously mentioned) were congruent with the race theories that provided philosophical justification for New World slavery. Notwithstanding their internal and mutual contradictions, early creolists’ theories, like the race theories of that time, were also ordered by Europe’s “normative gaze” vis-à-vis the non-White and non-Christian world (cf. West 1982:53f; also see references in note 2).<sup>14</sup> Let us consider (early) creolists’ “programmes of perception” one by one, starting with the DEGENERATE OFFSHOOT view of Creole genesis.

*Creoles as “degenerate offshoots” in the Tree of Language.* The notion that Creoles are structurally impoverished variants – “degenerate offshoots” – of their European “norms” is an explicit case of *minoration linguistique* in the sense of Prudent 1980:7. This view was considered as received wisdom in the comparative-historical linguistics of the 17th through 19th centuries, as summarized (e.g.) in scientific encyclopedia entries such as Larousse (1869:490), where *Creole* is defined as “corrupted French” (also see Vinson’s dictionary definition in (3) and the relevant references cited in note 18). This idea that Creoles are degenerate versions of their European ancestors seems also quite popular among the lay public. For example, we read in a recent Reuters article that HC is “Haiti’s language of broken French” (Gardner 2004).<sup>15</sup>

Similar views are rehearsed in scholarly works throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. In the 19th century, even the proud and patriotic 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

et passim).<sup>16</sup> In the early part of the 20th century, Meillet (1924 [1951:68]) claims 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.”

The claim, widespread among both linguists and nonlinguists, that Creoles are intrinsically degenerate languages seems largely ideological, “based on the perception that [Creole] languages are corrupt, deviant derivatives within the Western linguistic tradition and, concomitantly, on the notion of their inadequacy” (Alleyne 1994:8f). This perception seems related to other sorts of “deviancy” that European observers have tendentially associated with the evolution, the biology, and the behaviors of non-Europeans. In particular, early creolists’ claims that Creoles are structurally degenerate and inadequate when compared to their European ancestors appear congruent with the racial “degeneracy theory” of Buffon and his followers, including Blumenbach, whom Montagu (1942 [1997:62]) dubs “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, etc. – have degenerated (see, e.g., Davis 1966 [1988:457]; Popkin 1974:136f.; Gould 1996:410f.). In Davis’s (1966 [1988:457]) words: “Blackness was therefore a kind of aberration or disease . . . the Africans had ‘degenerated’ . . . from their white ancestral type. This was, in a sense, a secular version of Ham’s curse, the climate taking the place of God’s judgment.” Caribbean Creoles, as Indo-European-derived languages created by Africans, a so-called linguistically inferior race, were also viewed as “a kind of aberration.” In the early part of the 20th 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).

Perhaps the most explicit statement about the racial-biological bases of the structural impoverishment of Creole languages is given in a late 19th century University of Chicago dissertation in which a congruence is posited between, on the one hand, biological evolution from primitive to advanced races and, on the other hand, linguistic evolution from simple to complex grammars:

- (10) In my opinion, the [Caribbean French] Creole is a language produced by necessity of communication between men in a state of advanced civilization and men in a more primitive state who are put in contact with the advanced civilization. [The civilized men] will have a language that . . . has imperceptibly improved across centuries by slow evolution and steady progress . . . Suppose that a [primitive] man . . . establishes himself amongst the civilized men. . . . All grammatical refinement, all syntactic complexity will vanish from civilized man’s speech. . . . The slave imitates [civilized man’s speech] with all the care he can muster. . . . But he doesn’t belong to the same race, his vocal tract is not the same, his lips are different. (Poyen-Bellisle 1894:13ff.)

Thus, in Poyen-Bellisle’s scenario, the radical simplification (or pidginization?) of civilized man’s speech into Creole speech has an inescapable biological, race-theoretical basis.

In the first half of the 20th century, the degenerate offshoot view was made most (in)famous and most explicit by Bloomfield 1933, notwithstanding his critique of prescriptivists' purism (see notes 15 and 17). In Bloomfield's (1933: 472–72) view, "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."<sup>17</sup>

Even in the latter half of the 20th century, certain linguists still claim that structural linguistic factors, related to (e.g.) incapacitating "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; Samarin 1980:221; Quint 1997:58; the last was quoted above in (4)). Seuren erroneously 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." Seuren and Wekker (1986:66,68) explicitly contrast the "younger or less advanced" or "beginning" (Creole) languages with the "older or more advanced" (non-Creole) languages. The alleged extraordinary simplicity of Creole languages, which was already challenged in (e.g.) Dejean 1977:408 on empirical grounds, 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) or as denoting a lack of "richer expressive means" (Seuren & Wekker 1986:66, 68; Seuren 1998:292). This is somewhat reminiscent of the 19th-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 19th- and 20th-century examples of Uniformitarian approaches to Creole genesis).

Elsewhere (DeGraff 2001a,b, in preparation b) I survey and critique a number of degeneracy claims spanning four centuries of Creole studies, from Pelleprat 1655 onward.<sup>18</sup> In terms of scientific validity, the bottom line is that there is no reliable empirical or theoretical basis to support the claim that Creole languages (e.g., HC) are "degenerate" (i.e., radically impoverished, thus uniformly less complex) versions of their European ancestors. On the contrary, it can be documented quite straightforwardly that CERTAIN properties of HC grammar, a bona fide Caribbean Creole, signal an INCREASE in complexity over 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 first is 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 2003).

The second is 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, 2002, 2005, to appear, in preparation a). As for alleged lexical poverty, this seems a non-issue. For example, science – and the expression of abstract thought in general – is “untinctured by the particular linguistic medium in which it finds expression”: science can “readily deliver its message” in any language whatsoever (Sapir 1921:223). More generally, speakers of any language create vocabulary items as needed to fulfill their evolving representation and communication requirements, and this is what happened in the evolution of French, Italian, English, and other European languages as they progressively replaced Greek and Latin in scientific writing. Creoles are no exception to the rule.

In the particular case at hand, HC, like any other language, has the means to expand its vocabulary as needed, via morphological productivity, neologisms, borrowings, and so on. Contra the lore and pseudo-consensus in, e.g., Whinnom 1971, Seuren & Wekker 1986 and Seuren 1998, it has been shown via concrete and robust examples that Creole languages like HC do not lack the structural means (e.g., the productive affixes) that are needed for the expression of “sophisticated” semantics such as abstraction (see, e.g., DeGraff 2001a:89, 109 n.18). Besides, one finds scholarly works in HC, such as M.-R. Trouillot 1977 in history and I. Dejan 1995 in linguistics, that comfortably address abstract issues. More generally, there surely exist semantic domains (e.g., Vodou and agrarian practices) where the mental lexicon of some HC speaker in, say, rural Haiti offers distinctions that may not exist in the lexicon of an average French-speaking Parisian urbanite (see Fattier 1998 for illustrations of rich and complex semantic domains in the HC lexicon, some of which have no analogues in modern French). This brings to mind the fact that French speakers often borrow computer-related terms from English speakers, and that the latter often create scientific terms by inventing neologisms out of Latin and Greek roots. So there is no intrinsic limit on the lexicon of any language.

*Creoles as “linguistic dodos” on their decreolization deathbed.* According to some creolists, Creole languages’ past as “degenerate offshoots” may in certain cases entail a degenerate future with language death as the ultimate outcome. The argument goes as follows: Whenever they are spoken alongside their lexifier, Creole languages, because of a structural impoverishment in turn due to their hypothetically “abnormal” developmental history, are subject to “decreolization” (i.e., gradual assimilation into the lexifier). Here the assumption is that the inherent nonviability of Creole grammars constitutes a death threat whenever the corresponding lexifier, a “major language,” is available to the Creole speakers. In such exceptionalist frameworks, the allegedly abnormal beginnings of Creoles entail an abnormal evolution or, actually, no evolution at all: Creole languages are doomed to disappear under the very socioeconomic conditions

that spell progress for Creole speakers. As the argument goes, socioeconomic development in Creole-speaking communities entails access to the lexifier major language, which in turn entails the assimilation of the Creole into that major language, since the latter affords more adequate means of expression. Of course, this scenario assumes the drastic sort of structural limitations on Creoles' expressive means I just surveyed. In effect, such decreolization scenarios postulate the abnormality (i.e., the morbidity) of creolization's products: "[the] evolution [of a Creole language] into a normal language . . . is a hypothetical case that is not attested" (Valdman 1978:346; also see Valdman 1992:81). Creole languages are thus taken to be an inherently endangered linguistic species:

- (11) 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; Bloomfield 1933:474; d'Ans 1968:26, 34)

All languages undergo change (via, e.g., language contact). But creolists may well be the only linguists whose descriptions of change have coined a privative/inversive *de-* derivative – *de-creol-ize-ation* – with the label of their objects of study, *Creole*, as part of the stem. Yet it has not been rigorously defined what structural process is inverted or what structural properties are removed by this *de-creolization* process. It must also be noted that, unlike in creolistics, there is no substantial body of linguistic-theoretical work on (e.g.) \**de-Latinization*, \**de-Africanization*, \**de-Romancization*, \**de-Frenchification*, \**de-Germanicization*, or \**de-Anglicization*. What historical linguists outside of creolistics study is language change, be it contact-induced or not, and language change is a process that is presumably based on universal psycholinguistic mechanisms that do not leave room for a *sui generis* process of (de)creolization.

On an empirical and sociohistorical note, it has now been carefully documented that so-called decreolized varieties of Creole languages (i.e., the varieties structurally closest to the superstrate) would have existed, from the onset of language contact, among the Creole speakers in the most intimate contact with superstrate speakers. The latter were the numerical majority during the colonial settlement period (the homestead phase), thus giving the first cohort of substrate speakers greater access to native versions of the superstrate languages (see, e.g., Alleyne 1971:172–75, 179–82; Chaudenson & Mufwene 2001:127; Mufwene 1994, 2001:38f., 50–54, 91f.). Speakers of acrolectal Creole varieties would thus include at first the small number of slaves on initial colonial settlements, then later on the mulattoes, the free people of color, and the house slaves, most of whom had greater exposure to superstrate speakers than did the field slaves. It has even been argued (in, e.g., the just mentioned references) that the decreolized – or, more accurately, the acrolectal – varieties may have entered the linguistic ecology of the language contact situation BEFORE their non-decreolized (i.e., basilectal) varieties – those with the highest degree of restructuring. In such

a scenario, Creole varieties would have developed from most decreolized to least decreolized: in the initial settlement phase (the homestead society), the linguistic ecology would have been dominated by acrolectal varieties, whereas basilectal varieties would have been more numerous in the later phase (the “plantation society”), as the proportion of newly arrived Africans came to exceed that of Creole speakers with direct exposure to (near-)native superstrate varieties. In effect, such a scenario makes decreolization simultaneous with creolization, and language death virtually coincidental with language birth!<sup>19</sup>

In terms of linguistic structure per se, what exactly is supposed to make Creole languages (e.g., HC) nonviable and thus endangered? In one hypothesis, the culprit is “the absence of productive derivational processes [which] reduces the capacity of internal creation in lexical enrichment” with derivation only “play[ing] a minor role in the creation of new words [since] only two affixes [are] used today to renew the Creole lexical inventory” (Valdman 1978:148, 345). Thus HC allegedly suffers from severe limitations in native word-formation processes, and it is such limitations that supposedly make HC nonviable. Such structural limitations on Creole lexical development can be compared to the dodo’s small wings, which could not be used for flight, and like the dodo, Creole languages in certain ecologies are destined for extinction, so the decreolization story goes. Humor aside, it has been seriously claimed that HC’s modernization, particularly its “lexical enrichment,” can only happen via “Frenchification” as some sort of structural mimicry (e.g., via the borrowing of “pseudo French” morphology that is not compatible with HC grammar) which will eventually lead to a dissolution of native HC features, and thus decreolization (cf. Valdman 1984:94 on the “most important” need for lexical enrichment in the “modernization” of HC; also see d’Ans 1968:26, 34; Whinnom 1971:109f.; Samarin 1980:221).

Like the degenerate offshoot trope, the decreolization trope (or linguistic do-doism) can be textually related to the aforementioned hegemonic discourse of an anthropology ordered by Europe’s normative gaze. From such a normative anthropology, non-Whites’ racial improvement and even their spiritual salvation can occur only through a process of “whitening.” Such whitening, or Europeanization, parallels the so-called linguistic-structural improvement of Creoles via decreolization when they have evolved in prolonged contact with their European lexifiers. Various theories from Pelleprat 1655 through Bloomfield 1933 implicitly or explicitly equate creolization with “failure” and decreolization with “improvement” (see note 18).<sup>20</sup> Paradoxically, in Bloomfield’s metalinguistic terms (also see Jespersen 1922:235), the more decreolized the Creole, the better, which in a terminological twist makes the most decreolized Creole the most “improved” Creole. In effect, this view equates the most “improved” Creole with the least creolized Creole – the one that is about to disappear by merging into the nearby European language (cf. (11)). In other words, the best Creole is a dying Creole!

Decreolization and, under the “right” conditions, the disappearance of the Creole are thus perceived as the linguistic-structural means to regenerate the



cognitive capacities and elevate the humanity of Creole speakers who, then, can use their decreolized speech as a more efficient instrument of power, if not of communication. “The Negro of the [French] Antilles will be proportionately whiter – that is, he will come closer to being a real human being – in direct ratio to his mastery of the French language.” This sarcastic remark by Fanon (1952 [1991:18]) reminds us that “egalitarian” pro-Black thinkers from 18th-century European liberal abolitionists (e.g., the “good” Abbé Grégoire; see Popkin 1974:138f.) to 19th- and 20th-century Caribbean intellectuals have, whenever possible and sometimes even when impossible (e.g., with respect to national language or skin color), connected Caribbean progress with the abandonment of local and seemingly non-European traits, in favor of replacements with an unambiguous European pedigree.<sup>21</sup> This is a generalization of decreolization qua improvement to all domains of cultural and biological human phenomena in the Caribbean, discussed in later subsections.

The synchronic linguistic-structural aspects of the decreolization claims in respect to HC have already been proven to be way off the empirical and theoretical mark. For instance, the many examples of HC morphological processes documented in (e.g.) Fattier 1998 and DeGraff 2001a illustrate numerous robust and stable morphological resources that are native to the Creole and that are fully integrated into its morphological profile, even if most of them are etymologically related to French (also see Valdman 2000, 2001b). Many instances of morphologically complex words in HC have no attested etyma in French, so they cannot be said to be directly borrowed from French.

The statement that “French is the source of most HC neologisms” (Valdman 1979:99) is both empirically false and a theoretical contradiction: HC neologisms are structural innovations that result from the native combinatorial resources of HC speakers, many of whom have little or no contact with French (see Fattier 1998 for copious documentation); by definition, these neologisms – newly created derivations – cannot be borrowed from French. In theoretical linguistics, it is, *inter alia*, such neologisms that are used to measure the degree of productivity of particular affixes: usually, the more neologisms, the more productive the affix. As it turns out, many of these “Haitianisms” are adequately recorded as bona fide HC words, not “pseudo French,” in HC dictionaries, including Valdman et al. 1981, 1996, which are dictionaries coauthored by Valdman himself in collaboration with Haitian native speakers (see the discussion in DeGraff 2001a:61–69; also see Valdman 2000, 2001b for an accurate update on the development and productivity of HC morphology).

So, is it really true that “Creole languages that are used alongside their lexicifiers . . . are inexorably destined to dissolve in these major languages via the process of decreolization?” Such a statement may not even apply to Haiti since the vast majority of HC speakers, unlike Creole speakers in, say, Martinique, have little if any contact with French speakers (Dejean 1993b). Be that as it may, the question of linguistic longevity vs. language death is not a simple one. Did

the Romans at the height of their empire predict the “death” of Latin or, more accurately, its evolution into Romance? Or did early Hebrew speakers predict that Hebrew would become a quasi-moribund liturgical language and then be reconstructed as the national language of today’s Israel? I assume that whether any language eventually lives or dies out – be it because of genocide, migration, labor practices, imperialism, fascism, or any other cause – is the result of complex sociohistorical factors beyond the realm of linguistics proper.

What one can say for certain is that HC is, for now at least, the only language that all Haitians in Haiti have in common, and that it has always, from its genesis onward, “cohabited” to some degree with French as spoken by a small minority of HC/French bilinguals. HC is Haiti’s only national language and, since 1987, one of its two official languages, alongside French. HC is spoken by all members of a community that is more than 8 million strong, with an overwhelming majority of monolingual speakers. One does not need to be a cultural idealist to assert that HC is nowhere near its decreolization deathbed. On the contrary, the language is gaining new ground every day, notwithstanding widespread resistance on the part of various conservative sectors among the (aspiring) élites. HC is even being used in more and more classrooms, although still with many restrictions and much ambivalence on the part of educators and policy makers. Dejean (1993b:80, to appear), among many others, has discussed HC’s expanding uses and recognition. And recently, on the occasion of “Creole Day” on 28 October 2004, Haiti’s official newspaper, *Le Matin*, for the very first time published an issue written entirely in HC. There is thus far no sign of fatal decreolization, and as far as I can tell, HC is a normal language, *pace* Valdman (1978:346, 1992:81).

*Creoles as “special hybrids” with exceptional genealogy.* Let’s now move on to deconstruct the third doctrine in our Creole Exceptionalism series of five, that of HYBRIDOLOGIE LINGUISTIQUE, whose earliest monograph-length treatment is probably Adam 1883. Adam’s race-theoretical assumptions are quite explicit. Like Poyen-Bellisle in (10), Adam believed in the existence of different linguistic templates for different races, and he assigned these templates the following organizing property: Because of biological evolution, different races belong to distinct evolutionary rungs, and their respective linguistic templates are ranked 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 non-European languages is limited to superficial and easy-to-approximate European traits such as the phonetic shapes of words.

In the early part of the 20th century, the Haitian linguist Suzanne Sylvain, like Lucien Adam in 1883, readily assumes in her study of HC’s genesis “early crys-

tallization of the mental powers of the Black race” (Sylvain 1936:36f.). 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 European-derived words.<sup>22</sup> More recently, the *Times Literary Supplement* presents this view, without any caveat, as the very definition of “Creole language”: “[A] Creole [is] an African language, or languages, upon whose syntax the vocabulary of another language is laid. The clearest example from the New World is [HC], a Creole which appears to be composed of French vocabulary overlaid on the grammar of the African language Ewe . . .” (Greppin 2002).

As noted in Lefebvre (1998:3), Adam’s Hybridologie Linguistique is the precursor of Lefebvre’s 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, as 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, e.g., Lefebvre 1998:36, 65, 386, 394).

Relexificationists, along with other substratists of various theoretical stripes, are clearly right 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 Caribbean (see, e.g., Price-Mars 1928, Brathwaite 1971, Alleyne 1988, Bellegarde-Smith 1990; *pace* Chaudenson 1992, Chaudenson & Mufwene 2001). The Caribbean is rich in “African survivals,” not only in grammatical patterns but also in proverbs, tales, discourse styles, religious practices, music, dance, cuisine, and visual arts. Now consider HC. That it shows various patterns that were shaped under, *inter alia*, the influence of the Africans’ native languages (i.e., the substrate languages) is to be 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 makeup of Creole grammars.

As documented elsewhere,<sup>23</sup> past and present strict relexification proposals (e.g., Adam 1883, Lefebvre 1998) make incorrect empirical predictions regarding HC. For example, HC illustrates, at ALL levels of grammar, a number of structural properties that are straightforwardly derived from the superstrate French and that apparently have no counterparts in the substrate languages (this is most amply documented in DeGraff 2002).

Moreover, the strict relexification proposals share one strikingly non-Uniformalitarian property: They assume that the interlanguages constructed by Cre-

ole 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: These “learners” are claimed to learn little beyond the approximation of phonetic shapes of European words and some superficial facts about their distribution in the projections of lexical heads. Lefebvre’s Creole genesis scenario claims that the result of second language “learning” by Africans in colonial Haiti is virtually identical to the native languages they started with, except for the aforementioned properties of phonetics and word order. 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 delicately complex cognitive task for any language learner anywhere – contradict the claim that the creators of HC did not access or use any abstract principle of French phonology, lexicon, morphosyntax, or semantics. Segmentation and parsing of fluent speech in any language necessitate intricate tacit knowledge about the ABSTRACT structure of that language: Successful parsing is not a “What you hear is what you get” affair.

Thus, strict relexification accounts make assumptions (for example, about language acquisition) that apply nowhere else outside of Creole studies. In effect, these accounts put the agents of Creole formation in a *sui generis* class – they have properties fundamentally unlike those of other language learners. Here too, the methods that are used to classify and analyze the development and structures of Creole languages seem distinct from what is generally assumed for non-Creole languages.

*Creolization as “abnormal/broken transmission” and Creoles as “contemporary Ursprachen”.* Let us now turn to two related hypotheses: Creole genesis as ABNORMAL/BROKEN TRANSMISSION and Creole genesis as RECAPITULATION OF HUMAN LANGUAGE GENESIS. This hypothesis turns Creoles into observable replicas of the earliest human languages in the evolutionary history of *Homo sapiens*. In effect, Creole languages now become CONTEMPORARY URSPRACHEN or LIVING LINGUISTIC FOSSILS, one generation removed from the structureless Pidgin speech that allegedly resembles the protolanguage of our evolutionary ancestors. Such a scenario is perhaps the most spectacular instance of Creole Exceptionalism.

When considered in a Foucauldian perspective as discourses, the still ongoing broken-transmission and linguistic-fossils tropes each intersect with a well-known race- and evolution-related myth, that of Edenic primitivism *à la* Rousseau. The latter myth is perhaps at the core of European conceptualizations of Africa and the Caribbean during the “Age of Discovery.” Recall Adam’s (1883:3) statement that “In Europe, Creole speech is universally accepted as an infantile jargon.” Actually it is not only the Creole speech of non-Europeans that was

seen as infantile: "Africa [itself is] the land of childhood, . . . lying beyond the day of self-conscious history" (Hegel 1836 [1970:91]). Davis (1975:48) confirms and documents the fact that "for many Europeans . . . the African was an innocent child." About the Caribbean, Columbus himself "concluded in August 1498, that he had arrived on the 'nipple' of the earth, which reached closer to heaven than the rest of the globe, and that the original Garden of Eden was nearby" (Davis 1966 [1988:4]).

Given the postulated congruence in 19th-century philology between the evolution of races and that of languages (Schleicher 1863; see DeGraff 2001b for an overview with references), it is not surprising that a neo-Darwinian linguist like Adam would attribute "primitive" languages (which he called "*langues naturelles*" in opposition to the "*langues civilisées*" of Europe) to the "primitive" people of Africa at an allegedly lower evolutionary rung. In a similar vein, Saint-Quentin (1872 [1989:40f.]) would take Guyanais Creole as "a spontaneous product of the human mind, freed from any kind of intellectual culture," as a language that is 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 in 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, somewhat on a par with philosophers and historians like Hegel, may have been nearly unanimous in considering the speech of non-Whites 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 ancestors, notwithstanding the oft-noted parallels between, say, the formation of French-lexicon Creoles and the formation of Romance languages, with contact-induced language change in both cases (see, e.g., J. J. Thomas 1869:v, 1; Saint-Quentin 1872 [1989:131,171]; Baissac 1880:24–30, 49–54, 57–59, etc.; see DeGraff, 1997, 1999b,d,e, 2000, 2002, 2005 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 regarding Amerindian languages, was a relatively unsurprising development in the history of linguistics. What's more surprising, if not totally unexpected given Kuhn's (1970) observations about "paradigm-directed research," is that, although 19th-century race theories have largely been rejected by 20th- and 21st-century linguists, some of the empirically and theoretically problematic aspects of 19th-century creolistics are still encountered.

In 20th-century linguistics, the abnormal/broken transmission doctrine excludes Creole genesis from 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, so to speak, non-genetic "orphans" outside the family tree of human lan-

guages, that is, languages without any ancestors, not even among the languages whose native speakers were in contact during Creole formation.<sup>24</sup>

The abnormal/broken transmission doctrine is related to another myth of origins, that of Creoles as contemporary (quasi-)replicas of human language at its evolutionary incipience (Bickerton 1990:chap.5, 1995:37, 1990:171, 1998:354; Bickerton & Calvin 2000:149) – or as “the fossils of language” in the terminology introduced by Begley 1982. In Bickerton’s scenario, Creole formation (i.e., the hypothetical Pidgin-to-Creole cycle) recapitulates the first (i.e., most primitive) stages of the evolution of human language. As noted by Richard Price, this myth transforms Creole speakers into linguistic “Adams and Eves” (cited in Corcoran 2001: Sec. 1), and we’re back to Columbus’s vision of the Caribbean as the closest place to the original Garden of Eden.

According to the myth of Creoles as quasi-archetypal languages, one *sui generis* process that supposedly “breaks” *Stammbaumtheorie*-friendly “normal” language transmission and leads to exceptional and abnormal language genesis *ab ovo* is some form of radical Pidginization. The latter is postulated as the first step of a hypothetical Pidgin-to-Creole life cycle (Hall 1962). This sort of Pidginization is an all-powerful structural simplification process that is claimed, among other things, to obliterate virtually all morphology (Bickerton 1999:69, n.16) and to lead to a pre-Creole early contact language – a structureless 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 evolutionary pre-sapiens ancestors (Bickerton 1990:169–71, 181–85, 1998:354–55; Bickerton & Calvin 2000:149). It is this early Pidgin, with extraordinarily reduced structure, that is argued to catastrophically seed the Creole when the former becomes the target of first language acquisition by the very first generation of locally born children (see, e.g., Bickerton 1999:49–50). Hypothetically, such abrupt transition from Pidgin to Creole resembles the evolution some 1 million years ago from *Homo erectus*’s structureless protolanguage to *Homo sapiens*’s full-fledged human language. For example, “[w]hat happened in Hawaii [in the formation of Hawaiian Creole] was a jump from protolanguage to language in a single generation” (Bickerton 1990:171).

Taken together, the abnormal/broken-transmission and fossils-of-language myths turn Creoles into languages with no historical past, and with extraordinarily simple structures. In both scientific and popular discussions of language evolution, this hypothetical Creole prototype is often promoted as a unique model for the evolutionary origins of speech in the human species. That these myths are also found in popular magazines and newspapers such *Newsweek*, *Discover Magazine*, and the *New York Times* (see, e.g., Begley 1982, Berreby 1992, Dreifus 2001) suggests that Creole Exceptionalism reaches beyond specialized linguistic circles. In effect, quotes such as “Creole languages are the missing linguistic fossils . . . the equivalent of the Galapagos to Darwin” (Begley 1982, in *Newsweek*, reporting on Bickerton’s work) and “I suspect that [Creoles] most approx-

imate some of the early languages. . . . Creoles . . . are the only languages which have started again” (Dreifus 2001, quoting John McWhorter in the *New York Times*) illustrate modern propaganda whereby Creoles are still being caricatured, in exceptionalist fashion, as somewhat freakish languages, living fossils of the primitive languages spoken by the earliest humans. It is through such publications that Creole Exceptionalism myths enter popular consciousness and become difficult to eradicate, thus all the more dangerous for Creole speakers at large (DeGraff 2004).

From a conceptual perspective, the Bickertonian “fossils of language” metaphor seems to rest on the unlikely assumption that the structureless protolanguage of our pre-sapiens ancestors a 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 processes. If the transition from *Homo erectus* protolanguage to *Homo sapiens* human language is a reflex of brain reorganization via natural selection in the course of human evolution, then Bickerton’s hypothetical Pidgin-to-Creole cycle has nothing to say about such brain reorganization. Indeed, Pidgin speakers – who, by the way, also speak one or many fully-fledged human languages – indubitably belong to *Homo sapiens* and definitely not to *Homo erectus*. Besides, Creole formation among modern humans with modern brains shares no fundamental property with natural selection among genetically based variations in ancestral populations with pre-sapiens brains. As Mufwene aptly points out:

- (12) [B]oth modern children and the inventors of Pidgins have sophisticated modern minds, which have evolved far beyond the mental capacities of our (pre-[sapiens]) 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-[sapiens])hominid state. (Mufwene 2002)

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 protolanguage emerged”: The former surely include instances of full-fledged human language, whereas the latter would have included nothing more complex than pre-sapiens structureless protolanguage. It is therefore doubtful that Pidgins and their nativized descendants could provide evidence about the incipience of human language from pre-sapiens protolanguage.<sup>25</sup>

The “broken transmission” and “linguistic fossils” doctrines are robustly disconfirmed by a vast range of comparative data and empirical and theoretical observations. For example – I have already mentioned this as counter-evidence to the Relexification Hypothesis – we find ample evidence for systematic lexical and morphosyntactic correspondences between “radical” Creoles and their European lexifiers. We also find plenty of evidence of transfer from the African substrate languages into Creole grammars. Given the available evidence, Creoles could not have arisen from the sort of structureless protolanguage-like Pidgin that is postulated as an essential ingredient of the Bickertonian Pidgin-to-



Creole life cycle. Besides (as documented in e.g. DeGraff 2005), the magnitude of certain structural “discrepancies” or “drastic mismatch” in the history of non-Creole languages seems comparable to, and sometimes even greater than, that of their counterparts in Creole diachrony (*pace* Thomason & Kaufman 1988:8–12, 206 and Thomason 2002:105).

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 (Fattier 1998, DeGraff 2001a), and most of these have Latin etyma in turn. HC’s structural patterns appear not to instantiate the sort of extraordinary and abnormal break in transmission that would set the formation 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, e.g., sound patterns, verb and object placement and inflectional morphology) 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), except for 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, again along certain parameters, that English and Jamaican Creole are closer to each other than English and Proto-Germanic are. (See DeGraff 2001b: Sec. 3.2–3.3 and DeGraff 2005 for a fuller treatment of these arguments.)

The above-noted (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, “The 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 litmus test, and no coherent theoretical tools, for deciding where the “innovations” of language change qua “normal transmission” end and where the “drastic mismatches” of creolization qua “abnormal transmission” begin. Let’s assume (with, e.g., 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 morpho-syntactic correspondences [etc.]” If so, then the available evidence puts HC, a most “radical” Creole, squarely in the scope of the CM, *pace* Thomason. Such evidence militates against the postulation of some combination of an exceptional and abnormal break of transmission with *ab ovo* creation in Creole diachrony. (For extended case studies and detailed discussion in a variety of theoretical

frameworks, see Greenfield 1830; Posner 1985; Chaudenson 1992; Chaudenson & Mufwene 2001; DeGraff 1997, 2000, 2001a,b, 2002, 2005, to appear; Fattier 1998; Mufwene 2001, and references therein.)

*The end of Creole Exceptionalism?* The empirical, theoretical and sociological flaws in exceptionalist theories were already pointed out by Greenfield in the early 19th century. In the early 20th century, Schuchardt, the “father of Creole studies,” boldly posited “universal linguistic structures” as crucial to understanding Creole genesis, and, as boldly, he claimed Creole genesis to be 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 *sui generis* Creole prototype has traditionally depended on the empirically problematic postulation of exceptional and abnormal processes. These processes are generally not assumed to apply to the diachrony and synchrony of “normal”/“regular” languages. If Creole languages, as a class, are to be excluded from the set of “regular”/“normal” languages, then insights about Creole genesis and Creole structures can hardly teach us anything substantial about the “regular”/“normal” operation of our *faculté de langage*, despite Schuchardt’s sensible exhortation.

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, it can be argued that 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 1996, 1998, 2000, 2001 for an extended argument that “creolization is a social, not a structural, process”). But such sociohistorical distinction, if valid, does 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 made use of the “the same [mental] process adopted [for the] formation of [their respective new] language.”

*Creole Exceptionalism beyond Creole studies: On Haitian historiography*

The tight congruence between colonial creolistics and colonial race theories suggests that the scope of early Caribbeanists’ overarching “program of perception” reached well beyond linguistics. The unspoken goal of this program appears to have been the scientific exile of the Creole speaker’s (non)humanity to the outside of, or at least to the bottom of, the “universal” human family headed by White male Christians in Europe. This program of perception finds exponents throughout Europeans’ (neo-)colonial discourse in the human sciences (see references in note 2). The pervasiveness of this program is, perhaps expectably, somewhat similar to what Saïd 1979 dubs “Orientalism” (see notes 7 and 14).

And we're also reminded of Foucault's (1980:133) Power/Knowledge thesis that "'Truth' is linked in a circular fashion with systems of power which produce and sustain it, and to effects of power which it induces and which extend it."

In the domain of Caribbean history, Foucault's thesis is spectacularly illustrated by the following sample of late 19th century scholarship about post-independence Haiti, the only Black republic founded by ex-slaves who victoriously rebelled against European colonists. This sample is taken from the writing of James Anthony Froude, Regius Professor of Modern History at Oxford. In Froude's writings, the production of academic knowledge is clearly seen as both an instrument and a reflection of power. His writings are worth quoting at length, both for the congruence they document between colonial scholarship on the Caribbean and the subservience of this scholarship to the psycho-social and geopolitical needs of imperialist Europe, and for the congruence they document between early Caribbean historiography and early Creole studies.

- (13) a. The equality between black and white is a forced equality and not a real one, and Nature in the long run has her way, and readjusts in their proper relations what theorists and philanthropists have disturbed. (Froude 1888:247)
- b. If . . . specimens of black humanity are to be found anywhere, it will be where they have continued under the old influences as servants in white men's houses. The generality are mere good-natured animals, who in service had learnt certain accomplishments, and had developed certain qualities of a higher kind. Left to themselves they fall back upon the superstitions and habits of their ancestors. (Froude 1888:348)
- c. [In Haiti] they speak French still; they are nominally catholic still; and the tags and rags of the gold lace of French civilisation continue to cling about their institutions. But in the heart of them has revived the old idolatry of the Gold Coast, and in the villages of the interior . . . they sacrifice children in the serpent's honour after the manner of their forefathers. (Froude 1888:183)
- d. If left entirely to themselves, they [the Negroes in the English West Indies] would in a generation or two relapse into savages . . . falling eventually into a state like that of Hayti, where they eat babies, and no white man can own a yard of land. (Froude 1888:56)
- e. [T]he European nations filled [the West Indies] with slave gangs. [These islands] were valued only for the wealth they yielded, and society there has never assumed any particularly noble aspect. . . . There has been no saint in the West Indies since Las Casas, no hero unless philonegro enthusiasm can make one out of Toussaint.<sup>26</sup> There are no people there in the true sense of the word. (Froude 1888:347)

In Froude's writings, the lesser humanity of "Negroes" – "no people" in (13e) – is straightforwardly taken to further justify not only the African slave trade viewed as a soul-saving activity (see, e.g., Davis 1966 [1988:222], 1984:60), but also global patterns of European geopolitical hegemony.

Let's mine the above quotations for parallels between Froude's historiography and early creolists' narratives. Like early creolists, Froude assigns to its subject matter a distinct and lesser kind of humanity, one that is constructed independently of observable facts and sometimes on the basis of incompatible assumptions (cf. notes 7 and 14 for similarities with Orientalism).

Take Haiti as described by Froude in (13). Notwithstanding its history and complexity, the Haitian people in Froude's normative gaze are not, and could not

be, on a par with the French people in terms of their respective humanity, or alleged lack thereof. The Haitians are viewed as “degenerate” not only in their language and culture, but in their very humanity. In (13c), Haitian culture is seen as an unfortunate hybrid of degenerate French remnants – “the tags and rags of the gold lace of French civilisation” – coupled with the savagery, including the “old idolatry,” of Haitians’ African forefathers. This seems a case of generalized Hybridologie Culturelle, on the model of Adam’s Hybridologie Linguistique. Froude describes West Indians as “no people.” Presumably these “no people” would not speak “real” human languages, “in the true sense of the word.” This is exile to the utmost, exile from humanity.

Is there any escape from this exile? Perhaps, proposes Froude, though only through some generalized form of decreolization. He constructs an ethnographic counterpart of decreolization that is as ethnocentrist as Jespersen’s and Bloomfield’s decreolization scenarios and their contemporary congeners – decreolization as “improvement toward the master’s speech” (cf. Bloomfield 1933:474). For Froude, any Haitian who manages to develop “certain qualities of a higher kind” (e.g., mastery of French; see 13c) can only do so “under the old influence as servants in white men’s houses” (see 13b). These higher qualities, in the absence of European role models (read: in the absence of European masters), can quickly degenerate into “tags and rags of the gold lace of French civilisation” (see 13c) and “relapse into savage[ry]” (see 13d). It is thus that in European colonial scholarship and praxis, Europeans have been (and remain?) the yardstick of perfection for Caribbean people, not only in terms of language but also in terms of whatever it means to be human. Recall Fanon’s (1952 [1991:18]) remark about the perception of the Martinican Creole speaker “com[ing] closer to being a real human being . . . in direct ratio to his mastery of the French language.”

For our understanding of the genealogy and archaeology of Creole studies, it must be noted that Froude as an individual historian, on a par with the individual creolists whose dogmas are now familiar, was able to tacitly base his narrative of the Caribbean on a larger régime of 18th- and 19th-century myths which he did not have to invent or make explicit. Consider in particular the then-prevalent notion that “the negroes and in general all other species of men . . . [are] naturally inferior to the whites.” This is the scientific claim already advanced in the 18th century by, among others, the Scottish philosopher and historian David Hume in his essay “Of national characters.” Hume’s influence on modern racist thought has been analyzed in Popkin (1974:142–44, 154–64; cf. Davis 1966 [1988:457]). Hume writes: “In Jamaica indeed they talk of one negroe as a man of parts and learning; but ’tis likely he is admired for very slender accomplishments like a parrot, who speaks a few words plainly” (cited in Davis 1966 [1988:457,463f]; Popkin 1974:143; Davis 1984:131).

A similar argument is repeated by no less a philosopher than Immanuel Kant: “This fellow was quite black from head to foot, a clear proof that what he said was stupid” (see quotation and discussions in Montagu 1942 [1997:58]; Popkin

1974:159f.; West 1982:62). Hegel too considered Blacks as “no people”: In his *Philosophy of History*, Blacks manifest “nothing harmonious with humanity;” they are at the level of “a mere Thing – an object of no value” and Africa itself an “Unhistorical, Undeveloped spirit” (1836 [1970:93,96,99]). In a nutshell, Blacks are considered as no people and with no history, as “living fossils” of humanity. This is congruent with the creolists’ myth that creologeny recapitulates phylogeny and that Creoles are contemporary fossils of language incipience.

Europe’s “normative gaze” (cf. West 1982:53f) would make it impossible for many prominent 18th- and 19th-century scholars, no matter how insightful they were, to entertain any possibility of equality between Black and White (see references in note 2). Hegel, like Froude, seems genuinely convinced that slavery in the Caribbean and elsewhere is an “improvement” for the best interests of Blacks: “Slavery [has] been the occasion of the increase of human feeling among the Negroes . . . a mode of becoming participant in a higher morality and the culture connected with it” (Hegel 1836 [1970:98f]). The claim that slavery induces “higher morality” for Africans finds an analogue, with respect to linguistics, in Jespersen’s (1922:228) and Bloomfield’s (1933:474) now-familiar remarks that decreolization via contact with European speakers induces an “improvement” for Creole speakers. It is thus that Africans and their descendants were to improve both their moral and linguistic profiles through contact with Europeans.

Given the premium accorded to European acculturation, Creole slaves (i.e., locally born slaves) were consistently viewed as superior to African-born slaves (the so-called *bozals*; Davis 1975:191). One explicit example of such ranking is found in Moreau de Saint-Méry (1797 [1958:55–59]), according to whom “Creole Blacks are born with physical and moral qualities that truly give them the right to be superior over Blacks that have been brought from Africa”; in other words, “domesticity has embellished the [Black] species” (p. 59). Saint-Méry even quantifies the Creole advantage: “For all tasks, it is the Creole slaves that are preferred; their worth is always a quarter more than that of the Africans.”

It is worth insisting that the key themes in Froude’s discourse in (13) on the Caribbean were quite ordinary for his time. In order to make his narrative credible, it seems that Froude only had to appeal tacitly to popular beliefs about race and basic tenets of scientific racism. The latter was regularly expounded in scientific encyclopedias, such as various editions of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, through the 18th and 19th centuries (see, e.g., Davis 1984:132–35). As Davis (1984:231–320) argues, scientific racism was even part of the antislavery movements, up to and including the colonial scramble for Africa that started around the publication date of Froude 1888.

Perhaps key to our understanding of the genealogy of Creole Exceptionalism are Froude’s hints, in (13d–e) as to why he may have believed, or may have wanted his readers to believe, that “there are no people” in the Caribbean. Froude explicitly evokes the mercantilist, not scientific, basis of Europe’s interest in the Caribbean: These islands “were valued only for the wealth they yielded.” In (13d),

his terrifying image of formerly enslaved Africans reclaiming and regaining their freedom in Haiti, and thus denying the White man his property "rights," is juxtaposed with alleged cannibalism: For Froude, both are symptoms of "relapse into savage[ry]." From such juxtaposition of alleged crimes by Haitians, one can surmise that in the last analysis it is Europe's material interest in the Caribbean that induced Froude, and other scholars writing about the (post-)colonial Caribbean, to "disguise reality in the service of external power," in Chomsky's (1979:5) phrase.

The tacit disguising of Caribbean reality for the sake of European power and the power to parade this disguise as knowledge are also evident in Froude's silence about the Haitian revolution. One thorny question for Froude and his contemporaries was this: Since the Haitians were "mere good-natured animals" and "no people," how could they ever manage to win their freedom through war against the "higher kind" of humanity represented by the Napoleonic army that was sent to quell the Haitian revolution and reestablish slavery? The successful Haitian revolution – African "savages" winning over European "gold lace," borrowing some of Froude's terms – was an empirical embarrassment for, and a real counterexample to, the historiographical paradigm of White supremacy. But given Froude's race theory and his "program of perception," in Bourdieu's (1982 [1991:128]) sense, he was perhaps not epistemologically equipped to count the Haitian revolution as counterexample. In the hegemonic discourse illustrated in (13), there is hardly any room left for any counterexample to White supremacy as foundation of "normal science" in Kuhn's sense. In M.-R. Trouillot's (1995:89, 95) words, the Haitian revolution was unthinkable because "it challenged . . . the ontological order of the west and the global order of colonialism" as well as "major tenets of the dominant Western ideologies."

In the 19th-century historian's "body of discourse" (cf. Foucault 1966 [1970: 344]), Haiti's independence in 1803 had to be explained away as a mere accident caused by some uncontrollable external factor. Froude, appealing to the effects of yellow fever on French troops, would adduce that "[t]he climate won a victory to the black man which he could not win for himself." Yet General Leclerc himself, commander of the French expedition against the Black insurgents in Saint-Domingue, reported that "it is not enough to have taken away Toussaint [the most important leader of the Haitian revolution], there are 2,000 leaders to be taken away." Leclerc also warned his contemporaries that "we have in Europe a false idea of the country in which we fight against" (quoted in C.L.R. James 1969:43; also see James 1938 [1963:353, 356, 361, 368f.]) Although Leclerc himself and many of his troops would eventually succumb to disease while in Saint-Domingue, what the French mainly fought against during Haiti's independence battles, and did so in vain, was "freedom fighters, not fever" (C.L.R. James 1969:43). Even if yellow fever was on the side of the freedom fighters, the latter's determination and skills were real (Madiou 1847 [1989:v.2], C.L.R. James 1938, M.-R. Trouillot 1995).

As C.L.R. James (1969:39–43) writes, Froude’s history amounts to nothing but “lies and nonsense from the first word to the last.” But these “lies and nonsense” may have had a well-defined and all-too-real function: to provide a “normal science” discursive solution to the empirical counterexample and epistemological puzzle posed by what M.-R. Trouillot (1995:70) calls “an unthinkable history,” namely the military success of the Haitian “no people” over the French colonists with “gold lace” civilization. The Haitian military victory was not “*dans le vrai* (within the true)” (cf. Foucault 1971 [1972b:224]) of contemporary historiographical discourse. The first and only successful slave revolution in the Americas was then, borrowing Foucault’s (1971 [1972b:224]) terminology, “a true monster, so much so that [history] could not even properly speak of [it].” Yellow fever in Froude’s scenario is perhaps the sole factor/excuse that could explain France’s defeat in the hands of the Haitians. The yellow-fever argument, one of many “formulas of erasure and banalization,” denies any heroic achievement to the Haitian ex-slaves, and turns the Haitian revolution into a “non-event,” as it was “unthinkable even as it happened” (M.R. Trouillot 1995:70–107; cf. C.L.R. James 1938 [1963:214, 273–75, 323, et passim]). The Haitian ex-slaves’ hard-won victory and their radical revolution were thus devalued like much else in Caribbean history, culture, language, and humanity. This devaluation seems integral to what Chomsky (1993:chap. 1) calls “the great work of subjugation and conquest.”

It thus seems that the silencing of the Haitian revolution and other “lies and nonsense” in colonial scholarship on the Caribbean are rooted in imperialism, racism, and slavery, and wear ideologically rooted epistemological blinders:

- (14) One last word on the crimes and blunders of Froude, not for his sake but for the sake of history. He perpetrated these falsifications because he started from a premise, the inferiority and instinctive barbarism of Black people. This it was that shaped or twisted every historical fact. I repeat and repeat. This goes on today, a little less crudely but perhaps for that reason more effectively. (C.L.R. James 1969:43)

Somewhat like Froudean historiography, the Creole Exceptionalism dogmas I have surveyed were first elaborated to serve “dominant Western ideologies” by “shaping and twisting” representations of Creole structures. In the linguistic domain, exceptionalist scenarios were constructed whereby Creole speakers were considered to have failed in one way or another, this time in respect to language evolution, language acquisition, and language creation. Recall that each of the dogmas described above posits some *sui generis* imperfection on the part of Creole speakers: lack of complex structures to express complex thought, and thus “degeneracy,” with decreolization as a route toward “improvement”; failure to learn some target language, thus “relexification” or “break in transmission,” and so on. Early creolists, like early Caribbeanists (e.g., Froude), were not ideologically and epistemologically prepared to contemplate the parity of Africans and Europeans, linguistic or otherwise. Such parity was plainly “unthinkable,” just as it was “unthinkable” for Locke, Hume, Hegel, Froude, and others that



Africans and Europeans could share in the same humanity and that the Africans and their descendants could be victorious in battles against the Europeans. Therefore we find exceptionalist “lies and nonsense” in the writings of colonial creolists, as we do in the writings of colonial historians.

Recall that, in Africa and the Americas, part of Europe’s colonial mission was to bring civilization and progress to non-Europeans as it extracted wealth from its empire. One working assumption, found for example in Hegel and Froude’s writings, was that Africans had little or no civilization: They were “living fossils” of humanity. The latter premise parallels the Bickertonian myth that Pidgins and Creoles resemble the earliest (pre-)human languages. Furthermore, given established scientific premises of the time, no matter how successful the *mission civilisatrice* was, it could not turn non-Europeans into “real” Europeans. The two groups belong to distinct biological “races” on different evolutionary rungs (cf. Adam’s 1883 *Hybridologie Linguistique*); thus, the degenerate, deficient, hybrid, and/or morbid nature of the linguistic results of Europe’s civilizing mission in the Caribbean. Even the aforementioned Black Jamaican intellectual who was educated in England at Cambridge University and wrote poems in Latin could only be considered a “parrot” by David Hume (Davis 1966 [1988:463]; cf. Brathwaite’s (1971:300,307) Caribbean “mimic men”).

It is thus that, in the colonial period, Creole languages and Creole speakers were purposefully assigned by European observers to the margins of the family of “civilized” (i.e., “normal” and “regular”) human beings and their languages. The emergence of Creole Exceptionalism and its diverse correlates in scholarship on the Caribbean is a rather banal consequence of European imperialism in Africa and the Americas.

*The unbroken and unexceptional transmission of Creole Exceptionalism: The case of Haiti*

Let’s now consider some of the ways in which – notwithstanding their empirical, theoretical, and sociological flaws – the myths of Creole Exceptionalism may have survived through the 20th century, even outside the relatively narrow confines of academia. For that, we’ll take a closer look at the unbroken and unexceptional transmission of Creole Exceptionalism in the particular case of Haiti – “the lighthouse of Creoleness” and “the best described of French Creole dialects, if not of all Creole languages” (Valdman 1971:202, 1979:100).

Regardless of their many flaws, the sociological correlates of Creole Exceptionalism did make sense for neo-colonial 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, to ask themselves “Who are we?” and perhaps more acutely, “Who are we NOT?”.

Among the small percentage of socially dominant HC-French bilinguals in post-independence Haiti, one type of answer was taking shape which can be

somewhat simplistically paraphrased as “We are colored Frenchmen.” (It is interesting to compare this with Froude’s own answer in (13c): “the tags and rags of the gold lace of French civilisation continue to cling about [Haitian] institutions.”) The “colored Frenchman” (mis)identification denotes what Jean Price-Mars (1928 [1983:8]) calls the “collective bovarism” of the Haitian élites.<sup>27</sup> In Price-Mars’s analysis, this “collective bovarism” could for the most part be explained by the need for social cohesion after the battles for independence; this is Francophilia as an illusory tool for nation building (see references in note 21).

But there is a more cynical, and perhaps more realistic, analysis along Marxist lines. HC has long been the sole language of the vast numerical majority in Haiti. This monolingual majority has long lived in what Dejean (1993b:81) calls the “calm possession” of their native language, HC. And there is popular Haitian maxim that contrasts HC with French as *lang achte* – literally, a ‘bought language’, a language that is rather inaccessible and that is often obtained, “bought,” at great psychological and socioeconomic costs. In discussing the notion of *lang achte* as applied to French, Valdman (1984:82) aptly compares HC to the Vodou believer’s *lwa rasin*, the Vodou spirits that are part of one’s family heritage; these are the “native” spirits, so to speak, on a par with the native language. In this metaphorical context, French would be the linguistic counterpart of the *lwa achte*, the nonnative spirits that are sometimes bought at a burdensome price from the Vodou priest. It is generally advised that one stay away from these unsympathetic *lwa achte*, who often make costly demands that overwhelm the Vodouisant’s modest means. The HC maxim *Franse se lang achte!* ‘French, that bought language!’ thus opposes French as a hard-to-acquire language to HC as a mother tongue that need not be bought. Indeed HC is effortlessly acquired by all Haitians. The maxim pithily reveals a rather sophisticated view of language acquisition and of Haiti’s sociolinguistic market (cf. Bourdieu 1982).

Hence, in practice HC has been a better linguistic tool for national cohesion than French has been. The latter as *lang achte* 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 as *lang rasin*, Francophilia in post-independence 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), and it seems to have remained that in contemporary Haiti, for those who can afford this *lang achte*.<sup>28</sup>

One other factor related to the promotion of French as “expression of class self-interest” is the latter’s status as an international language with enormous prestige. That prestige has long made HC relatively unattractive in the eyes of Haiti’s neo-colonial élites anxious to gain respect in a Western world that has often looked down on Haitians for one reason or another. As impeccable speakers of “good” French, the Haitian élites felt that 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 19th century U.S. Secretary of State's comment about Haitians as "Niggers speaking French"; Chomsky 1993:201.)

The sort of "apartheid" that excludes monolingual HC speakers from power in Haiti (P. Dejean 1993:123–24; cf. Y. Dejean 1975, 1999a: Sec. 16; Devonish 1986:16, 30) seems to have been imposed by both outsiders and insiders via widespread dissemination of (neo-)colonial stereotypes about Haitians and their Creole language, as documented above (also see, e.g., M.-R. Trouillot 1990: chap. 4; Chomsky 1993:200–6). Interestingly these stereotypes echo some of the theoretical claims that constitute Creole Exceptionalism as documented above. In any case, the maintenance of anti-HC stereotypes by the Haitian élite increases the economic, social, and symbolic capital (in Bourdieu's 1982 sense) that French-speaking Haitians can accumulate at the expense of their monolingual HC-speaking compatriots. This capital has often subtle and somewhat ambiguous correlates in ethnicity, race, and class (see, e.g., Hoffmann 1984; M.-R. Trouillot 1990:114–18).

On the international scene, French, Francophilia, and a concomitant debase-ment of HC have long been perceived by the dominant classes in Haiti and by their "organic intellectuals" (in Gramsci's sense) as an investment for Haiti, a fledgling and ostracized nation craving international recognition and participation in world markets (see, e.g., Bellegarde-Smith 1985:171, 1990:7; Hoffmann 1984:57–63). Dantès Bellegarde (1877–1966), as portrayed in his own writings and in those of his historian nephew Bellegarde-Smith (1985, 1990), gives us the most straightforward example of pro-French and anti-Creole attitudes among the Haitian élites (for short, I'll dub this complex "Francophilia-cum-Creolophobia").

First, some background: Bellegarde can be considered "the quasi-official historian of successive Haitian governments [and] key to the understanding of the development of Haitian social thought . . . in the twentieth century" (Bellegarde-Smith 1985:xiii). He was the "synthesizer of [the Haitian bourgeoisie's] views" through the 19th and 20th centuries (Bellegarde-Smith 1985:155, 1990:58). Bellegarde was even hailed "International Spokesman of the Negroes of the World" by W.E.B. Dubois (Bellegarde-Smith 1990:54, 73). He was also active on the policy front in Haiti, playing a major role in foreign and domestic policy, including education, with top positions in various ministries: foreign affairs, public instruction, agriculture, and religious affairs. Bellegarde also acted officially as Haiti's ambassador to France, to the United States, to the League of Nations, and to the Holy See. And Bellegarde's own mother was a monolingual HC speaker from a relatively humble background (Bellegarde-Smith 1985:55). Altogether, Bellegarde was in the best position to be intimately acquainted with various sectors of Haitian society, from the peasantry to the intelligentsia. He was also in

the best position to shape educational and language-related policies, and to affect deeply the outcome of Haiti's "culture wars," as well as the representation of Haiti on the international scene.

Bellegarde's ideology straightforwardly instantiated the psychological complex that Price-Mars calls "collective bovarism," and may well have encapsulated the most complete internalization of (neo-)colonial attitudes about the African components of Haitian culture. In working toward his ideal Haiti, Bellegarde categorically rejected anything Haitian that could be perceived as distinct from French culture or from Christianity. For example, he explicitly expressed his disdain for HC, which "empties the mind" (Bellegarde 1949:43; Bellegarde-Smith 1985:123). Here's one lengthy quotation that explicates his anti-Creole position:

- (15) [T]he near-universal use of Creole is one of the great difficulty of education in Haiti. . . . Born and raised in an environment where Creole is generally spoken, [monolingual Creolephone children] imitate their parents' speech and gestures, and [these children] translate their first impressions in the puerile mother tongue. . . . By the time [these children] are admitted in primary school, often at a late age, they have already contacted speech habits that, for the most part, are corrupted: they are used to give to objects incorrect names; they have learnt to give certain words inadequate senses or distorted pronunciations. Once in contact with French, these students become confused because this language is to them a dead and foreign language that seems to bear no relation to the lively and colorful language through which they express and communicate their thought. (Bellegarde 1949:42)

Bellegarde expressed similar disdain for Haiti's heritage from what he considered "sinister Africa," which he made responsible for Haiti's alleged cultural and intellectual backwardness. Bellegarde considered Vodou and HC as "bad Roman Catholicism" and "bad French," respectively (see, e.g., Bellegarde 1934:28f.; also see Bellegarde-Smith 1985:81f., 107, 121, 170f., et passim). Note the extent to which Bellegarde reflects Western prejudices about Africa. For example, his phrase "sinister Africa" brings to mind (mimics?) Hegel's "Africa . . . is enveloped in the dark mantle of Night" and his ensuing sinister description of Africa (1936 [1970:91–99]).

Bellegarde became an apologist for colonization and slavery, and he spent much of his diplomatic career trying to "sell" Haiti to the French, culturally and economically. One of his goals was to integrate Haiti into the community of nations by promoting what he perceived to be Haiti's biggest selling point, its Christian and Latin heritage: Bellegarde could only perceive and showcase Haiti as "an intellectual province of France" (Bellegarde-Smith 1985:104), with Haitians being "attached to [France] by blood and by language [through] a very sweet and very strong link that we have neither the wish nor the power to break" (Bellegarde 1934:14), with "[a]ll moral and intellectual life in Haiti relies on principles that are foundational to French culture and civilization" (Bellegarde 1934:18) and with "French [as] the national language of Haiti . . . [and HC] . . . even closer to French than certain French patois varieties

are” (Bellegarde 1934:12, also see Bellegarde 1949:40). Bellegarde thought that such fanciful representations of Haiti would make his country attractive to French cultural and economic investment, especially in the context of U.S. hegemony in the Americas (see, e.g., Bellegarde 1934:10, 19; Bellegarde-Smith 1985:98–115).

Bellegarde’s view that HC is structurally incapacitated and incapacitating seems quite widespread among the Haitian educated élites (compare with similar views among bona fide linguists, as surveyed above). Another exponent of this view is the historian Hénock Trouillot, one of the preeminent Haitian intellectuals of the 20th century (Berrou & Pompilus 1978:v3, 466, 696f.). In his book *The limits of Créole in our educational system*, Trouillot categorically declares that “Creole facilitates mediocrity in many ways” (1980:12). He claims that certain areas of knowledge just cannot be taught in HC, not just because there is no appropriate material, but because no such material could exist (p. 14): he believes that HC is intrinsically incapable of conveying higher types of knowledge. Worse yet, for Trouillot, “the pure Creolophone is, by definition, an alphabetic” (p. 22). This is obviously false, since many HC speakers, like speakers of other languages, can be, and have been, taught to read and write in their native language (e.g., Y. Dejean 1985, 1997, 1999b, to appear; P. Dejean 1988, 1989).

Here’s a larger sample of the fictitious “limits” that Trouillot assigns to HC:<sup>29</sup>

- (16) a. [HC] closes itself in structures that are narrow and limited, with the heavy disadvantage that it is a language that has not been systematized, a language with a syntax and orthography that are not yet part of a grammar with broad recognition in the intellectual world. (H. Trouillot 1980:15)
- b. [HC] has no fixed orthography and no fixed syntax. Worse yet, it is (nearly) unreadable for many francophone readers. (1980:22)
- c. For a successful study of mathematics, physics, geography, natural sciences or French (of course), . . . learning must take place in French or in any other universal language with the adequate pedagogical material. (1980:13)
- d. The transition from the status of oral language to that of written language constitutes a promotion that requires long years, sometimes centuries. (1980:14)

Francophilia-cum-Creolophobia on the part of Bellegarde, Trouillot, and other (aspiring) middle- and upper-class Haitians (see, e.g. the references in note 21 and the quotes in the section above on sociohistorical and epistemological background, and note 29) can be analyzed as an elitist, yet somewhat rational, solution to the economic, political, and cultural embargo on post-independence Haiti. Recall that the latter emerged in 1803 after the bloody defeat of France by rebellious ex-slaves at a time when the United States was still a slave-holding power. Besides, the Haitian élites’ Francophilia-cum-Creolophobia conveniently doubles as one of many tools that are tacitly, yet systematically, used for class exclusion in the interest of socioeconomic hegemony (cf. Hoffmann 1984:57–63). These practices become a sensible investment strategy in the linguistic markets made available by Haiti’s history. In Bourdieu’s (1982) model of linguistic markets:

- (17) a. [L]inguistic exchanges ... are ... relations of symbolic power in which the power relations between speakers or their respective groups are actualized.
- b. ... The value of the utterance depends on the relation of power that is concretely established between the speakers' linguistic competences ... ; it depends, in other words, on the capacity of the various [speakers] to impose the criteria of appreciation most favourable to their own products. This capacity is not determined in linguistic terms alone. ... [T]he whole social structure is present in each situation. (Bourdieu 1982 [1991:37, 67])

Using Bourdieu's model, Valdman (1984:98) correctly notes that "the Haitian [Francophile and Creolophobe] power élites ... are defending a threatened capital"; they oppose HC's promotion "for the VALUE of their competence in French can only be preserved if the MARKET is protected. [emphasis in original]" Yet the social factors that devalue the symbolic capital of HC vis-à-vis French are perhaps more subtle and more complex than anticipated by Valdman (see, e.g., Fanon's 1952 opening chapter, where the mastery of French is considered an instrument of both self-empowerment and self-alienation in the French Caribbean). In Bourdieu's model, as sketched in (17), there is a "whole social structure" behind linguistic capital formation and symbolic domination. The latter is

- (18) ... inscribed ... in dispositions which are impalpably inculcated, through a long and slow process of acquisition, by the sanctions of the linguistic market. [These dispositions] are therefore adjusted, without any cynical calculation or consciously experienced constraint, to the chances of material and symbolic profit which the laws of price formation characteristic of a given market objectively offer to the holders of a given linguistic capital. ... This means that 'linguistic customs' cannot be changed by decree. (Bourdieu 1982 [1991]:51, 258 n.15).

If not by decree, then how?<sup>30</sup>

#### TOWARD POSTCOLONIAL CREOLISTICS

One fundamental characteristic of creolistics is that its own genesis, along with the genesis of its objects of study, is deeply steeped in the history of White hegemony in the New World (e.g., colonization and slavery) and its ensuing dualisms vis-à-vis the (non)humanity of those who were deemed "slaves by nature" (see note 12). The genesis of creolistics may thus offer a clear case study of the linguistics-ideology interface – namely, how sociohistorically rooted ideological and geopolitical concerns promote, and are reinforced by, certain types of linguistic (mis)analyses. In the history of creolistics as in the history of other human sciences, power did produce the sort of "reality" – the "régime of truth" – that benefited those in power. Creolistics, like the sociology reflexively studied by Bourdieu & Wacquant (1992:51), has the "scientific authority ... [and] the power to produce, to impose, and to inculcate the legitimate representation of the social world," including the past, present, and future (socio)linguistic world of Creole speakers. In turn, analyzing the power/knowledge cycles that make up the creolistics-ideology interface will, I hope, contribute to eliminating the recurrent myths that conspire against both a deeper understanding of Creole languages and the welfare of Creole speakers. Such an analysis is unavoidably both

political and linguistic. To quote Bourdieu again: "By uncovering the social mechanisms which ensure the maintenance of the established order and whose properly symbolic efficacy rests on the misrecognition of their logic and effects, social science necessarily takes sides in political struggles" (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992:51).

This essay has thus analyzed the interaction between, on the one hand, certain discursive practices in Creole studies and, on the other hand, sociohistorical patterns in the (under)development of Creole communities. Basically, I am concerned with the political, sociological, methodological, and theoretical prerequisites for a new perspective on Creole studies, a new "politics of truth" vis-à-vis Creole languages. How do we break the chain of transmission of the prejudices and errors inherited from our (neo-)colonial intellectual forebears? In order to strip the camouflage from ideologically tainted epistemological heuristics, it seems to me that we must first try to face who we are as creolists in the mirror of the history of our field, and thus establish the need for a reflexive creolistics (DeGraff 2003:402; DeGraff & Walicek 2005). That way we can, at least, identify any problematic "habitus of thought" and, at best, eliminate such habitus.

As discussed above, the central tropes in the discourse of Creole Exceptionalism can be related historically to the ideological climate of the colonial and neo-colonial eras as determined by the economic, geopolitical and socio-psychological interests of the ruling and slave-holding classes and of their post-colonial and post-emancipation ideological descendants. Simultaneously, the intellectual roots of Creole Exceptionalism can be traced back textually to versions of pre- and neo-Humboldtian essentialism (e.g., Rousseau and followers; cf. Corcoran 2001; also see note 10) and to pre- and post-Schleicherian/Darwinian views on both human evolution and language evolution (DeGraff 2001a,b, 2003).

On the linguistic-theoretical side, one now familiar, if tired, question is this: Can Creoles, in general, be unambiguously distinguished from non-Creoles on strictly structural (e.g., morphological, syntactic) synchronic grounds because of their ("abnormal"? "broken"? "non-genetic"? "catastrophic"?) genealogy? The discussion thus far, combined with our best available evidence and with robust results from linguistic theory and psycholinguistics, supports an approach in which Creole grammars do not form a typological class that is aprioristically and fundamentally distinguishable from that of non-Creole grammars.

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 and that of Creole formation (see, e.g., Posner 1985; Muysken 1988; DeGraff 2005, to appear; Mufwene 2001 and references therein): "The very notion of a 'Creole' language from the linguistic point of view tends to disappear if one looks closely; what we have is just a language" (Muysken 1988:300). One basic insight in these and related works is that language contact, in some form or another, and language creation, whether seemingly gradual or seemingly abrupt, happens always and every-



where. “[C]reoles are no more and no less than the result of extraordinary external factors coupled with ordinary internal factors . . . [Within mentalistic approaches to language creation and language change,] the notion of ‘creolization’ as a unitary and distinct linguistic phenomenon evaporates” (DeGraff 1999b:477).

Cartesian-Uniformitarian approaches to Creole genesis can all be, in principle, extrapolated from Descartes’s assumption about the species-specificity and the basic uniformity of the human mind: “Reason . . . is by nature equal in all men” (Descartes 1637 [1962:1]; cf. Chomsky 1966).<sup>31</sup> In Creole studies, such rationalist approaches were already adumbrated by Greenfield’s (1830:51f.) dictum, “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.” We find similar Uniformitarian assumptions in Boas’s study of Native American languages:

- (19) [T]he method of treatment has been throughout an analytical one. No attempt has been made to compare the forms of the Indian grammars with the grammars of English, Latin, or even among themselves; but in each case the psychological groupings which are given depend entirely upon the inner form of each language. In other words, the grammar has been treated as though an intelligent Indian was going to develop the forms of his own thoughts by an analysis of his own form of speech. (Boas 1911:81)

Boas’s egalitarian approach, as somewhat anticipated by Greenfield 1830 much in advance of Neogrammarian Uniformitarianism (cf. Osthoff & Brugmann 1878 [1967: 204]), relies on the assumption that grammars, in the theoretical linguistic sense, are based on species-uniform properties of brain/mind. In a similar vein, Sapir (1933:155) considers all speakers to be endowed with the full-fledged knowledge of their native language; this knowledge is “an essentially perfect means of expression and communication among every known people” (also see Boas 1911:11 and Sapir 1921:219). In other words, every language is “normal,” and so are the processes whereby it is created in the minds of its native speakers. Similar prospects are found, most explicitly, in the methodology of generativists whose objects of study are Cartesian properties of mind. Cartesian-Uniformitarian linguistics, from (e.g.) Greenfield to Chomsky, is thus intrinsically egalitarian and provides a solid rational basis for undermining the traditional dualist dogmas in Creole studies (for case studies with HC as “prototypical” test case, see DeGraff 1997, 1999a,b,e, 2000, 2001a,b, 2002, 2005, to appear).

As must be clear by now, Creole Exceptionalism is a set of sociohistorically rooted dogmas with foundations in (neo-)colonial power relations, and not a scientific conclusion based on robust evidence. It could be argued that the myths of Creole Exceptionalism are still active because they implicitly serve symbolisms of power and mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion, all of which relate to identity formation, to socioeconomic hierarchies, and to modern *missions civilisatrices* (see references in note 4). “It is hegemony, or rather the result of cultural hegemony at work, that gives Orientalism [its] durability and . . . strength” (Saïd

1979:7); this seems to apply as well to the Caribbean counterpart of Orientalism, Creole Exceptionalism.

As with Orientalism, the durability and popularity of Creole Exceptionalism seems largely orthogonal to scientific progress. Creole Exceptionalism has deprived, and may still be depriving, the world of a wealth of empirical and theoretical insights about Creole languages and about language in general, thus ultimately weakening the scientific foundations of linguistics. The myth that Creole languages are “simplest” to analyze shunts into oblivion any data set that attests to the complexity of Creole languages as full-fledged languages and that may further contribute to our understanding of Universal Grammar, and thus to our understanding of the cognitive underpinnings of language (see, e.g., DeGraff 2001b).

Worse yet, neo-colonial and exceptionalist creolistics, especially within Creole communities, eventually infringes on the human rights of Creole speakers. The beliefs of Creole Exceptionalism that are critiqued in this essay and elsewhere (see note 4) have long served to justify the widespread exclusion of monolingual Creole speakers from a number of spheres where socioeconomic power is created, reproduced, and exercised. The most powerful tool of domination, both actual and symbolic, is the school system, which in much of the Caribbean still devalues Creole languages – even in Haiti, where the vast majority of Haitians speak only HC, where all Haitians speak HC, and where HC is an official language on a par with French. The nonuse or limited use of HC in Haitian schools violates the pedagogically sound principle that “education is best carried on through the mother tongue of the pupil” (UNESCO 1953:6, 47). Such de facto stigmatization and/or exclusion of HC in the schools and in other formal spheres effectively makes monolingual HC speakers second-class citizens.<sup>32</sup>

How can postcolonial linguistics as a discipline help fight such stigmatization? What I propose is the following, in addition to current efforts already in place. 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 accidents of (post-)colonial history. Cartesian-Uniformitarian linguistic research on the origins and structures of Creoles questions and ultimately invalidates the epistemological and conceptual bases of the neo-colonial and nonegalitarian paradigms of much work in contemporary creolistics, whereby Creole languages are effectively devalued as (e.g.) “beginning” languages, “less advanced” languages, “simplest” languages, “abnormal” languages, “broken” languages, “corrupted” languages, and so on.

On the practical and pedagogical side, Universal Grammar (UG) leaves no room for the fantastic and fatalistic, but still widely believed, orthodoxy according to which Creole languages constitute a “handicap” for Creole speakers and cannot be used as viable media for, and objects of, instruction. So, in principle, a creolistics that is informed by Cartesian-Uniformitarian linguistics may help provide Creole languages and their speakers with, among other things, “capital”

that is both symbolic, in Bourdieu's 1982 sense, and real, in the sense of economics. Such capital is critical in order to reverse the past and present stigmatization and dehumanization of Creole speakers and help move Creole-speaking communities toward progressive social change.

Postcolonial creolistics must invest in this UG-based capital, both epistemologically – to improve Creole-related linguistic research – and sociologically, to improve Creole-based education and language policy. One prerequisite of this investment is a thorough reevaluation of the use of Creole languages in research and education. Education is the strongest bastion of socioeconomic hegemony. In Haiti, for example, the French-based (mis-)education system has quite successfully kept the monolingual HC-speaking population – the vast numerical majority – at bay as incompetent or as failures. The return on investing in our Creole capital may in the future, hopefully not too distant, be found in the widespread and constructive use and study of Creole languages as an integral part of research, education, language policy, and sociocultural practices in Creole communities. Given Caribbean history and the history of Creole studies, this seems to require nothing less than “ascertaining the possibility of constituting a new politics of truth [toward] changing . . . the political, economic, institutional régime of the production of truth” (cf. Foucault 1980:133). This is, of course, a tall order, but the arguments set forth here can, I hope, be a small step toward achieving this goal.

This essay has sketched some potential paths for progress, both in terms of our knowledge about Creole languages and in terms of “our knowledge of the conditions of knowledge” about these languages. But the question remains: How can we actually “change the political, economic, institutional régime of the production of [anti-Creole] truth”? Cameron et al. (1992:22) exhort us toward research “on, for and with” the native speaker, and I would like to suggest how to begin exploring what this exhortation might mean in the context of Creole studies (also see DeGraff 2001a: Sec. 7, “Toward a new Perspective on Creole studies”).

Pro-Creole Gramscian, “organic” intellectuals (e.g., linguists and educators devoted to Creole speakers and their cause) have already started linking theory and practice via the elaboration of autonomous orthographies, literacy programs, pedagogical tools, instructional resources, guidelines for reforms, post-colonial critiques, and so on. Modern Creole-related technology even includes automated orthographic conversion software (Mason 2000). Thanks to the continuing expansion and development of these types of tools and materials, Creole speakers, like speakers of other languages, can be, and have been, taught to read and write their native languages, and to acquire and produce knowledge in and about those languages (see, e.g., Y. Dejean 1985, 1995, 1997, 1999b, to appear; I. Dejan 1995; and P. Dejean 1988, 1989).

From the perspective of Cartesian-Uniformitarian linguistics and contrary to the myths surveyed in this essay, there is no reason to believe that Creole structures constitute an intrinsic intellectual handicap that irremediably blocks intel-

lectual and socioeconomic progress for Creole speakers. In fact, there do exist educational virtues in using Creoles in the education of Creole speakers (for the case of Haiti, see Y. Dejean 1975, 1993, 1997, 1999b, 2001, to appear, and the references therein). In addition, the cognitive, intellectual, and scientific benefits of engaging school children in linguistic research with their native languages as data sources have long been documented (see, e.g., Hale 1973, Honda & O'Neil 1993).

In the particular case of Haiti, the “lighthouse of Creole-ness,” most HC speakers remain unaware of the scientific, intellectual, and educational value of the *ONLY* language that they, as a group, can truly consider their own. Yet continued scientific progress on HC is substantially hampered by the absence of active communities of native-speaker linguists in partnership with the international research community (see note 33). Such communities and partnership can barely coexist with the deep-seated ambivalence about Creoles that I have documented in this essay. If Creole languages are viewed as handicaps for the intellectual development of their speakers, how could Creole speakers ever become full-fledged agents and valid partners toward scientific progress? Yet, as Chomsky writes:

Maybe the best way to investigate languages [is to] teach [their respective native speakers] linguistics, and then have them work on their own language.

... [Native Americans] working on their own languages [have] discovered all kinds of things that none of the anthropological linguists ever noticed because [these facts are] just too subtle and you really have to have complete mastery of the language in order to study them seriously... . When people begin studying their own languages, they discover all kinds of things, particularly if they do it in groups... . Part of the reason why the study of English, Italian, French, German, Japanese and so on have advanced very fast is because there were groups of people doing the research. (Chomsky 1997:46, 171)

In order to reverse the effects of neo-colonial creolistics *qua* miseducation and dehumanization, many more Creole speakers will have to become active participants, as linguists and/or educators, in the reflexive, Cartesian-Uniformitarian, and scientifically and socially responsible study of their own, “normal” and “regular,” languages (DeGraff 2001a:99–105, 2003:402–4). In addition, linguistic theory and reliable data collected and analyzed with the expert assistance of Creole-speaking linguists will help us further demystify the dogmas critiqued in this essay. Furthermore, the contributions to linguistics of native speakers of these still understudied languages will further enrich our empirical bases for the study of Universal Grammar (Rizzi 1999).<sup>33</sup>

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; and (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 will live by the creolist’s noble ideal that scholarly knowledge about Creole languages can indeed be “appli[ed] . . . to language planning, education, and social reform in Creole-speaking societies” (from the masthead of the *Journal of Pidgin & Creole Studies*). In Bourdieu’s (1982 [1991:128]) 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.” And, as Fanon (1952 [1991:11]) says: “What is the prognosis? . . . The prognosis is in the hands of those who are willing to get rid of the worm-eaten roots of the structure.”

## NOTES

\* This project has been supported by, inter alia, a much-appreciated fellowship from the National Endowment for the Humanities (# FA-37500-02). While I am responsible for the views and errors in this paper, I feel immensely privileged to have benefited from the generous encouragement and judicious comments of editor Jane Hill and two anonymous reviewers at *Language in Society*, and of many friends and colleagues: Myriam Augustin, Marie-Lucie Brutus, Noam Chomsky, Yves Dejean (Papa Iv), Dominique Fattier, Marilyn Goodrich, Ken Hale, Dimitri Hilton, Tometro Hopkins, Tami Kaplan, Antonia MacDonald-Smythe, Heliana Mello, Miriam Meyerhoff, Salikoko Mufwene, Marilene Phipps, Ella Maria Ray, Faith Smith, Geneva Smitherman, Arthur Spears, and Adrienne Talamas.

<sup>1</sup> As Mufwene (1989:242) points out, “One may . . . be colonial in one study and yet be noncolonial in another. The term ‘colonial’ here is used to characterize specific analyses rather than the authors themselves.” And so is creolistics colonial in some respects, yet noncolonial in many other respects. Indeed, the sort of ambivalence detected by Mufwene is all too common in Creole studies and, more generally, in post-colonial scholarship (also see notes 9 and 16).

<sup>2</sup> An array of modern scholars provides overviews and/or analyses of race-theory dualisms in Western intellectual thought; among these are Montagu 1942; Césaire 1950; Fanon 1952, 1959, 1961; Sartre 1961; Davis 1968, 1975, 1984; Popkin 1974; West 1982; Ngugi wa Thiong’o 1986; Chomsky 1993; Gould 1996; Bernasconi 2001a.

<sup>3</sup> In the rest of this essay, I most often use the term “postcolonial,” sans hyphen, in the sense of “anti-imperialist,” thus “anti-colonial.” This is the intended sense in (e.g.) the term “postcolonial linguistics.” This use of “postcolonial,” without hyphen, is to be distinguished from the use of “post-colonial,” with hyphen. The hyphenated use has the compositional, time-referential reading of “subsequent,” as in (e.g.) “post-colonial Haiti,” which stands for “Haiti in the historical period that came after the colonial period.” Technically, Haiti’s “post-colonial” period starts with independence in 1803 and includes the present (Haiti’s colonial, or pre-“post-colonial,” name was Saint-Domingue). Unlike post-colonial Haiti, truly postcolonial Haiti seems nowhere in sight (see Chomsky 1993: chap.8).

<sup>4</sup> Works that have, in one way or another, contributed to my current stance include Firmin 1885; Hale 1972 and subsequent works; Bebel-Gisler & Hurbon 1975; Y. Dejean 1975 and subsequent works; Prudent 1980; Devonish 1986; Faraclas 1988; Gould 1996; Mufwene 1989, 1998, 2000, 2001; Morgan 1994; Zéphir 1996; Hill 1998; Spears 1999; Corcoran 2001; Mühleisen 2002; Makoni, Smith-

erman, Ball & Spears 2003. Precursors of the arguments here appears in DeGraff 2001a,b, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, to appear, DeGraff & Walicek 2005. Degraff (in preparation b) is a monograph that will expand this essay's argument, which in turn expands the argument in DeGraff 2003, 2004.

<sup>5</sup> THROUGHOUT THIS ARTICLE, SMALL CAPS, AS IN THIS NOTE, INDICATES MY OWN EMPHASIS, NOT THAT OF THE QUOTED AUTHOR, EXCEPT WHERE INDICATED.

All translations from French are mine, except where indicated in the main text or in the bibliography.

<sup>6</sup> Nicolas Quint, like Julien Vinson, is a French linguist. Quint currently works at France's Centre National de Recherche Scientifique (CNRS).

<sup>7</sup> This hegemonic discourse is reminiscent of Saïd's (1979) definition of Orientalism, which, as a set of ideas and representations, "allowed Europeans to deal with and even to see Orientals as a phenomenon possessing regular characteristics. . . . Orientalist notions influenced the people who were called Orientals as well as those called Occidental, European, or Western; in short, Orientalism is better grasped as a set of constraints upon and limitations of thought than it is simply as a positive doctrine. If the essence of Orientalism is the ineradicable distinction between Western superiority and Oriental inferiority, then we must be prepared to note how in its development and subsequent history Orientalism deepened and even hardened the distinction." As this essay will show, much in Saïd's definition of Orientalism seems to apply to Creole Exceptionalism as well. This is not surprising: Saïd himself (e.g., 1976:92–110) keenly noted the intimate Foucauldian connections between the construction of political, cultural, and racial hegemony and the concomitant discursive elaboration of scientific authority through scholarly (-looking) texts, with linguists playing a key role in said elaboration.

<sup>8</sup> As in Orientalism (see note 7), categorical, essentialist and exotic statements about "sexual promise (and threat), untiring sensuality, unlimited desire [etc.]" (cf. Saïd 1979:188–90, 207, 309) still enter into the elaboration of Creole-related stereotypes. Compare the second quote from Quint with the following usage quotation in Larousse's (1869) dictionary entry for *créole*: "The passions of the Creoles are intense to the utmost." Colonial European writers' sexual obsession about the Other go beyond Creoles: "Through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the account of French, Dutch, and English travelers were virtually unanimous: Africans were shamelessly licentious; the women were incredibly hot and lascivious, and would prostitute themselves for a trifling quantity of European goods" (Davis 1966 [1988:468f.]). Compare these colonial beliefs with Quint's comment in (6).

<sup>9</sup> As documented here and elsewhere, sociohistorically rooted ambivalence about Creole languages exists at least among both linguists and Creole-speaking intellectuals. I myself belong to both groups. Thus, my own efforts to elucidate such generalized ambivalence put me in a somewhat precarious yet privileged position, one that may compromise objectivity and fairness while providing the benefit of introspective insights (also see notes 1 and 16). The full effect of my own biases, I myself cannot objectively evaluate (see DeGraff & Walicek 2005). As the 13th-century Persian poet Rumi (2001:39) wrote: "Remember, the looking itself is a trace of what we're looking for." *Caveat lector!*

<sup>10</sup> It may be instructive to compare the quotes in (7) with Jean-Jacques Rousseau's (1712–1778) views on the languages of "primitive" vs. "civilized" man: The speech of "primitive man" is exoticized as "closer to childhood, nonlanguage and nature," reflecting passion over need (see Derrida 1967 [1976:217f.] for valuable discussion; also see Foucault 1969 [1972a:160–62] for parallels between Rousseau's views on grammar and natural history's taxonomy). During the early stages of the New World conquest, "[t]hose trying to establish the sub-humanity of the Indians adduced as evidence that [inter alia] the Indians were incapable of having abstract ideas" (Popkin 1974:129).

<sup>11</sup> The apparent irrationality of various intellectuals toward Creole languages should also be the subject matter of anthropologists. As pointed out by Hill 1998, "'apparent irrationalities' seldom turn out to be the result of ignorance or confusion. Instead, they appear locally as quite rational, being rooted in history and tradition, functioning as important organizing principles in relatively enduring political ecologies, and lending coherence and meaning to complex and ambiguous human experiences." Also see note 14.

<sup>12</sup> These race theories can be somewhat related all the way back to Aristotle's (384–322 B.C.) notion of "slaves by nature," as defined in his *Politics*, viz., slaves have inferior mental capacities and require a master for guidance. It is thus that Aristotle considers slaves "tame animals," to be used for labor. Montesquieu (1689–1755) reached a similar conclusion via a different argument: "slavery . . . might be founded on natural reason in tropical countries, where the heat made men slothful and unwilling to do heavy work except for the fear of punishment" (Davis 1966 [1988:394]). Aristotle's



slave-by-nature or Montesquieu slave-by-climate were both conveniently popular paradigms for colonial observers (see, e.g., Davis 1966 [1988:175, 392], Popkin 1974:129–32, 134–6 and references in note 2).

<sup>13</sup> Chomsky 1993, chap.1 is a concise survey of “the great work of subjugation and conquest” that started in the New World in 1492 and continues still.

<sup>14</sup> On recurrent contradictions as symptoms of “the ideological functioning of a science,” see Foucault 1969 [1972a:186]. Also see Saïd 1979:7 and Davis 1966 [1988:119] on similar contradictions in, respectively, Orientalism and the history of religious and philosophical ideas about slavery. For Saïd, the purpose of such contradictions is to maintain “flexible positional superiority.” Davis considers such contradictions as the “the curious capacity of slavery for generating or accommodating itself to dualisms in thought.” As selectively sketched in this essay, Creole Exceptionalism, somewhat like Orientalism and scientific racism, exhibits the sort of “flexible positional superiority” that allows creolists’ discourse to accommodate mutually contradictory views about Creole structures and their origins while maintaining some degree of consensus around the doctrine that Creoles form an exceptional class of languages, regardless of robust contrary evidence.

<sup>15</sup> As illustrated in (e.g.) Humboldt 1836 [1988: 182–229] and Schleicher 1863 [1869:36f., 49–54, 79] and as critiqued in (e.g.) 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 about many non-Indo-European languages, which were viewed as evolutionarily and intellectually inferior. Bloomfield (1933:8) critically reports related attitudes about 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.’” (See Corcoran 2001, DeGraff 2001a,b and Mühleisen 2002 for critiques of Humboldtian and Schleicherian creolistics. I thank Brian Joseph for his input on this issue.)

<sup>16</sup> This is the same J. J. Thomas whose 1889 book waged a fiery anti-colonial rhetorical war against Froude’s (1888) prejudiced rant against Caribbean people (as illustrated below). See Smith 2002 for some enlightening hints on the origins of Thomas’s ambivalence toward Trinidad’s French-lexicon Creole and much else in the context of “colonial formation.”

<sup>17</sup> The contrast between Bloomfield’s promotion of American Indian languages (e.g., Bloomfield 1925) and his simultaneous stigmatization of Creole languages may well make him the Las Casas of linguistics. Recall that Bartolomé de Las Casas (1474–1566) made a Faustian bargain with the Spanish crown: He offered to trade “freedom for the savages (the Indians) [with] slavery for the barbarians (the Africans). Colonization won the day” (M.-R. Trouillot 1995:75). In Bloomfield’s case, the stigmatization of Creole languages won the day. This illustrates how hard it can be, even for an industrious, open-minded, intelligent, and skeptical linguist, to “extricate himself from the system of shared ideology and propaganda [and] readily see through the modes of distortion developed by substantial segments of the intelligentsia,” *pace* Chomsky’s optimism that “[e]veryone is capable of doing that” (1979:3–4). (See Davis 1966 [1988:165–96] for a study of double standards in the European treatment of Amerindians vs. Africans in the Americas.)

<sup>18</sup> Variations on the popular theme that Creoles are “degenerate offshoots” of their lexifiers can be found in, e.g., Pelleprat 1655, Girod-Chantrons 1785, J. J. Thomas 1869, Saint-Quentin 1872, Baissac 1880, Vinson 1889 (see quote in (3)), Poyen-Bellisle 1894, Meillet 1924, Bloomfield 1933, Hall 1953, Hockett 1958, Valdman 1992, Métellus 1997, 1998.

<sup>19</sup> See Mufwene 2000, 2001 for further discussion of various terminological and conceptual pitfalls in Creole studies. See DeGraff 2002:374–382 for more details and further references on the sociolinguistics and demographics of Creole formation in Haiti.

<sup>20</sup> However, contrast this view of decreolization as improvement with the view that decreolization counts as yet another imperfection since the decreolizing Creole speakers are considered “no longer able to express themselves” in any language. (See Quint 1997:134 as quoted above on page 539.)

<sup>21</sup> In the case of Haiti, aggressively Creolophobe and passionately Francophile intellectuals have included, over the years, Delorme 1870, Bellegarde 1934, 1949, H. Trouillot 1980, Métellus 1997, 1998, among many others. See Bellegarde-Smith 1985, 1990 for some case studies, specially on Bellegarde’s pro-French and anti-Creole attitudes. Also see this article’s subsection on transmission of Creole Exceptionalism, note 29, and various references in note 4 on the role of language in “state against nation” identity struggles.



<sup>22</sup> Sylvain adopts the above race-theoretical assumption 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 categorically pro-relexification 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 empirical substance of her HC-French-Ewe comparisons. As Mufwene (2001:213 n.14) accurately sums it up, Sylvain “provides several connections between features of Haitian Creole with those of several nonstandard French dialects, aside from the much appreciated connections proposed with African languages.” Her empirical contribution is thus more nuanced and observationally more adequate than the strict-relexification scenarios mentioned in the main text, namely Adam 1883, Quint 1997, and Lefebvre 1998.

<sup>23</sup> See, e.g., DeGraff 1994a,b, 1999c, 2001a, 2002, 2005 and the relevant references therein.

<sup>24</sup> Distinct versions of the abnormal/broken transmission doctrine can be found in Schuchardt 1914, Jespersen 1922, Bickerton 1981, 1984a,b, 1990, 1998, Thomason & Kaufman 1988, McWhorter 1998, 2001, and Thomason 2002. Arguments against this doctrine and its antecedents are quite old, even if often unheeded still, going back to at least Greenfield 1830. More recent counter-arguments, from somewhat distinct theoretical perspectives, include Posner 1985, Fattier 1998, Chaudenson & Mufwene 2001, Mufwene 2001, DeGraff 2001a,b, 2002, 2005.

<sup>25</sup> Other examples of neo-Darwinian creolistics that postulate an abnormal/broken transmission in the history of Creole languages can be found in (e.g.) Saint-Quentin 1872, Jespersen 1922, Seuren & Wekker 1986, Seuren 1998, McWhorter 1998, 2001. In DeGraff 2001a,b, 2003, 2004, in preparation a,b, I further document the genealogy and the empirical, theoretical, and sociological flaws of various neo-Darwinian catastrophic scenarios for the origins of Creole languages (also see Mufwene 2001 for another extended critique from a different theoretical perspective). DeGraff 2004 is a reply to Bickerton’s reaction to some of my arguments here and in DeGraff 2003 against Creole Exceptionalism.

<sup>26</sup> Toussaint L’Ouverture is the best-known leader of the successful slave uprising against the French, which eventually led to Haitian independence in 1803 (see, e.g., C.L.R. James 1938).

<sup>27</sup> *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.”

<sup>28</sup> Given the discussion thus far, it can perhaps be argued that Creole Exceptionalism in linguistics, like pro-French and anti-Creole campaigns in Haiti, emerged and survived as an “expression of self-interest.” This is a tempting parallel, whose full exploration goes beyond the scope of the present paper.

<sup>29</sup> As abundantly documented in Bellegarde-Smith 1985, the sort of Francophilia-cum-Creolophobia illustrated by Bellegarde and H. Trouillot are representative of large segments of Haiti’s middle and upper classes (see DeGraff 2001a:99–105). Here are some additional illustrations going back two centuries:

Demesvar Delorme (1831–1901): “Our country waged a long war against France, and yet the country we like best is still France. . . . France speaks the language of human rights and the generous impulses of the soul. . . . Our young nation will be the founder of a new French civilization in the New World” (Delorme 1870 as quoted in Hoffman 1984:61).

Anténor Firmin (1850–1911): “The Haitian who needs to evolve mentally, could not have conceived of a better linguistic tool [than French]” (as quoted in Bellegarde-Smith 1985:51).

Jean Métellus (b. 1937) : “[T]he Creole spoken in the Antilles and the Indian Ocean is a French language, even if it is stripped of all grammatical constraints and remarkably close to children’s speech. Therefore, Creole-speaking Haitians should not claim a simplified system . . . as their only linguistic universe. They ought to appropriate as well ‘traditional’ French, with all its possibilities for expressing representative, dialectic, and symbolic concepts. . . . Creole – a utilitarian language for immediate communication – deprived its users of all the possibilities that fully developed languages offer” (Métellus 1998:123).

<sup>30</sup> Francophilia-cum-Creolophobia has not been an unambiguously unanimous trend among the Haitian intelligentsia. Not only is Francophilia often mixed with a (sometimes folkloric) attachment to Creole culture (as discussed in, e.g., M.-R. Trouillot 1990:116), but throughout Haiti’s history there have been intellectuals who eloquently and passionately articulated pro-African and pro-Creole positions, at least in discourse, if not always in practice. After all, *Négritude* itself may well have been a Haitian invention, minus the label. Consider, for example, the anti-colonial spirit of

Haiti's independence heroes – Toussaint L'Ouverture, Jean-Jacques Dessalines, Henri Christophe, etc. – and the Indigénisme of Jean Price-Mars (1928) and his colleagues; see Césaire 1947 [1983:24f.], Berrou & Pompilus 1978v3:734, Bellegarde-Smith 1985:105, 169. (For a sample of pro-African and/or pro-Creole, and often pre-Négritude, references in Haiti's pre- and post-independence years, see (e.g.) the texts and bibliographies in Madiou 1847; Price-Mars 1928; Berrou & Pompilus 1978:v3, 7–14; H. Trouillot 1980:9; Hoffmann 1984:67–74; Bellegarde-Smith 1985:81, 108, 169; P. Dejan/Dejean 1988:18, 1989:4; M.-R. Trouillot 1990, 1995.)

<sup>31</sup> The universalism advocated by generative linguists does not erase the rich and enriching particularities of the world's distinct languages and cultures. The hunch in modern linguistics is that investigating the roots and limits of these particularities will shed light on the abstract structural-cognitive constraints that every language shares; this is the "university in diversity" slogan (see, e.g., Hymes 1976:21–23, Hale 1992). Universal Grammar in generative linguistics is quite unlike 18th- and 19th-century so-called universalism (e.g., its "human family" trope) which was actually designed to degrade "lesser humans," "natives," "barbarians," "savages," etc. Hegel exposes this fake universalism most straightforwardly: "[I]n reference to [the African character], we must quite give up the principle which naturally accompanies all OUR ideas – the category of Universality" (p. 93; emphasis in original).

<sup>32</sup> There are interesting sociohistorical and sociological parallels between, on the one hand, the Creole-related orthodoxies and, on the other hand, studies of linguistic minorities in the U.S. This was most recently exemplified in the Ebonics debate following the 1996 Oakland School Board's resolution recognizing African-American English as a valid primary language (see, e.g., Rickford 1999 and Smitherman 2000). It must be noted though that, unlike African-American English for Americans in the U.S., HC is the ONLY language for most Haitians in Haiti.

<sup>33</sup> As suggested by Chomsky 1997, as quoted on page 579, the epistemological foundation of Chomskyan linguistics puts Creole speakers' knowledge at the heart of theoretical Creole studies (see Chomsky 1964:28, 1965:24f., 1975:95f., 101–3). The crucial methodological import of native speakers' knowledge is shared by linguists across theoretical affiliations, from Neogrammarians, to anthropological linguists, to structuralist behaviorists. For a sample of linguists who put native speakers' knowledge at the epistemological center of their research, see, e.g., 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. See DeGraff 2001a:102f and Dejean to appear for further discussion of native speakers' contributions to linguistics with focus on studies of Haitian Creole.

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(Received 27 July 2002; accepted 25 October 2002; final revision received 1 December 2004)