

The Languages of Africa and the Diaspora

NEW PERSPECTIVES ON LANGUAGE AND EDUCATION

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NEW PERSPECTIVES ON LANGUAGE AND EDUCATION
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The Languages of Africa and the Diaspora

Educating for Language Awareness

Edited by
Jo Anne Kleifgen and George C. Bond

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**In memory of our parents
Mildred Hovig Kleifgen and Arthur F. Kleifgen
Ruth Clement Bond and J. Max Bond**

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Chapter 7

Creole Exceptionalism and the (Mis)Education of the Creole Speaker

MICHEL DEGRAFF

A recent article in the *Miami Herald* (Bailey, 2006) described the efforts of a local elementary school to incorporate Haitian Creole as a language of instruction alongside English for Creole-speaking Haitian students. The article argued that the early use of Creole in the classroom is critical to the education of Creole-speaking children. This article caused a stir among readers, and subsequent letters to the article's author, Peter Bailey, contained comments such as:

- '[T]hat lousy, disgusting Creole ... is not even a legitimate language. It's just badly bastardized French.'
- 'Creole is not even a language. It is slave lingo.'
- 'Why on earth are we spending public funds to teach kids in school the language of peasants?'
- 'The absence in Creole of complex concepts and fine shadings of meaning should suggest that it is fine if Haitian parents want to speak it at home, but it should not be "taught" in schools any more than "Spanglish" or "Ebonics" should be.'

These comments convey more than negative attitudes about a language; the comments are riddled with demeaning remarks related to race and class. Faced with such virulent anti-Creole attitudes, how should linguists and educators respond? Although one might assume that linguists are in a good position to help change these false beliefs about Creole languages and their speakers, a change in attitude towards Creoles must start in linguistics itself, which, historically, has played a major role in producing and maintaining these beliefs.

In this chapter, I examine ways in which what I call 'Creole Exceptionalism' beliefs, going back to the 19th century, have been manufactured and transmitted over time by linguists. In this context, I show how Creole Exceptionalism has historically been a means of maintaining power. Then I survey theoretical and empirical arguments that show that these beliefs

are, indeed, false, and that Creoles are on a par with other languages. Finally, I argue that the lack of understanding about the legitimacy of Creole languages as valued resources in the classroom and elsewhere comes at a great social cost for the education of Creole speakers. In the conclusion, I propose a few directions for change.

Some Definitions and Facts

The term *Creole languages* typically, though not exclusively, refers to the speech varieties that were created in many of the emerging communities in and around the colonial forts and plantations of Africa and the 'New World' from the 15th to 19th centuries. In the New World, these Creole communities emerged relatively abruptly as the result of Europe's colonization of the Caribbean, subsequent to Columbus's expeditions. Caribbean Creole languages thus developed among Europeans and Africans. They are linguistic side effects of a peculiar type of 'globalization', so to speak – the slave trade and other mercantilist practices by the Europeans (British, French, Portuguese, Dutch and Spanish) in Africa and the Americas. In modern linguistics, the term is often extended to include any new language variety that is considered to have emerged relatively abruptly from contact between groups of speakers of distinct languages. Under this extended definition, there are some 20 million speakers of Creole languages worldwide, including the Greater Caribbean, the USA. (e.g. Louisiana Creole, Gullah in the Sea Islands of Georgia and South Carolina, Hawaiian Creole), Africa, the Indian Ocean and the Pacific. Strikingly, most of these languages are located around the Equator. This geographical significance is not accidental; the term arose as a result of Europe's imperialist expansion into tropical lands. But, can a linguistic-structural concept be validly assigned a geographical correlate, when language contact occurs everywhere? Could there be typological features that are exclusively reserved for languages that grew out of colonization?

In this chapter, I draw on data from Haitian Creole, my native language. It is one of the most extensively studied Creole languages, and it is the Creole language with the largest community of speakers. Haitian Creole emerged during the second half of the 17th century out of contact between the regional and colloquial varieties of French, as spoken by the European colonists, and the various African languages of the Niger-Congo spoken by the Africans that were enslaved and then brought across the Atlantic to work on Caribbean colonial plantations and the related colonial infrastructure. Haitian Creole is Haiti's national language and, since 1987, a constitutionally-recognized official language, alongside French. However,

most official documents in Haiti are still written exclusively in French to the detriment of monolingual Creolophones, even though French is spoken today by only about one-fifth of the population. These French-only policies effectively create a situation of 'linguistic apartheid', which mirrors Haiti's long-standing social apartheid (P. Dejean, 1989, 1993; see also Trouillot, 1990). In Haiti, the use of French by a small but powerful élite is still used to keep monolingual Creole speakers – the vast numerical but disenfranchised majority – away from the halls of power.

For many linguists, Creole languages are an exceptional window on the difficult-to-observe processes of language creation and evolution. Linguists' goals with regard to Creoles might seem lofty – to use these allegedly rapidly-emergent languages to understand how the human mind works. Yet, these exceptionalist beliefs (about Creoles' unique scientific potential) have implications that converge with the attitudes expressed in the aforementioned letters to the *Miami Herald*.

A variety of linguistic dogmas, going back to the 19th century, have maintained that Creoles constitute a special class of languages because of their grammatical structures (or lack thereof) or the ways in which these structures have emerged in the course of history. In one of the earlier studies of Creole languages, it was claimed that:

[Creole grammar] is, therefore, a spontaneous product of the human mind, freed from any kind of intellectual culture. ... But when one studies its structure, one is so very surprised, very charmed by its rigor and simplicity that one wonders if the creative genius of the most knowledgeable linguists would have been able to give birth to anything that so completely reaches its goal, that imposes so little strain on memory and that calls for so little effort from those with limited intelligence. (Saint-Quentin, 1872/1989: 40f; my translation)

In a related vein, the current orthodoxy considers Creoles as quint-essentially exotic linguistic neonates, as opposed to 'normal' languages: only the latter are 'old' languages (i.e. languages with ancient pedigrees), whereas Creoles are often considered the world's youngest languages that fall outside the family tree of 'normal' languages. They do not appear in any of the family trees of languages in the classic linguistics texts (e.g. Bendor-Samuel & Hartell, 1989; Crystal, 1987; Fromkin & Rodman, 1993). In somewhat 'Neo'-Darwinian fashion, these exceptionalist claims often correlate Creoles' alleged youth with extraordinarily reduced ('primitive') structures that limit their expressiveness and render them unusable for 'serious' purposes in the modern world. This brand of Creole Exceptionalism is an instance of linguistic 'utopia'... or 'anti-utopia' perhaps, depending on, for

example, whether or not the observer is a (monolingual) Creole speaker or an individual who stands to benefit from a world order where Creole languages are considered and treated as deficient.

A Sampling of Creole-genesis Theories: Contesting Three Canonical Tropes

Here I lay out three different kinds of theory that claim Creole languages to be special, and I show why they are flawed. The first and most widespread view about Creole languages, especially among the general public (such as the readers who sent complaints to the *Miami Herald* about the use of Creole to teach school children), is that they are degenerate – ‘broken’ – varieties of European languages. For example, Haitian Creole and Jamaican Creole (aka Patwa) are often considered ‘broken French’ and ‘broken English’ respectively. This degeneracy view was the received wisdom in the comparative-historical linguistics of the 17th through 19th centuries, as summarized in scientific encyclopedia entries such as Larousse (1869: 490), where Creole is defined as ‘corrupted French’. Similar views are rehearsed in scholarly works throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. Meillet, for example, 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. (Meillet, 1924/1951: 68)

This degenerate descendant view was made most (in)famous and most explicit by Bloomfield, who stated:

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. ... When the jargon [among Negro slaves in many parts of America] has become the only language of the subject group, it is a creolized language. 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. (Bloomfield, 1933: 472–474)

Even in the latter half of the 20th century, certain linguists still claim that structural and linguistic factors such as incapacitating ‘morphological simplicity’ and a ‘vocabulary [that] is extremely poor’ are among the ‘greatest obstacles to the blossoming of Creoles’ (Valdman, 1978: 345; see also Seuren, 1998; Seuren & Wekker, 1986).¹

A second exceptionalist view states that Creoles are hybrid languages: African grammars clothed in European-sounding words. The earliest proponent of such a view is perhaps Lucien Adam in 1883 for whom Cayenne Creole grammar, for example, 'is nothing but the general grammar of the languages of Guinée [in West Africa].' For Adam (1883: 4–5), 'African grammatical habits prevented them from adopting French grammar': such 'African grammatical habits' were viewed as too 'primitive' and 'children-like' in comparison with those of speakers of languages such as Sanskrit, Latin and French. In a related vein, the Haitian linguist Suzanne Sylvain states that Haitian Creole is 'French vocabulary in the mold of African syntax or ... an Ewe dialect with French lexicon' (Sylvain, 1936: 178). Sylvain, like Adam in 1883, readily assumes 'early crystallization of the mental powers of the Black race' as key factor in the formation of Haitian Creole (Sylvain 1936: 36f). A contemporary descendent of Adam's hybridization theory, and one that is fortunately removed from both Adam's and Sylvain's problematic race-theoretical stipulations, is Lefebvre's (1998) Relexification Hypothesis. According to the latter, Creole creators as adult language learners adopt, and adapt, words – or just phonetic strings – from the target European language (called the *lexifier* or *superstrate* language) and overlay these European-derived phonetic strings on the syntax and semantics of their native African languages (called the *substrate* languages), with the grammar of the latter transferred virtually intact into the newly-created Creole languages. This view appears in the popular press, as well. It was recently claimed in the *Times Literary Supplement* that:

[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 [Haitian Creole], a creole which appears to be composed of French vocabulary overlaid on the grammar of the African language Ewe. (Greppin, 2002)

Let us examine some basic comparative data from both lexicon and morphology (DeGraff, 2001a; Fattier, 1998) to judge whether there is really a bottleneck for lexical and morphological development in the history of Creoles – a bottleneck that would make Creoles, as the above tropes suggest, degenerate varieties or special hybrids. With respect to hybridity, the data that follow demonstrate that English, in its lexicon and morphology, has 'out-creoled' Haitian Creole. We begin with Modern English – a non-Creole language and one that is usually taken to descend from its Germanic ancestor by 'normal' processes of language change, which make English a so-called 'genetic' language in the terminology of historical linguists. We show here that English, at the very least in its

lexicon and morphology, is substantially much more ‘mixed’ than Haitian Creole – a so-called ‘non-genetic’ language (i.e. one that allegedly was not created by ‘normal’ processes of language change). In some estimates, the lexicon of English is 65% non-Germanic, much of it due to the Norman French invasion in 1066 and its socio-historical correlates. The etymology of a sampling from the English lexicon and morphology follows:

French-based Lexicon:

- (1) battle (*bataille*), ally (*allié*), alliance (*alliance*), admiral (*amiral*), march (*marche*), enemy (*ennemi*), peace (*paix*) ... ;
- (2) judge (*judge*), jury (*jury*), justice (*justice*), court (*court*), defendant (*défendant*), crime (*crime*), petty (*petit*), marriage (*mariage*) ... ;
- (3) clergy (*clergé*), altar (*autel*), miracle (*miracle*), pray (*prier*), sermon (*sermon*), virgin (*vierge*), saint (*saint*), friar (*frère*) ... ;
- (4) cuisine (*cuisine*), sauce (*sauce*), boil (*bouillir*), filet (*filet*), soup (soup), pastry (*pâtisserie*), fry (*frire*), roast (*rôtir*) ... ;

French-based morphology:

- (5) -or (-*eur* as in *dictateur*), -tion (as in *célébration*), -ment (as in *déguisement*);
- (6) -ee (as in *payée*), -able (as in *agréable*), -age (as in *espionnage*) ... ;

English also contains borrowings from Latin, among many additional languages:

Latin-based Lexicon:

- (7) kitchen (*coquina*), pan (*panna*), cup (*cuppa*), dish (*discas*), parsley (*petrosileum*) ... ;
- (8) priest (*presbyter*), bishop (*episcopus*), nun (*nonna*), angel (*angelus*) ... ;

Latin-based morphology:

- (9) ex- (*ex* as in *expatriare*), pre- (*præ* as in *preceptor*), pro- (*pro* as in *proclamare*), dis- (*dis* as in *disjunctio*), re-, (*re* as in *recreate*), inter- (*inter* as in *intermuralis*)....

(For other and easily accessible examples of this sort, see Vajda, n.d.)

In contrast with English, the etymology of most of the Haitian Creole lexicon (over 90%) is unmistakably French (Fattier, 1998). The same observation applies to morphology: virtually all Haitian Creole affixes have cognates in French affixes, whereas English has many affixes and many words, of non-Germanic origins. So is English more of a ‘Creole’ than Haitian Creole?

A third view is that Creoles are the results of a catastrophic and abnormal

break in transmission. This third view, like the first two, has antecedents in 19th-century Creole studies – recall Saint-Quentin's (1872/1989: 40f) above-quoted statement that Creole grammar is a 'spontaneous product of the human mind, freed from any kind of intellectual culture.' This third view, which is perhaps the most spectacular instance of Creole Exceptionalism, has received the most press, not only among linguists, but also among anthropologists, psychologists and evolution theorists. According to this hypothesis, the 'normal' transmission of language is broken in the Pidgin-to-Creole life cycle. Basic introductory linguistics texts such as O'Grady *et al.* promote this view:

Contact situations where speakers have restricted access to each other's language can sometimes lead to the formation of a pidgin – a rudimentary language with minimal grammatical rules and a small lexicon. By definition, a pidgin has no native speakers and many pidgins are predominantly used as a lingua franca. (O'Grady *et al.*, 2001: 578)

The textbook goes on to assert 'If their children [i.e. children of pidgin speakers] then learn the pidgin as a first language and it is adopted as the native language of the new community, it becomes a Creole and is no longer considered a pidgin. When a Pidgin becomes a creole, its inventory of lexical items and grammatical rules expands dramatically, usually in only one or two generations' (2001: 579f).

It is thus that Creoles are set apart from non-Creoles. Creoles are considered to have emerged 'non-genetically' (i.e. with a Pidgin ancestor) through some abnormal and catastrophic 'break in transmission' whereas non-Creoles are considered to have evolved gradually and 'genetically' via the 'normal transmission' of a full-fledged (i.e. non-Pidgin) language. Creolists often postulate that one prominent exceptional/abnormal process in the history of a Creole is the elimination of (virtually) all morphology from the output of pidginization (see Bickerton, 1984; Hjelmslev, 1938; Jespersen, 1922; McWhorter, 1998; Seuren, 1998; Seuren & Wekker, 1986). Pidgins, in other words, are structurally impoverished languages without any morphology, so the subsequent Creoles had to create their morphological apparatus *ab ovo*.

In its most extreme form, this spontaneous-and-catastrophic-creation view turns Creoles into observable replicas of the earliest human languages in the evolutionary history of *Homo sapiens*. Bickerton has now argued that the catastrophic birth of Creoles from Pidgins recapitulates the first (i.e. most primitive) evolutionary stages of language evolution. The Pidgin-to-Creole cycle would thus approximate the transition, at the prehistoric dawn of our humanity, from *Homo erectus*' pre-human protolanguage to *Homo sapiens*' first human language. Creole speakers now become linguistic 'Adams and

Eves' and the colonial Caribbean an edenic utopia. Bickerton's hypothesis is popularized in the print media such as in *Newsweek*: 'Creole languages are the missing linguistic fossils ... the equivalent of the Galapagos to Darwin' (Begley, 1982) and in the *New York Times* quoting McWhorter: 'I suspect that [Creoles] most approximate some of the early languages. Creoles begin as Pidgin languages Creoles ... are the only languages which have started again' (Dreifus, 2001). In effect, Creole languages now become living linguistic fossils, one generation removed from the structureless Pidgin speech that allegedly resembles the protolanguage of our evolutionary ancestors. This is the most spectacular exceptionist scenario whereby Creoles are assigned a *sui generis* typological class.

This third view of Creole genesis can be proven flawed with a variety of linguistic data, including lexical, morphological and syntactic evidence. First, let us contrast the empirical claims about 'break in transmission' with the following samples of Haitian Creole word-formation through affixation, compounding, reduplication and apocope (from DeGraff, 2001a):

Prefixation:

- (1) *de-* (cf. Fr *de-*), as in *derespekte* 'to disrespect, to insult' (cf. *respekte* 'to respect'), *dekreta* 'to cut off the crest' (cf. *krèt* n. 'crest') and *debaba* 'to mow down' (cf. *baba* adj. 'mute'; variant of *bèbè*);
- (2) *en-* (cf. Fr *in-*), as in *enkoutab* adj. 'foolhardy' (cf. *koute* 'to listen');
- (3) *ti-* (cf. Fr *petit*), as in *Ti-Yèyèt*, *Ti-Sonson* and *ti-chouchou*.

Suffixation:

- (4) *-te* (cf. Fr *-té*), as in *bèlte* 'beauty' (cf. *bèl* 'beautiful'), *frekanste* 'insolence' (cf. *frekan* 'insolent'), *lèdte* 'ugliness' (cf. *lèd* 'ugly'), *saftte* 'greed' (cf. *saf* 'greedy');
- (5) *-ay* (variant: *-aj*) (cf. Fr *-age*), as in *plasay* (variant: *plasa*) n. 'concubinage' (cf. *plase* 'to live in concubinage');
- (6) *-è* (cf. Fr *eur*), as in *djolé* n. 'boaster' (cf. *djòl* n. 'mouth');
- (7) *-èt* (cf. Fr *-ette*), as in *Boukinèt* (cf. *Bouki*) and *bòlèt* n. 'lottery' and *boul* (*-bòlèt*) 'lottery number, ball';
- (8) *-syon* (cf. Fr *-tion*), as in *admirasyon* (cf. *admire* 'to admire') and *tribilasyon* 'tribulation';
- (9) verbal marker *-e(n)* (cf. Fr *-er*), as in *gade* 'to look', *admire* 'to admire', *mennen* 'to bring', *mache* 'to walk' (cf. *mach* n. 'march, step/stairs'), *grennen* 'to shell out' (cf. *grenn* n. 'grain');
- (10) nominalizer *-man* (cf. Fr *-ment*), as in *kozman* n. 'talk, gossip' (cf. *koze* 'to talk');
- (11) adverbializer *-man* (cf. Fr *-merit*), as in *kòrèkteman* adv. (cf. *kòrèk* adj. 'correct');

- (12) suffixation plus gender inflection with *-en/-èn* (cf. Fr *-en/-enne*), as in the pair *Dominiken/Dominikèn* n. (cf. *Dominikani* n. 'Dominican Republic').

Other:

- (13) compounding, as in *kòk-batay* 'fighting cock';
(14) reduplication, as in *Ti-Yèyèt*, *Ti-Sonson*, *ti-chouchou* 'little darling' (affectionate) and *mache-mache* 'to walk a lot' (intensifying);
(15) apocope, as in *gen*, which is the short form of *genyen*.

It is instructive to note that, in (1), *-te* as in *bèlte* 'beauty' from *bèl* 'beautiful' is an abstraction marker par excellence: it derives nouns of quality from adjectives that describe qualities. This contradicts the oft-repeated claims by linguists such as Whinnom (1971: 109), who states that 'what cannot be generated very successfully by the combination of concrete words is abstract terms, in which it is notorious that pidgins and creoles are deficient', thus 'there may be some reason to suspect that the creole-speaker is handicapped by his language'.

The data presented here show that there was no etymological 'break in transmission' in the history of Haitian Creole. The overwhelming majority of Haitian Creole morphemes (whether free or bound) have French cognates. If we consider the inventory of Haitian Creole affixes, alongside the fact that most of these affixes have origins in French, then it is most unlikely that these affixes would have been created from the linguistic scratch of an affixless pidgin. Nor is there evidence for relexification in the history of the Haitian Creole lexicon and morphology – at least, not for *massive* relexification of the sort that is claimed in Lefebvre (1998).

Further, the basic comparative morphosyntactic data (from DeGraff, 2000, 2005a) disconfirm the orthodox dichotomy between Creole languages and non-Creole languages. In comparing the formation of Haitian Creole structures from French with the formation of Modern English structures from earlier varieties of English, it is clear that Haitian Creole cannot be taken to have evolved via some exceptional processes that would make creolization radically different from 'normal' processes of language change.

Let's start our comparison by focusing on the distribution of the nominal complements of verbs in Haitian Creole. These objects of the verb uniformly *follow* the verb that take them as complements, giving rise to the uniform word-order pattern *subject...verb...object* (SVO) as in examples (16) and (17):

- (16) *Bouki* *konnen* *Boukinèt*.
Bouki know Boukinèt
'Bouki knows Boukinet.'

- (17) *Bouki* *konnen* *li*
Bouki know 3rd sg
'Bouki knows him/her/it.'

Note that pre-verbal pronouns are ungrammatical in Haitian Creole:

- (18) **Bouki*² *li* *konnen*.

In contrast, standard French has post-verbal noun-phrase objects as in (19) but it also exhibits pre-verbal pronominal objects as in (20):

- (19) *Bouqui* *connaît* *Bouquinette*
Bouqui know Bouquinette
'Bouqui knows Bouquinette.'

- (20) *Bouqui* *la* *connaît*.
Bouqui 3rd sg-f know
'Bouqui knows her.'

Post-verbal pronouns are ungrammatical in standard French declarative clauses:

- (21) **Bouqui connaît* *la*.

The next set of data compares the placement of verb vis-à-vis certain adverbs and the negation marker *pa(s)* in the two languages. Here we can see that in Haitian Creole these adverbs and the negation marker *pa* consistently precede the verb:

- (22) *Bouki* *deja* *konnen* *Boukinèt*.
Bouki already know Boukinèt
'Bouki already knows Boukinèt.'

- (23) *Bouki* *pa* *konnen* *Boukinèt*.
Bouki NEG know Boukinèt
'Bouki doesn't know Boukinèt.'

Note that these adverbs and the negation marker cannot intervene between the verb and its object:

- (24) **Bouki* *konnen* *deja* *Boukinèt*.

- (25) **Bouki* *konnen* *pa* *Boukinèt*.

In contrast, verb placement in French follows a different pattern: it is actually the mirror image of the Haitian pattern. In French, the finite verb precedes the corresponding adverbs and the negation marker *pas*:

- (26) *Bouqui connaît déjà Bouquinette.*
 Bouqui know already Bouquinette
 'Bouqui already knows Bouquinette.'
- (27) Bouqui (ne) connaît pas Bouquinette.
 Bouqui NEG know NEG Bouquinette
 'Bouqui doesn't know Bouquinette.'

In French, unlike in Haitian Creole, these adverbs and the negation marker *pas* cannot precede the finite verb:

- (28) **Bouqui déjà connaît Bouquznette.*
 (29) **Bouqui (ne) pas connaît Bouquznette.*

Finally, unlike French, there are no suffixes on Haitian Creole verbs for marking features such as concord and tense. In Haitian Creole, the tense-mood-aspect markers (e.g. *te* which marks anterior, *ap* which marks future or progressive depending on the verb, and *a(va)* which marks irrealis³ mood) are independent words that precede the verb they modify. (Also compare with English tense-mood-aspect free morphemes such as *will* and *would*, as in *she will walk* and *she would walk*, and contrast with English agreement and tense suffixes such as *-s* and *-ed*, as in *she walks* and *she walked*):

- (30) { *Mwen* | *Ou* | *Li* | *Nou* | *Yo* } *konnen Boukinèt.*
 1sg | 2sg | 3sg | 1pl/2pl | 3pl know Boukinèt
 '{I | You | He/She | We | They } know(s) Boukinèt.'
- (31) *Boukinèt te renmen Bouki.*
 Boukinèt ANT renmen Bouki
 'Boukinèt loved Bouki.'
- (32) *Boukinèt ap renmen Bouki.*
 Boukinèt FUT love Bouki
 'Boukinèt will love Bouki.'
- (33) *Boukinèt a renmen Bouki si ...*
 Boukinèt IRR love Bouki if ...
 'Boukinèt would love Bouki if ...'

Compare these structures with concord and tense suffixes in (Standard) French, which shows the following patterns:

- (34) *J'aime* '1sg love + 1sg' *Nous aimons* '1pl love + 1p'
Tu aimes '2sg love + 2sg' *Vous aimez* '2pl love + 2p'
Il/Elle aime '3sg + m/f love + 3sg' *Ils/Elles aiment* '3pl+m/f love + 3p'

- (35) *Bouquinette aim-ait Bouqui*
 Bouquinette loved Bouqui
- (36) *Bouquinette aim-era Bouqui*
 Bouquinette will love Bouqui
- (37) *Bouquinette aim-erait Bouqui si ...*
 Bouquinette would love Bouqui if

The Haitian Creole and French structural contrasts illustrated above are summarized in Table 7.1.

Now compare the above French/Creole differences with similar differences in the history of English – a ‘genetic’ language.

Modern English is like Haitian Creole in having its negation marker and certain adverbs occur regularly in the position that *precedes* the verb and in not allowing these adverbs and the negation marker to occur between the verb and its object. Yet, Modern English, like Haitian Creole, has an ancestor where these adverbs and the negation marker regularly occurred to the *right* of the finite verb, thus intervening between the verb and its object, if any. This is exemplified in line 1744 from Chaucer’s *Merchant’s Tale*, ‘Quene Ester looked never with switch an eye’ (Kroch, 1989). Similar examples abound where, in its earlier historical stages, English allowed certain adverbs and the negation marker to *follow* the finite verb – a verb-placement pattern that is *not* allowed in Modern English (nor in Haitian Creole). Thus there isn’t anything particularly ‘Creole’ about the fact that Haitian Creole has the adverb-verb and *pa*-verb word-order patterns while its French ancestor has the verb-adverb and verb-*pas* word-order patterns, as illustrated above. Like Haitian Creole, Modern English, a non-Creole language, has the adverb-verb and negation-verb word-order patterns

Table 7.1 Haitian Creole and French structural contrasts

	<i>Haitian Creole</i>	<i>French</i>
verb object pronoun	OK	NOT OK
object pronoun verb	NOT OK	OK
negation marker / adverb finite verb object	OK	NOT OK
finite verb negation marker / adverb object	NOT OK	OK
tense-mood-aspect marker verbal suffixes	NOT OK	OK

with its Middle English ancestor exhibiting the verb-adverb and verb-negation word-order patterns.

Besides, Middle English exhibited multiple inflectional affixes on its verbs with forms such as *showe^{de}dest* with two consecutive suffixes (*-ed* for tense and *-est* for 2nd-singular concord) somewhat like Modern French *nous aimions* 'we loved' with *-i* a tense suffix and *-ons* a 1st plural concord suffix. Thus, in the history of English, as in the history of Haitian Creole, there has been a reduction in the inventory of suffixes that can attach to the verb to indicate tense-mood-aspect or subject-verb concord.

Similar parallels obtain between the history of Haitian Creole and the history of English in the domain of object placement. Old English, for example had pre-verbal object pronouns like Modern French has today, yet in Modern English, objects are now uniformly post-verbal as in Haitian Creole (see DeGraff, 2005a for additional details).

Given the above comparative data, the patterns of verb placement, object placement and verbal inflectional affixes in the formation of Haitian Creole fall within developmental scenarios that are instantiated in the history of non-Creole languages. In other words, these patterns in Haitian Creole history do not instantiate any sort of 'discontinuity' that would set 'creolization' apart from other instances of language development/change over time. There is no rigorous algorithm that can reliably measure the structural discontinuity that is to serve as a litmus test for distinguishing the history of Creoles from the history of non-Creoles. The above data thus dismantle the exceptionalist claim that the kind of discontinuity manifested in Creole genesis is of a significantly distinct nature in comparison to the kind of discontinuities manifested in the history of so-called 'normal' or 'genetic' languages. The above-mentioned discontinuities in the history of English seem as spectacular as, or perhaps even more spectacular than, those in the history of Haitian Creole.

Toward Post-Colonial Creolistics: Taking a Cartesian-Uniformitarian Approach

One fundamental characteristic of the study of Creole languages (aka 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 enslavement) and its ensuing dualisms vis-à-vis the (non)humanity of those who were deemed 'slaves by nature'. 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 and 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)

The three tropes in the discourse of Creole Exceptionalism that I have laid out in this chapter can be related historically to the ideological climate of the colonial and neocolonial 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) and to pre- and post-Schleicherian-Darwinian views on both human evolution and language evolution (DeGraff, 2001a, 2001b, 2003, 2004).

Yet, our best available evidence, alongside 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. Thus Creole Exceptionalism is a set of socio-historically 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*.

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. DeGraff, 2005a, 2005b; Mufwene,

2001; Muysken, 1988; Posner, 1985): '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 everywhere.

[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, 1999: 477)

The theoretical antidote to Creole Exceptionalism beliefs can be found in what I have dubbed 'Cartesian-Uniformitarian' approaches to Creole languages. By 'Cartesian-Uniformitarian', I mean linguistic approaches that can 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). 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'. 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'. 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, for example, 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 Haitian Creole as 'prototypical' test case, see DeGraff, 2000, 2001a, 2001b, 2002, 2005a, 2005b).

Contesting Creole Exceptionalism in the (Mis)Education of Creole Speakers

Neo-colonial and exceptionalist creolistics eventually infringes on the human rights of Creole speakers. The beliefs of Creole Exceptionalism that are critiqued in this chapter and elsewhere have long served to justify the

widespread exclusion of 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 all Haitians speak Haitian Creole and the vast majority speak only Haitian Creole, and where Haitian Creole is an official language on a par with French. The non-use or limited use of Haitian Creole 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 Haitian Creole in the schools and in other formal spheres effectively make monolingual Haitian Creole speakers second-class citizens. As other contributors to this volume demonstrate, there are revealing socio-historical and sociological parallels between Creole-related orthodoxies and studies of linguistic minorities in the US such as the case of speakers of African American English (e.g. Baugh, 2000, Chapter 12 this volume; Rickford, 1999; Wolfram, 2007, Chapter 14 this volume).

How can postcolonial linguistics as a discipline help fight such stigmatization in education? In Cartesian-Uniformitarian linguistics, the mental bases of language acquisition (i.e. ‘Universal Grammar’) are similar across the entire human species and across recent time (say, the past 50,000 years). If we accept this view, then Creole languages cannot be singled out structurally. 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 non-egalitarian paradigms of much work in contemporary creolistics whereby Creole languages are effectively devalued as ‘beginning’ languages, ‘less advanced’ languages, ‘simplest’ languages, ‘abnormal’ languages, ‘broken’ languages, ‘corrupted’ languages and so on.

In terms of pedagogy, Universal Grammar leaves no room for the 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 socio-cultural and economic sense. 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, especially through education.

Post-colonial creolistics must invest in this Universal Grammar-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 re-evaluation 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, for much of Haiti's history, quite successfully kept the monolingual Haitian Creole-speaking at bay as incompetent or as failures, notwithstanding the fact that these monolingual Creole speakers are the vast numerical majority of the population.

The return on investment in our Creole capital may, in the future, 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. From the perspective of Cartesian-Uniformitarian linguistics and contrary to the myths surveyed in this chapter and elsewhere, there is no reason to believe that Creole structures constitute an intrinsic intellectual handicap that irremediably blocks intellectual and socioeconomic progress for Creole speakers. In fact, there do exist educational virtues in using Creole languages in the education of Creole speakers (for the case of Haiti, see Y. Dejean, 1975, 1993, 1997, 1999; I. Dejan, 2006). 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, for example, Hale, 1972; Honda & O'Neil, 1993).

More generally, we can apply our improved knowledge to new and truly progressive educational practice and pedagogy. Worldwide, 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, for example, Y. Dejean, 1985, 1997, 1999; I. Dejan, 1995, 2006; P. Dejan, 1988; P. Dejean, 1989, and most recently Féquière Vilsaint's prolific library of pedagogical texts in Haitian Creole (as listed on <http://www.educavision.com/>).

Given Caribbean history and the history of Creole studies, these efforts seem to require nothing less than embracing a Foucauldian antidote:

‘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. ... The essential political problem for the intellectual [e.g. linguists and educators] is ... ascertaining the possibility of constituting a new politics of truth [toward] changing ... the political, economic, institutional régime of the production of truth. (Foucault, 1980: 133)

We can educate parents, teachers, Creole-speaking children and ourselves about the intrinsic value of Haitian Creole and other Creoles as powerful linguistic resources. This is, of course, a tall order, but the arguments set forth here can, I hope, be a small step toward achieving this goal.

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This chapter is partly an abbreviated and adapted version of arguments presented in DeGraff, 2005b.

Note

1. For a detailed review of a number of degeneracy claims spanning four centuries of Creole studies, see DeGraff, 2001a, 2001b, 2005b.
2. The asterisk indicates that the phrase or sentence structure is unacceptable/ungrammatical to the native speaker’s ear.
3. Irrealis mood is the way in which the grammar of a language indicates that the situation described by the corresponding clause has not (yet) happened at the time of speech.

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