

drastic opposition and **INEQUALITY** between the dominant and dominated groups – speakers of the European *superstrate* and the African *substrate* languages, respectively. At the opposite end, the superstrate and substrate speakers had relatively intimate interactions, especially during the settlement period when substrate speakers were outnumbered by, and in relatively close contact and interdependence with, superstrate speakers and then, throughout the colonial period, among and around the groups that played an intermediate *buffer* role race- and class-wise. These continua would entail, throughout colonial history, corresponding continua of second-language (L2) learner varieties of the superstrate language. These non-native varieties, alongside native varieties, of the superstrate language would in turn become the target for increasingly numerous cohorts of native Creole speakers (DeGraff 2002, 374–94; 2005b, 2009).

My working assumption is uniformitarian: Normal processes of first- and **SECOND-LANGUAGE ACQUISITION** (L2A) and use have underlaid the formation of Creoles as they have the formation of non-Creoles. The sociohistorical evidence, as documented by (e.g.) Salikoko Mufwene (2008), suggests that Caribbean Creoles were not seeded by any sort of structureless **PIDGINS** (i.e., these Creoles were not created with input from early Pidgins allegedly spoken by the parents of the first generation of Creole speakers). Such early Pidgins as the *immediate* predecessors of Caribbean Creoles have never been documented, and neither does the contemporary structural evidence support the postulation of such Pidgins as the primary ancestors of Caribbean Creoles (see the following).

Creole Exceptionalism

The term “Creole exceptionalism” (DeGraff 2003) covers a subset of long-standing hypotheses whereby Creole languages constitute a *sui generis* class on phylogenetic and/or structural grounds. Here is a sample:

- (i) Creoles are “degenerate offshoots” of their European ancestors;
- (ii) Creoles are “special hybrids” with exceptional genealogy;
- (iii) Creoles are the only contemporary languages with a history of “abnormal transmission” that deprives them of any structurally full-fledged ancestors.
- (iv) The Pidgin-to-Creole transition recapitulates the transition from pre-human protolanguage to human language.

(For a fuller development of these arguments, see DeGraff 2005a, 2009.)

Creoles as “Degenerate Offshoots”? It’s only in the latter part of the twentieth century that linguists started refuting the received wisdom that Creoles are structurally impoverished variants of their European *norms*. In Julien Vinson’s scientific dictionary (1889, 345–6), “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.” For Leonard

CREOLES

SocioHistorical, Terminological, and Epistemological Background

The concept *Creole* has not been operationalized with rigorous and reliable criteria in linguistic theory. At best, it is a sociohistorically and politically motivated concept, often misidentified as linguistic (DeGraff 2005b, 2009; Mufwene 2008).

Etymologically, the word *Creole* derives from the Portuguese *crioulo* and/or Spanish *criollo* “raised in the home” (from *criar* “to raise, to breed”). In Caribbean history, the labeling of biological species, including humans, as “Creole” seems to have preceded the labeling as “Creole” of certain speech varieties. Both uses referred to nonindigenous varieties that developed *locally*, in contrast to their counterparts from Europe and Africa. The original uses of the word were thus devoid of any specific structural correlates (Mufwene 2001, 3–11; Chaudenson and Mufwene 2001, Chap. 1).

In keeping with this original usage and to avoid circularity and the sort of controversial linguistic assumptions that are noted in Mufwene 2008, I here ostensibly use *Creole* as a label for certain speech varieties that became emblematic of the newly created communities – the Creole communities – on and around colonial Caribbean plantations. These are the classic Creole languages.

Caribbean Creole languages developed mostly among Europeans and Africans via language acquisition by adults and children in a complex mix of language-**CONTACT** settings. The complex sociohistorical factors therein included a continuum of social divides and power asymmetries (Chaudenson and Mufwene 2001). One end of this continuum was marked by

Bloomfield (1933, 472), "The creolized language has the status of an inferior dialect of the masters' speech."

Even in the latter half of the twentieth century, certain linguists claimed that structural linguistic factors, related to (e.g.) "morphological simplicity" and a "vocabulary [that] is extremely poor," are among the "greatest obstacles to the blossoming of Creoles" (Valdman 1978, 345; cf. Whinnom 1971, 110; Samarin 1980, 221; Seuren and Wekker 1986; and Quint 1997, 58). Pieter Seuren (1998, 292) has elevated the alleged extraordinary simplicity of Creole languages to "historical universal."

There is no reliable empirical or theoretical basis for the claim that Creole languages are uniformly less complex than their European ancestors. For example, certain aspects of my native Haitian Creole (HC) signal an increase in complexity to the extent that these properties of HC have no counterpart in French, HC's European ancestor (DeGraff 2001b, 284). Furthermore, HC, like any other language, expands its vocabulary as needed, via productive affixation, neologisms, borrowings, and so on (DeGraff 2001a; Fattier 1998).

CREOLES AS "SPECIAL HYBRIDS"? Lucien Adam's (1883) *hybridologie linguistique* hypothesis posited different linguistic templates for different races. The latter belong to distinct evolutionary rungs, with their respective linguistic templates ranked in a corresponding hierarchy of complexity. Upon language contact, these templates will cross-fertilize (i.e., "hybridize"), and 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 complexity on the hybrid grammar. In such scenario, the European contribution to the hybridization of European and non-European languages is limited to superficial traits, such as the phonetic shapes of words – only these shapes, and not the complex grammars of European languages, can be acquired by the allegedly inferior minds of the non-Europeans.

Claire Lefebvre's (1998) relexification hypothesis is far removed from Adam's race-theoretical postulates. For Lefebvre, it is because the Africans in Haiti "had very limited access" to French that they were virtually unable to learn any aspect of French grammar. Thus, they could only overlay French-derived phonetic strings on their native substrate grammars, with the latter being kept nearly intact in the original Creole languages.

Consider again HC. Current results from L2A research predicts that HC structure would have indeed evolved under *some* influence from the substrate languages. L2A research also documents that adult learners at every stage acquire more than phonetic strings from their target. Unsurprisingly, HC instantiates, alongside substrate-influenced patterns, a wide range of superstrate-derived properties that apparently have no analogues in the substrate languages (DeGraff 2002).

Adam's and Lefebvre's proposals share one non-uniformitarian assumption, namely, that Creole creators, unlike L2 learners elsewhere, were unable to learn anything abstract about their target language. Yet the lexicon and **MORPHOLOGY** of HC demonstrate that Creole creators were able to segment and parse target speech (here, French), including affixes. Such segmentation and *parsing* contradict the claim that the creators of HC could not access any abstract property of French grammar.

Segmentation and parsing of target speech necessarily tap into substantial aspects of target grammar.

CREOLIZATION AS "ABNORMAL/BROKEN TRANSMISSION" AND CREOLES AS "LIVING FOSSILS"? In keeping with the postulated congruence in nineteenth-century philology between the evolution of races and that of languages, Alfred de Saint-Quentin ([1872] 1989, 40) considered it "a property of emerging languages to be naive" and claimed Guyanais Creole as "a spontaneous product of the human mind, freed from any kind of intellectual culture." Similarly, Isle de France Creole was considered "an infantile language for an infantile race" (Reinecke 1980, 11).

In twentieth-century linguistics, the abnormal/broken transmission doctrine excludes Creoles from the scope of the **COMPARATIVE METHOD** and turns them into new linguistic phyla without ancestry (Thomason and Kaufman 1988).

This doctrine seems related to another "myth of origins," as writers in cultural studies (see **DECONSTRUCTION** and **CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS**) might put it – that of Creoles as contemporary (quasi-)replicas of human language at its evolutionary incipience (Bickerton 1990, 171, Chap. 5; 1998, 354; Bickerton and Calvin 2000, 149). In Derek Bickerton's scenario, the hypothetical Pidgin-to-Creole cycle recapitulates the evolution of *Homo erectus*'s "protolanguage" into the most primitive instantiations of *Homo sapiens*'s language: "What happened [in the formation of Hawaiian Creole] was a jump from protolanguage to language in a single generation" (Bickerton 1990, 171).

In this scenario, one *sui generis* process that allegedly disrupts "normal" language transmission and leads to catastrophic language genesis is some form of radical pidginization. The latter is claimed to obliterate virtually all stable structural patterns, including morphology (Bickerton 1999, 69, n. 16), and to lead to a structureless "early pidgin." Such a Pidgin is putatively unlike any full-fledged human language and more like the hypothetical protolanguage of *Homo erectus*, our prehistoric hominid ancestors (Bickerton 1990, 169, 181; 1998, 354; Bickerton and Calvin 2000, 149). This early Pidgin, by definition, is non-native, unstable, and used as an emergency lingua franca across languages. This early Pidgin is argued to abruptly seed the Creole when the former becomes the acquisition target for the first generation of locally born children (see Bickerton 1999, 49) in a way similar to how *Homo erectus* protolanguage seeded the early forms of human language as spoken by the first cohorts of *Homo sapiens*.

How could the documented pidgins of modern humans and the hypothetical protolanguage of *Homo erectus* evince any enlightening similarity? How could the hypothetical Pidgin-to-Creole transition in modern history resemble the evolution in prehistory from *Homo erectus*'s structureless protolanguage to *Homo sapiens*'s full-fledged human language? 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 and its linguistic structural consequences. Indeed Pidgins, under any definition, reflect mental properties of *Homo sapiens*. Acquisition data suggest that learners at every age and stage, including Pidgin speakers, have access to the same faculty of language as any other human being (Mufwene 2008, ch. 5).

The “broken transmission” and “linguistic fossils” doctrines are further undermined by a vast range of comparative data and empirical and theoretical observations. As mentioned earlier, there is ample evidence for systematic lexical and morpho-syntactic correspondences between *radical* Creoles and their European lexifiers from the onset of Creole formation onward (Fattier 1998; DeGraff 2001a, 2005b, 2009; Mufwene 2008). There is also ample evidence for transfer from the African substrate languages into Creole grammars. This is as expected given the aforementioned facts of Caribbean history and the results from L2A research. The sort of structureless pidgin that is an essential ingredient in the traditional Pidgin-to-Creole scenario renders mysterious any systematic set of structural correspondences between Creoles and their ancestor languages. Besides, the magnitude of structural gaps in the history of non-Creole languages seems comparable to, and sometimes even greater than, that of their counterparts in Creole diachrony (DeGraff 2005b, 2009), *pace* Thomason and Kaufman (1988, 8–12, 206) and Thomason (2002, 105).

If “the rigorous criteria of the Comparative Method [CM] ... include the establishment of recurring phonological correspondences in morphemes of identical or similar meanings, including much basic vocabulary ... the establishment of systematic morphosyntactic correspondences” (Thomason 2002, 103), then the available evidence puts Caribbean Creoles squarely in the scope of the CM (DeGraff 2005b, 2009; Mufwene 2008, *pace* Thomason). Such evidence militates against the postulation, in Creole formation, of an exceptional and abnormal break in transmission with subsequent creation of all new linguistic structure from the hypothetical “scraps” of a Pidgin.

The End of Creole Exceptionalism?

Creolization differs from LANGUAGE CHANGE on sociohistorical and political, not linguistic, grounds. For example, conquered peoples involved in forming Caribbean Creoles may have spoken more languages than their counterparts in the formation of, say, the Romance languages. Furthermore, oppression in the Caribbean was correlated with race. Caribbean Creoles and Romance languages thus evolved in distinct ecologies, with Caribbean vernaculars ending up *disfranchised* for sociohistorical reasons. Creolization is a social, not a structural, process (Mufwene 2001, 138). The individual speakers engaged in language contact, whether in the genesis of Creole or Romance languages, would have made use of “the same [mental] process adopted [for the] formation of [their respective new] language” (Greenfield 1830, 51 f). If so, Creole grammars do not, and could not, form a typological class that is aprioristically and fundamentally distinguishable from non-Creole grammars (DeGraff 2005b, 2009; Mufwene 2008).

– Michel DeGraff

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