

Preface

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**Roots of Creole Structures: Weighing the contribution of
substrates and superstrates**

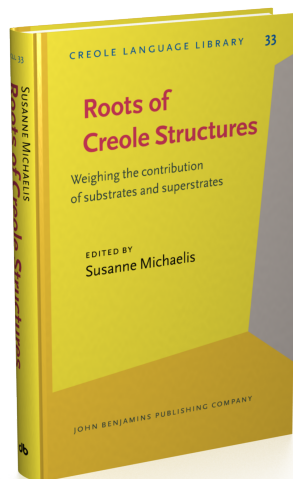
Edited by Susanne Maria Michaelis

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Preface

Susanne Michaelis

The articles published in this volume represent a selection of papers which were given at the Conference “Creole Language Structures between Substrates and Superstrates”, held at the Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology, Leipzig, in June 2005.

For many readers, the title of this book, *Roots of Creole Structures*, will evoke Bickerton's *Roots of Language* (1981). This similarity is not entirely unintentional. The roots of human societies and languages have always fascinated scientists and lay people alike. Bickerton's inspiring view of creoles as a window on the human capacity of language was highly influential, and it provoked many new insightful studies on creole and pidgin languages around the world. However, it has turned out that much of the subsequent research on creole universals and creole genesis did not confirm Bickerton's picture. This book shifts the emphasis back to the precise roles of the contributing languages, the substrates and superstrates, about we now know a great deal more than a few decades ago.

The current view, as largely represented at the Leipzig conference and in the contributions to this volume, differs from the well-known Bickertonian approach in mainly four ways:

i. Sociohistorical information: The groundbreaking work by the late Jacques Arends and subsequent work along the same lines has opened a whole new avenue on our understanding of the social history of creole languages. Plantation societies were much more complex than the earlier simplistic picture implied. Fine-grained sociohistorical studies asserted the view that each creolizing setting had its own ecology. Yet we still seem far away from a typology of sociohistorical contexts yielding specific language contact phenomena (in the vein of Thomason & Kaufman 1988).

ii. The role of first and second language acquisition: Bickerton's view of the crucial role of children who creolized the chaotic pidgin of their parents' generation proved to be highly problematic in the face of the social situations. The early plantation societies consisted primarily of adult slaves, and the creole languages were mostly shaped by adults who drew on superstrate languages to create a language of their own that would allow them to communicate with others and to identify with.

iii. The attested history of creoles: Many creoles are quite different now from the stage when they first arose as separate languages. Like all other languages, creoles undergo normal language change processes, and these can be studied where early records are available. Again Jacques Arends was one of the pioneers of tracing the different stages of creolizing varieties by meticulously studying the old texts (Arends 1996). Early texts are being used increasingly also outside of the Caribbean (see, e.g., Baker & Fon Sing 2007 for early Mauritian Creole texts and analyses).

iv. Creole language structures: Creole languages show much more diversity than we would expect from Bickerton's predictions. Over the past quarter century, we have seen many descriptions of creole languages which do not conform at all to Bickerton's creole prototype. Also the more recent approach by John McWhorter (1998, 2005), who tries to define creole languages in terms of a synchronic type ("the simplest grammars in the world"), cannot capture the complex reality of creole languages.

In the introduction to their important collection *Substrata versus Universals in Creole Genesis*, Pieter Muysken and Norval Smith refer to Bickerton's Language Bioprogram Hypothesis as something that a creolist has to take into account:

(...) it is there as a well-defined hypothesis, and as such cannot be ignored. Because of its presence the burden of proof for substratists has become more demanding whether they like it or not. (Muysken & Smith 1986: 11)

But today, the debate surrounding Bickerton has become fairly marginal, and the papers in this book reflect this change. (Only Jeff Siegel clearly refers to Bickerton's ideas). Along similar lines, the rather simple Chomskyan Principle and Parameters model of the 1980s, which had the vision of a few dozen parameters determining the core grammars of all languages, has lost much of its appeal as it has proven largely illusory (cf. Haspelmath 2008). Bickerton's Language Bioprogram, which became very influential also outside of creolistics, made a lot of sense to many scholars then, but the field has moved on, both in creolistics and in general linguistics.

Creole languages, like all other languages, are the outcomes of their individual unique historical settings and contact situations, nothing more and nothing less. But to get a better idea of the mechanisms of individual language changes and their potential regularities, we are in need of good sociohistorical and linguistic data. Therefore the articles in this volume place the diverse creoles and pidgins in the historical contexts of their evolution, paying particular attention to very specific substrate and superstrate information. In the 1980s, it was still possible for Bickerton to base his far-reaching theories on creoles mirroring the Language Bioprogram on just a few suggestive data from a few creole languages, while at the same time largely ignoring and even ridiculing the potential influence of substrate languages.

I do not share Muysken & Smith's optimistic assessment of the empirical situation in 1986 compared to the situation of the fore-fathers of creole studies in the 18th and 19th centuries, e.g., Van Name, Coelho, Schuchardt:¹

Of course, the debate today is much more informed – and therefore potentially resolvable – as present creolists do not labour under the difficulties of their counterparts of a hundred years ago, who lacked both the data and the techniques for a satisfactory resolution of the question. We feel therefore that it is now time for a new approach to the study of creole languages (...) Universalist and Substratist approaches are complementary. (Muysken & Smith 1986: 11)

Even today, more than twenty years later, we are still woefully lacking systematic cross-creole data, and we are still in need of more fine-grained data-based studies of the various structural aspects of different creole languages. The present papers are a modest contribution to the further piecemeal accumulation of data which is the *conditio sine qua non* for us to test our hypotheses about the nature of creole languages and creolization. The ongoing project of *The Atlas of Pidgin and Creole Language Structures (APiCS)*² will be a first step towards the build up of a comprehensive comparative database of creole language structures (see also Holm & Patrick 2007 for a collection of readily comparable syntactic sketches of creoles). The APiCS project, which was first conceived during discussions at the Leipzig conference in 2005, was inspired by *The World Atlas of Language Structures (WALS, Haspelmath et al. 2005)*, which was about to appear by the time of the conference and which was presented to the conference participants as a preview. WALS offers new possibilities of placing creole languages in the worldwide context of language variation and of comparing them with superstrates and potential substrates. Without the worldwide context, it is hard to know what is special about creoles and how cogent a proposed substrate explanation is.

Let us now come back to the four aspects of Bickerton's approach which have undergone a thorough revision in the course of the last quarter century. I will present the chapters of this book by correlating them with these four aspects:

i. Sociohistorical information:

Silvia Kouwenberg looks at the situation of seventeenth-century Jamaica. From the sociohistorical sources available, she concludes that contrary to earlier claims,

1. Cf. Holm, John & Michaelis, Susanne (Eds.) 2008. *Contact Languages* (Critical Concepts in Linguistics), London: Routledge (to appear), a collection of key articles in the field of creole studies, including especially early texts which are otherwise hard to get.

2. To be edited by Susanne Michaelis, Magnus Huber, Philippe Maurer and Martin Haspelmath.

Jamaica was characterized by multilingualism with no evidence for a single dominant substrate language. For such situations of multiple substrates, Kouwenberg suggests a new typological-comparative research method which would not start off from a hypothesized uniformity across the substrate language family, here Niger-Congo, but would look carefully at possible different alignments of the creole with its substrates.

In her article on the *Lingua Franca* (the only article on a pidgin in this book), **Rachel Selbach** analyzes the historical accounts of this pidgin as they were reported from the slave colonies of the North African “Barbary Coast” (present-day Algeria and Tunisia). Selbach’s meticulous study supports Peter Bakker’s generalization that pidgins often do not use the lexicon of the socially dominant group. In the case of the *Lingua Franca*, the politically dominant “superstrate” languages Arabic and Turkish are not the lexifiers, but it is the Romance languages, mother tongues of the slave population, from which the majority of the lexicon is drawn. Selbach puts forward possible different social ecologies to account for this crucial difference with creolizing speech communities.

ii. The role of first and second language acquisition:

In his article on Hawai’i Creole, **Jeff Siegel** argues in favour of the so-called “cafeteria principle”. Contrary to Bickerton, he defends the view that several aspects of Hawai’i Creole morphosyntax have been modelled on features of different substrate languages. He cites ample linguistic evidence to support his claim, and he appeals to two mechanisms which are operating in the contact situation: language transfer in second language use, and substrate reinforcement of diffused features.

Ana R. Luís offers a fascinating view on patterns of verbal inflectional morphology in three Indo-Portuguese creoles. Verbs in these languages retain a fair amount of suffixes from the Portuguese superstrate. The most striking case is the retention and partially new development of theme vowels, a phenomenon that has not been described for any other creole language. Luís argues in favour of the decisive role of adult substrate speakers. These speakers were encouraged to shift to the superstrate, Portuguese, because of social and religious factors. This specific attitude towards the target language led the shifting speakers to acquire more aspects of the inflectional paradigms of Portuguese than are observed in other creolization situations under different social conditions.

iii. The attested history of creoles:

Three articles look at specific aspects of the history of Sranan (Uffmann), Saramaccan (Smith), and Mauritian Creole (Kriegel, Ludwig, and Henri), the first two dealing with phonological aspects, the last one with syntactic aspects.

Christian Uffmann analyzes the phenomenon of vowel epenthesis (and subsequent vowel harmony of the epenthetic vowel) in early and modern Sranan,

which he argues to be largely substrate-motivated. Following an Optimality Theory approach, Uffmann broadens his view to other creole phonologies and identifies three types of processes which come together to produce the results that we see: substrate transfer, substrate levelling, and superstrate influence in L2 acquisition.

Norval Smith traces the source of a phonological change in Saramaccan that applies only in the Portuguese-derived lexicon of this creole language ($g > k$). He identifies a Bantu substrate (Kikongo-dominated or Kimbundu-dominated) as responsible for that change, and he then explores the complex geographical and historical conditions for this change and suggests various transfer scenarios.

Sibylle Kriegel, Ralph Ludwig and Fabiola Henri look at an instance of language contact between Mauritian Creole and one of its major adstrates, the Indo-Aryan language Bhojpuri. They describe the use of *depi* ("from", French *depuis*) as an ablative marker in terms of Bhojpuri influence, basing themselves on synchronic data from two sociolects of the language, and on diachronic data from old Mauritian texts.

iv. Creole language structures:

In the next six papers, the authors place grammatical features of creole languages in relation to their respective superstrates and substrates. They try to pin down one single substrate or a group of related substrates as the source of various grammatical phenomena in the creole language.

Claire Lefebvre claims that the contribution of substrate and superstrate made to the creoles are not random, but principled. This claim results from her assumption that the main cognitive process at work in creolization is relexification or relabelling. Her strong claim is supported by ample examples from a fine-grained comparison between Haitian Creole, its superstrate French and one of its main substrates, the West African language Fongbe.

In her article on valency patterns in Seychelles Creole, **Susanne Michaelis** argues for Eastern Bantu substrate influence in this part of creole grammar. On the basis of the new sources of typological data on the worldwide distribution of certain grammatical structures, she advocates a new methodological approach in creole studies: Creoles and their substrates (and superstrates) should be studied within the context of the world's languages.

Incanha Intumbo analyzes several noun phrase phenomena in Guiné-Bissau Creole and compares them rigorously with one of the most relevant substrate and adstrate languages, Balanta (an Atlantic language), and Portuguese, its superstrate. He detects seven areas where Guiné-Bissau Creole patterns with its substrate or adstrate Balanta.

Philippe Maurer studies tone in Santomense. Contrary to the received opinion on this creole, he claims that Santomense is a tone language, despite its Portuguese superstrate, and that the origin of its tone lies in its West African substrate languages, especially Edo and Kikongo.

Carl Rubino presents a grammatical feature which is rare to creole languages outside the Austronesian language area, the so-called potentive mode in Zamboangueno Chavacano. He shows that neighboring Visayan languages also have this same grammatical feature, and that the creole has taken over the semantics of this construction, expressed by the grammaticalizing abilitive verb *puede*, from its Philippine substrate.

Bettina Migge and **Laurence Goury** give a broad overview of the tense-mood-aspect systems of four Surinamese creoles and of varieties of the West African language Gbe, and go on to discuss the precise roles of substrate influence, internal change from a substrate calque, superstrate influence, and shift of form and category correlated with innovation.

Paula Prescod deals with word formation processes in Vincentian Creole, which, contrary to widespread views on creole morphology, are not necessarily transparent. Vincentian exhibits derivational patterns which make use of the material of the English superstrate, but which go far beyond the English patterns.

Only one article focuses its attention fully on the peculiarities of the superstrate that gave rise to the creoles: **Ingrid Neumann-Holzschuh** provides detailed information on North American French varieties which can shed light on the nature of the colonial French varieties which formed the input of the feature pool for the plantation societies in the Caribbean and elsewhere. The author shows that North American French is similar in many forms and structures to the French creoles. She nevertheless stresses the fact that the creolization involved restructuring processes which go far beyond those in North American French.

The terms *superstrate* and *substrate* are used in this book in a sense that is familiar in creole studies, but is at variance with the sense of these terms outside of creolistics, e.g., in Romance linguistics, where the term pair originated in the 19th century (see also n. 1 in Neumann-Holzschuh's paper). Originally, *substrate* and *superstrate* both referred to languages whose speakers adopted another language as L2 speakers and thereby influenced the structure of their new language, especially in phonology and syntax. The difference between them is that a substrate language is a language spoken by a socially subordinate group that shifted to the language of the dominant group, whereas a superstrate language is a language spoken by a socially dominant group that shifted to the language of the subordinate group because of its numerical predominance. For example, Gaulish influenced French as a substrate language, and Franconian influenced it as a superstrate language.

In creole studies, the term *substrate* has long been used for the languages of the African slaves which had a strong influence in phonology and lexicon on the resulting creoles. This usage is still in line with the earlier sense of the term. However, the term *superstrate* is generally used for the European lexifier, which is similar to the earlier sense of the term only in that the speakers of the lexifier are the socially dominant group. But if there is language shift in creolization, it is to the superstrate,

not from the superstrate. Thus, the non-creole and creole superstrates are similar in social terms, but not at all with respect to the outcome of the language contact. This needs to be borne in mind when comparing creole with non-creole language contact situations.

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