

Introduction

 **Carsten Levisen** | Roskilde University, Aarhus University

 **Eeva Sippola** | University of Bremen

 **Peter Bakker** | Aarhus University

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Creole Studies – Phylogenetic Approaches

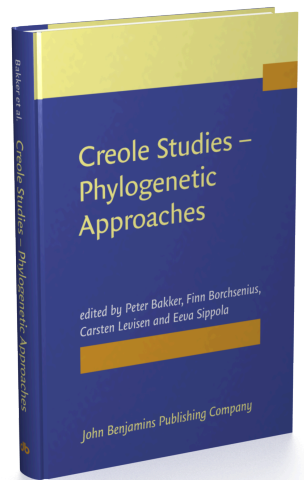
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Introduction

Carsten Levisen, Eeva Sippola and Peter Bakker

Roskilde University, Aarhus University / University of Bremen /
Aarhus University

This book is a first step in a new exploratory way of doing creole studies with phylogenetic networks. As a computational tool originally developed for evolutionary biology, the use of phylogenetic networks has been exported to other disciplines, including linguistics, and this volume is the first book-length treatment of the phylogenetic approach to creole studies and contact linguistics.

The volume shows how phylogenetic tools can successfully help elucidate creole studies, and help us to test both old claims and new hypotheses. With a strong evidence base, the networks enable the researcher to visualize both similarities and differences. Graphs make relationships and categories visible. These include connections which were well known or only dimly suspected, or perhaps not even expected at all. Needless to say, the adaptation of phylogenetic networks requires a certain amount of conceptual and methodological engineering, as shown in this volume, since linguistic features are products of human history and collective creativity, rather than objective, natural features of the world.

For decades, creole studies have been uniquely positioned in the interface between linguistics and sociohistorical studies. This position has made creole studies a vehicle for innovations and debates in ways which have often challenged and rejuvenated more traditional paradigms. Today, creole studies have become part of the mainstream – there are creole textbooks, handbooks, courses, research groups, journals, societies, etc. The danger for any mature research field is that it loses its original vibrancy and forgets to be open to new interdisciplinary ideas. The approach in this book is thus unapologetically interdisciplinary. With phylogenetic methods and tools in combination with state-of-the-art linguistic typology and cross-linguistic semantics, the contributors to our volume study both contemporary and historical varieties. We investigate lexifier-creole relations, creole-creole relations, creole-substrate relations, and the relations between creoles and non-creoles. We showcase how phylogenetic networks can be utilized in contact situations in Africa, Australia, the Caribbean, India, the Indian Ocean, the Pacific, South America, and South East Asia. We provide new empirical evidence for a “creole

typology”, but we also unravel historical affiliations and areal groupings, and initiate a new semantics-based approach to creole lexicons.

The volume is based on work by “Cognitive Creolistics”, a research group which was based at Aarhus University 2013–2015. The group was led by Peter Bakker, and funded by the Velux Foundation. The core research team consisted of the biologist Finn Borchsenius (Aarhus), and the linguists Eeva Sippola (now Bremen), Carsten Levisen (now Roskilde) and Aymeric Daval-Markussen. In addition, three research students contributed to the book: Karime Aragón, Kristoffer Bøegh, and Yonathan Goldstein. Project-external researchers and guests of the project have also contributed their invaluable expertise in several chapters: Sophie Nicholls (Western Sydney), Danae M. Perez (Zürich), Carol Priestley (ANU, Canberra) and Sandro Sessarego (Austin, Texas). Finally, Bettina Migge (Dublin) gave an outsider’s perspective on the whole enterprise. We also received valuable help from our student assistants, too many to mention here.

Creole Studies: Phylogenetic Approaches is united by a shared methodological curiosity, rather than a theoretical orthodoxy. We approach and discuss central concepts such as “creole”, “language”, “phylogeny”, and “feature” from a variety of assumptions and perspectives. All the chapters in this book adhere to a data-oriented, empirical style of research and reasoning, and all chapters address specific research questions which are of great relevance to creole studies.

The chapters fall into in four main subsections. Chapters 2–6 address conceptual and methodological issues in creole studies, with a focus on “creole typology”, and the controversial question of “creole distinctiveness”. Linguistic typologists and biolinguists will find this section thought-provoking, illuminative, and rich in empirical evidence.

In Chapter 2, Bakker provides an overview of key concepts, issues and discussions in creole studies. This chapter is recommended for newcomers to the field of creole studies.

In Chapter 3, Borchsenius, Daval-Markussen, and Bakker compare and contrast the use of phylogenetic methods in biology and linguistics, discussing methodological and conceptual developments in both fields, as well as new syntheses. Readers with an interest in biology and linguistics, and the interface between these two disciplines are referred to this chapter.

In Chapter 4, Bakker, Sippola and Borchsenius explain the methodological practices and problems in the utilization of phylogenetic networks in this book. Linguists and creolists without prior knowledge of phylogenetic networks will find this chapter a useful starting point.

In Chapters 5 and 6, Bakker and Daval-Markussen discuss how their datasets led them to accept the existence of what they call the “creole typological profile”. They discuss the structural properties of creoles, taking a broad geographical and

genealogical range as their point of departure. They conclude that no single structural property is unique to creoles, and no property is common to all creoles, but that despite their internal diversity, creoles form a typological group – when compared with non-creoles in a large-scale comparison. Chapter 5 provides a thorough synchronic review of proposed creole structures, whereas Chapter 6 focuses on history and diachrony.

Chapters 7–12 are devoted to the study of specific language groups, their interrelationships and origins. Historical linguists, including scholars of colonial and postcolonial linguistics will find these studies carefully crafted and highly relevant to the on-going work on classification.

In Chapter 7, Daval-Markussen, Bøegh, and Bakker investigate the common belief that the African languages which were involved in the creation of creoles were typologically similar. However, it turns out that the African languages in question were typologically diverse and heterogeneous when one takes stable structural features into account. It also appears that the African languages generally do not cluster with creoles, whether they were developed in the Atlantic or elsewhere. Based on these findings, the authors argue that substrate influence was not a determining factor in creole genesis in the more stable properties of languages.

In Chapter 8, Daval-Markussen sheds light on French-related creoles. In a quest for understanding both their interrelatedness and origins, he explores their degree of radicalness, i.e. their difference from French, and the areal features of French-related creoles in the Caribbean, North America, the Indian Ocean, and the Pacific.

In Chapter 9, Goldshtein studies Juba Arabic Creole of South Sudan in contrast and comparison with non-creole varieties of Arabic as well as Nilotic languages, including substrate languages, as well as a small sample of creoles. Focusing on the nominal number system, he finds that Juba Arabic clusters with other creoles rather than with Arabic or Nilotic languages. This leads Goldshtein to argue against the Feature Pool Hypothesis, and in favor of Creole Distinctiveness.

In Chapter 10, Bakker compares standard Dutch with Virgin Islands Creole Dutch, Berbice Creole and Skepi Dutch, based on lexical, grammatical, and phonological features. On the basis of this multi-faceted analysis, it is concluded that the three creoles were created independently.

In Chapter 11, Sippola investigates the Spanish-related and Portuguese-related creoles, which are the oldest and most geographically dispersed among the creoles of the world. The study supports previous classifications, in which a major division between Atlantic and Asian creoles is encountered. She then turns to investigate the more intricate aspects of the interrelationships, including the role of adstrates, substrates, and areal linguistics.

In Chapter 12, Perez, Sessarego and Sippola study Afro-Hispanic varieties in South America, with a special focus on the classification of Afro-Yungueño spoken in Bolivia. Taking on the dialect versus creole debate, they explore how phylogenetic networks can help nuance the discussion on creoles, post-creoles and dialects, emphasizing the importance of interpretation and the perspectives resulting from feature selection.

Chapters 13–16 study creole lexicons from a semantic perspective. Lexical typologists, cross-linguistic semanticists, and sociolinguists with an interest in metalanguage, will find these chapters inspiring and innovative.

In Chapter 13, Levisen and Bøegh compare the expression units for basic semantic categories across creoles and lexifiers. They find that the expression of basic categories is more different between the major colonial languages and their lexifiers than expected. However, they also find that, from a large-scale perspective, creoles, in their core lexicons, do cluster with their lexifiers, but that English-related creoles make up the most heterogeneous group.

In Chapter 14, Levisen and Aragón explore the expression of different semantic domains, using semantic molecules for feature selection. Basic words from the domains of society, environment and the human body, as well as abstract terms are compared. The study indicates that domains generally differ in closeness and distance, and that the social domain stands out as the area where creoles differ the most from the colonial lexifier languages.

In Chapter 15, Levisen, Priestley, Nicholls and Goldshtein draw lexical networks of new lects and languages in the Pacific in order to explore their contemporary relationships, but also to discuss and deconstruct the metalinguistic terminology of what is meant by “language”, “dialect”, “variety”, “creole”, and “English”. They demonstrate how the combination of phylogenetic network techniques and semantic primes can be used to circumvent and nuance the current sociolinguistic debate on metalanguage.

The volume ends with five evaluations of the results in Chapters 16 to 20. Bakker discusses the results from a perspective of a linguistic typologist, Sippola as a creolist, Levisen as a semanticist and Borchsenius as a biologist. They provide concluding comments, and further reflect on the prospects and problems for further use of phylogenetic methods in creoles studies, contact linguistics, and beyond.

Finally, in her invited review of the volume, Migge critically engages with the findings, the method and the scope of the work, giving also suggestions for future work in Chapter 20.