

A course to end the course of "Creole" studies as we know it...

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21-22 July, 14h - 17h
IEL/Unicamp

Course description:

The goal of this 2-day/6-hour course at UNICAMP is to establish some basic "Cartesian-Uniformitarian" guidelines for empirically and theoretically constructive connections between studies of language contact (e.g., "creolization" as in the history of Haitian Creole), of language change (e.g., English diachronic syntax) and of language acquisition (e.g., patterns of morphosyntactic development in first- and second-language acquisition).

Here "Cartesian" has a mentalist sense as in (e.g.) Chomsky 1966: it takes "Creole genesis" to ultimately reduce to the formation, in certain socio-historical contexts, of the idiolects (or "I-languages" in Chomsky's terminology) of certain classes of speakers. The latter is to be identified on ethno-historical grounds in order to avoid circularity.

"Uniformitarian" evokes my fundamental working assumption that there is no *sui generis* psycho-linguistic process to be postulated in order to explain Creole formation: the latter is made possible by the same psycho-linguistic mechanisms that are responsible for the ontogenesis of (I-)languages everywhere else.

Thus, "creolization", in my view (also see Mufwene 2001), is strictly an a-theoretical abbreviation for the longer phrase "development of these languages that, for socio-historical reasons, have been labelled 'Creole'...".

In establishing these Cartesian-Uniformitarian guidelines, I investigate the (im)possible contributions of first-language acquisition (L1A) and second-language acquisition (L2A) to "creolization". I will evaluate Creole-genesis theories that assign an exclusive role to either some kind of L1A (e.g., Derek Bickerton's Language Bioprogram Hypothesis) or some kind of L2A (e.g., Claire Lefebvre's Relexification Hypothesis). I will also evaluate various genetic-linguistics claims of formation that exclude Creole languages from the Comparative Method. Such theories seem inadequate on various grounds---empirical, theoretical and socio-historical.

Is there any more viable theoretical alternative? What seems more compatible with the available empirical and socio-historical details and with current results in linguistic research, including language-acquisition research, is a scenario in which cohorts of both adult learners and child learners in (e.g.) the colonial Caribbean contributed to Creole formation, each class of learners in their own complex, yet principled, ways. From that perspective, it will be shown that Creole languages cannot be distinguished a priori from non-Creole

languages on any linguistic-theoretical criteria and that Creole languages can be genetically classified by the Comparative Method on a par with non-Creole languages.

Suggested readings:

DeGraff, Michel (2002).

Relexification: A re-evaluation.

Anthropological Linguistics, 44, 4, 321--414.

http://web.mit.edu/linguistics/people/faculty/degraff/degraff2002relexification_a_reevaluation.pdf

DeGraff, Michel (2005).

Morphology and word order in 'creolization' and beyond.

In Cinque & Kayne, eds., New York: Oxford University Press (Oxford Studies in Comparative Syntax), 293--372.

http://web.mit.edu/linguistics/people/faculty/degraff/degraff2005morphology_and_word_order_in_creolization.pdf

DeGraff, Michel (2005).

Linguists' most dangerous myth: The fallacy of Creole Exceptionalism.

Language in Society, 34, 4, 533--591.

http://web.mit.edu/linguistics/people/faculty/degraff/degraff2005fallacy_of_creole_exceptionalism.pdf

Mufwene, Salikoko (2007).

Population movements and contacts in language evolution.

Journal of Language Contact, 1, 63--91.

http://cgi.server.uni-frankfurt.de/fb09/ifas/JLCCMS/issues/THEMA_1/JLC_THEMA_1_2007_03Mufwene.pdf