

The Founder Principle in Creole Genesis

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Creole genesis

- Population genetics perspective
 - Language restructuring in contact situations
 - Language contact – population contact
 - Linguistic features – genes
- Paper focuses on creoles lexified by European languages

Creole genesis

- Lexifier:

- Dominant language that provides basis for creole and thereby majority of vocabulary

- Restructuring:

- ‘system reorganisation’: modifying grammatical features from the lexifier into a creole’s system

Founder Principle

- “to explain how structural features of creoles have been predetermined to a large extent (but not exclusively!) by characteristics of the vernaculars spoken by the populations that founded the colonies in which they developed”
 - Mufwene, 84

Founder Principle

- Features belonging to founder populations had advantage in being selected over competing dialect
- Nonstandard forms became principal lexifiers

Feature selection

- 'disadvantageous' features in lexifier's varieties could become 'advantageous' in speech of founder populations
- Three explanations:
 - Features may have been reintroduced by mutation
 - Features may have been favoured by new ecological conditions in the colony
 - The colony may have received significant proportions of carriers of the features

Feature selection

- Features may have been favoured by new ecological conditions in the colony
 - Ecology: “the ethnographic setting in which the lexifier (the displaced population) has come into contact with diverse languages (other populations) whose structural features (genes) enter into competition with its own features.” (Mufwene 85)

Feature selection

- Feature competition
- Ethnographic factors effected the selection of features from varieties in contact
- Features of ethnographic group in power had selective advantage

Feature selection

- The colony may have received significant proportions of carriers of the features
 - Creoles should be compared to nonstandard varieties
 - Early colonists did not speak standard variety of their language
 - Creoles' lexifiers were already restructured varieties

Evidence for Founder Principle

■ Ethnographic:

- Louisiana Creole
- French colonisation, Spanish rule, sold to Americans
- No relexification (language change in which one language replaces much or all of its lexicon with that of another language, without drastic change to its grammar)

Evidence for Founder Principle

■ Structural:

- Structural features of creoles' systems were not innovative but extensions from structures already available in lexifier
- Negators *no, don, ain, neba* (never)
- Form is (almost) the same, but syntactic distributions and semantic functions differ
- Extensions still show connection to lexifier

Important conclusions

- Social history of relevant colonies suggests that varieties to which the makers of creoles were exposed and which they restructured were *nonstandard*

Important conclusions

- Structural features of creoles are not innovations but extended from strategies already available in the lexifier

Important conclusions

- During feature competitions, features of the founder variety often had selective advantage

Important conclusions

- “The Founder Principle offers a useful perspective from which we may address various, though not all, aspects of the complex question of the genesis of creoles as mixed languages with features coming from diverse sources and possibly at different stages of their gradual and protracted development” (Mufwene 125-26)