

From Genetic Creolistics to Genetic Linguistics: Lessons We Should Not Miss!

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1. Introduction

Genetic creolistics is a label I coined in Mufwene (2001) in reference to the branch of the study of creoles that is concerned with their emergence as separate vernaculars, focusing both on ecological factors that have driven or influenced the speciation process and on the nature and origins of structural features that distinguish them from their “lexifiers.”¹ I wanted to underscore the fact that this research area is not different from historical dialectology and is in fact part of genetic linguistics. One can thus argue that genetic creolistics should benefit from several techniques developed in the latter, including the comparative method, internal reconstruction, and lexicostatistics, to account for degrees of genetic kinship among, for instance, new colonial languages that have evolved from the same “lexifiers.” On the other hand, based on what I say below, one can also contend that such an approach to a history which already makes obvious that the relevant language varieties have evolved from the same ancestor mostly highlights the nature of family resemblance among the offspring varieties, not whether or not any of them are more closely related to the “proto-language” than (the) others. It is at best debatable whether language speciation, which accounts for linguistic diversity even within the same genetic family, can be understood independent of population movements and contacts as ecological factors, on which I capitalize below. This paper is thus about whether the traditional marginalization of creoles and creolistics from genetic linguistics is justified.

The term *speciation* is used here as in my previous work to drive home similarities between linguistic and biological evolution (subject to constraints imposed by the

¹ I use the terms *lexify* and *lexifier* tongue in cheek, because it has become increasingly dubious that they have retained only (most of) their lexical items from the European languages they have evolved from. There are a number of reasons why their grammars are different from those of their kin colonial varieties such as nonstandard American Englishes and Québécois French, including some innovations specific to language appropriation by new speakers and influence from the substrate languages. *Pace* Bickerton (1981ff), McWorter (1998ff), Thomason & Kaufman (1988), and Thomason (2001), the evidence suggests creoles owe much their grammars to the nonstandard varieties of the European languages targeted by the slaves and contract laborers on typically sugarcane, coffee, and rice plantations since the 17th century.

ontogenetic peculiarities of the relevant species), focusing especially on ecological factors that cause the process, such as population movements, contacts with other populations and languages, and adaptations to new ecologies, including reweightings of variants. I do not intend for the term to replace the word *diversification*. As a matter of fact, I have used both interchangeably in my work.

This paper also subscribes to one of the positions of Mufwene (2001), viz., it is high time creolistics stopped being a consumer discipline that applies uncritically working assumptions of general linguistics and contributes little in return. The tables are being reversed below, showing a number of ways in which genetic creolistics can help improve genetic linguistics, thanks especially to recent findings about how creoles are more likely to have evolved (Chaudenson 2001, 2003; Mufwene 2001, 2005, 2008; Aboh 2006, 2007; Clements, in press; Faraclas et al. 2007;). More specifically, I show how genetic linguistics can be enriched with the ecological perspective that has been such an inherent part of the study of language speciation in genetic creolistics.

I won't pretend that all creolists subscribe to the hypotheses presented here about the emergence of creoles. Nor will I expect them to concur my claim that creoles are among the outcomes of the continual speciation of IE languages,² having been triggered by contacts of European colonial languages with those of the colonized populations in settings exogenous to both parties. More difficult for some creolists and other linguists to accept is my thesis that the European expansion since the 15th century constitutes the latest wave of the IE dispersal since about six thousand years ago (Mufwene 2005, 2008). Insights gained from the way the colonial languages have speciated over the past half millennium should be informative about the role that colonization and the contacts of populations played in the earlier stages of the diversification of IE.

Needless to say that I assume the uniformitarian position stated in Mufwene (2001) and agree with DeGraff's (2003, 2004, 2005) arguments against "creole exceptionalism." Since much of what I present in this paper has been discussed in detail in Mufwene (2008), I will simply summarize most of my positions below, elaborating only those arguments or aspects thereof that still need clarifying, often adding some of my latest thoughts on particular topics. I focus below on creoles lexified by European languages, associated especially with trade in slavery on tobacco, sugarcane, and rice cultivation (around the Atlantic and in the Indian Ocean), from especially the 16th to the 19th century. I leave out other new languages varieties associated also with the European colonization of the world but have not been lexified by European languages, although some of them have questionably also been identified as creoles by linguists. Much of this restriction is related to the history of the word *creole* itself, which I need not go into here. The restriction is convenient, although much of the same "lessons" for genetic linguistics can be learned from the formation of the other "contact(-based) languages" not considered here.

² I return below to this apparent stipulation that similar varieties not lexified by European languages be excluded from the category of "creoles." Arguments for this position have been articulated in Mufwene (1997, 2001, 2005).

2. Creoles did not evolve from antecedent pidgins

Despite an increasingly better understanding of the socio-economic histories of the territories where creoles emerged, which suggest that creoles could not possibly have emerged from pidgins, linguists seem to have a nostalgic fondness for this myth. The essential arguments against this traditional position can be summarized as follows. The coffee, rice, and sugar cane plantations on which creoles evolved around the Atlantic and in the Indian Ocean did not develop overnight. Colonization was primarily a capitalist economic venture. Owing to shortage of sufficient capital, the development of large plantations was protracted over several family generations, often over more than 50 years. This was typically the result of a monopoly practice which enabled some families to gradually buy out neighbors who were less prosperous and to consolidate the estates into much larger ones (e.g., 1972). This history corroborates Chaudenson's (1979, 2001, 2003) position that settlement colonies evolved gradually from homestead communities to the large plantation societies with which creoles have typically been associated.³ In the former, the Africans (who started as indentured servants) were minorities and integrated in family units, though discriminated against (see also Wood 1974). In the latter, the non-European laborers became the overwhelming majorities and were segregated from the European colonists, even from the European indentured servants, who played a central role in the interactions which spread particular non-standard koinés of the European languages (rather than the metropolitan varieties) on the plantations.⁴ The colonial population grew slowly during the homestead phase and more by birth than by immigration or importation of labor. In the homesteads, the interactions between the European and the captive slaves were so regular that there is no particular reason to expect the adult Africans to have spoken a pidgin, although they must have gone through an interlanguage stage, like any (naturalistic) L2 learner. So did

³ There are actually colonies that dispute this traditional assumption. For instance, Cape Verde and the Netherlands Antilles thrived more as slave depots than as plantation colonies but produced creoles. On the other hand, Brazil, which invested into sugarcane cultivation a little over a century before the Caribbean colonies followed suit has produced no creole. Rapid population replacement seems to have been a more critical ecological factor than most of those traditionally invoked to account for the emergence of creoles (Mufwene 2005, 2008).

⁴ As I show below, this does not apply to the Hawaiian plantations and perhaps not, or little, to the Melanesian ones. The social integration of Africans in the homesteads around the Atlantic and in the Indian Ocean does not reflect a particular fondness of Europeans for them. Rather, it reflects particular ecological pressures stemming from the poor economic conditions of the settlers, who depended on the greater familiarity of the Africans and Asians (in the case of the Indian Ocean) with the tropic settings for their survival (Wood 1974, Chaudenson 2001, 2003). We should refrain from confusing discrimination with segregation. The former condition is the reason why in Virginia, for instance, the conditions of the captive Africans would shift from that of indentured servants to that of slaves by 1675 (Tate 1965). Race segregation was typically caused by concerns for security management and was typically institutionalized when the slave population became the overwhelming majority. For instance, it was institutionalized in 1720 in coastal South Carolina (Wood 1974), whereas the first slaves had arrived in 1670, concurrently with the first British settlers from Barbados. Economic ecological pressures suggested particular population structures, which in turn would bear on language evolution as they imposed particular patterns of interactions across race boundaries (Mufwene 2005, 2008).

the locally born, Creole populations and the significant proportions of Bozal slaves who arrived before or around puberty.

The most plausible hypothesis about the emergence of creole vernaculars is that both White and Black Creoles were native speakers of colonial vernaculars, the European koinés spoken in the homesteads. By the time the slave and European populations became segregated and marked indeed by fewer interactions between the two groups outside the work place, the Bozal slaves still had access to the native varieties of the colonial European vernaculars, the relevant koinés, primarily through the Creole populations of the homestead phase and some of the later Creoles who descended from them. As the slave populations grew dramatically during the 18th century, during the peak of the plantation economic system, some of the Bozal slaves learned the colonial vernaculars either from Creole children of non-Creole progenitors, the “seasoned slaves,” or directly from the latter, who had lived longer in the colonies and could acculturate recent Bozal slaves and served also as linguistic models.

This tradition of language “transmission” cannot be different from that of recent immigrants to *de-facto* socially, if not residentially, segregated nations of the West, where recent immigrants learn the local vernaculars primarily from earlier immigrants, with whom they typically socialize. From the point of view of divergence, the plantation settlement colonies are also reminiscent of the exploitation colonies of Africa and Asia, where the scholastic varieties of European languages taught originally to colonial auxiliaries have indigenized. These are settings where the indigenous populations have been the overwhelming majorities, there have been fewer and fewer teachers who are native speakers of the metropolitan varieties, and learners have increasingly targeted models produced by non-native speakers who had “acquired” the languages under similar ecological conditions that favor substrate influence.

From an evolutionary perspective, adequate accounts of the emergence of creoles need not invoke *deus as machina* of “break in the transmission of the lexifier” and the exclusive innovative agency of children. Principles such as “differential transmission” under internally-variable ecological conditions of population structure and exposure to differing models, coupled with imperfect replication in language learning can account for the gradual basilectalization of creoles from their original lexifiers (Chaudenson 1979ff; Mufwene 1996ff). In fact, the so-called “creole continua” have always been typical of the relevant communities since the inception of plantation societies (Alleyne 1980).

Although interlinguas must have occurred of necessity while the Bozal slaves learned the colonial vernaculars naturalistically, one need not posit a stage in the evolution of plantation societies during which interactions took place first in pidgin and then in creole one or two generations later, *pace* Schuchardt (1914), Jespersen (1922), Bloomfield (1933), and their followers. The regular and sometimes intimate interactions of the homestead phase are essentially different from the settings of sporadic contacts and the limited exposure to the lexifier traditionally associated with the emergence of pidgins.

Besides, it is now debatable whether pidgins developed abruptly in the way usually explained in the literature. As explained in Mufwene (2005), the history of the

From Genetic Creolistics to Genetic Linguistics

colonization of Africa is full of accounts of Africans being taken to Europe with the first explorers and returning a few years later as interpreters. This is consistent with Naro's (1978) account of the "Reconnaissance Language" (RL), according to which there were quite a few Africans in Portugal by the 16th century whose speech was not native. Although the RL was a Portuguese variety fabricated by Portuguese writers to deride the Africans, it also suggests where the population of interpreters who accompanies the explorers and traders on the African coast must have been recruited during the period when Portuguese was the world's dominant lingua franca (Ostler 2005) and the dominant language of the slave trade on the western coast of Africa till the 19th century (Huber 1999).⁵

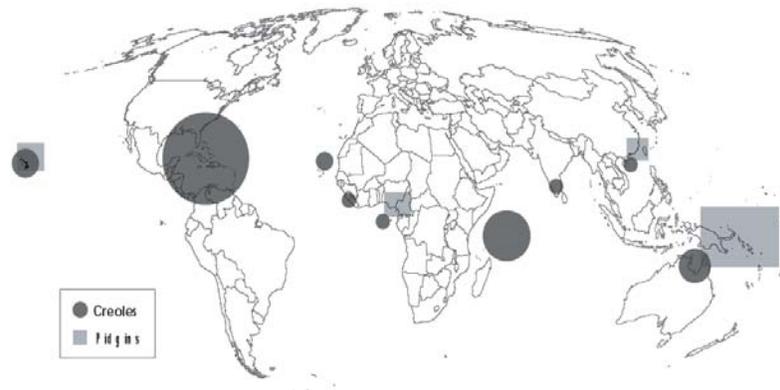
Likewise Fayer (2003) underscores the role played by African interpreters recruited in Europe in communications between Europeans and Africans during the slave trade and at the beginning of plantations. Also, according to Bolton (2000, 2002), Chinese who had learned English earlier from American Christian missionaries served as interpreters at the beginning of the English-Chinese trade in Canton in the late 18th century. This particular history of the spread of English for trade is also similar to what happened in Hawaii, where American missionaries taught English first to the Hawaiian elite. Many Hawaiians who learned the language during these early American-Hawaiian trade proselytization contacts would serve as interpreters on whaling ships, in trade in the Pacific and at the beginning of plantation industry in Hawaii (Reinecke 1969, Beecher 1985). The plantation system itself relied on foremen who interfaced between the owners and contract Asian laborers making it unnecessary for the latter to learn English immediately, although a Pidgin English (with possible initial elements from the South Pacific, according to Siegel 2000 and Drechsel 1999) eventually developed on the islands.

As explained in Mufwene (2005), these observations lead to the conclusion that pidgins have probably had evolutionary trajectories similar to those of creoles. They too may have evolved by basilectalizing away from the closer approximations of their lexifiers spoken by the earliest interpreters. The probable scenario is as follows: as trade contacts with the indigenous populations increased and/or intensified and there were fewer and fewer interpreters around, more and more people who had participated in earlier transactions must have tried to speak the relevant lingua francas, producing utterances that were structurally more and more divergent from those of the earlier contacts between European traders and their non-European interpreters. The end result was the pidgin that evolved from each such lingua franca. Once the ecological conditions for the pidgins discontinued, the pidgins either died or evolved into something different. Where the contact settings became permanent as plantations or towns in exploitation colonies, the pidgins vernacularized into regular means of

⁵ These observations should not be used to support, hurriedly, the monogenetic hypothesis of the development of creoles, although the Portuguese lingua franca may have influenced the handful of English pidgins that developed later on the African coast. The observations only suggest that it may have taken long before other European languages could be used during the slave trade. The initial contacts of Europeans and African slaves were not always, and perhaps not typically, unmediated. We will also have to always factor in the role of Creole children as native speakers of the European languages and as transmitters of the European language even after residential and social segregation had been institutionalized.

interactions. Thus they also adapted to the increasing communicative needs of their speakers in various domains, and they complexified and stabilized into expanded pidgins.

Note that although creoles and expanded pidgins are comparable in structural complexity, this similarity in outcomes only reflects the role of vernacularization in the emergence, expansion, and stabilization of their structures. History provides no evidence suggesting that creoles evolved from pidgins, especially not that expanded pidgins represent an intermediary stage in this evolution. As is obvious from Map 1, there is actually a complementary distribution in the geographical locations of the settings where pidgins and creoles emerged:



Map 1: *World-wide complementary geographical distribution of creoles and pidgins*

Hawaii is probably the only place where a creole and a pidgin lexified by the same language have evolved. However, contrary to the traditional literature (including Bickerton 1981, 1984, 1999) the two varieties evolved concurrently, the pidgin on the plantations and the creole in the city (Roberts 1998, 2005, to appear; Mufwene 2005, 2008). Hawaii was not colonized at the same time or in the same style as the Atlantic and Indian Ocean territories where our heuristic prototypes of creoles emerged. It was colonized in the 19th century, after slavery was abolished, with an Asian contract labor population that was ethnically less diverse. The contract laborers were hardly mixed on the plantations, consisting of Chinese, Japanese, Koreans, and Philipinos, who arrived at different periods and were housed separately. They continued to speak their heritage languages as their vernaculars and really needed a pidgin (originally Pidgin Hawaiian, replaced later by Pidgin English) to communicate across ethnic boundaries. They received instructions for work from foremen, who were bilingual in English and their respective ethnic languages. Indeed traditional ethnic distinctions among Asians have survived in Hawaii, contrary to the experience of African slaves in the former Atlantic and Indian Ocean colonies.

Hawaiian cities are the only places where the Asian and Portuguese contract laborers interacted with each other in ways approximating the African slaves on the plantations of the Atlantic and Indian Ocean colonies. They are, indeed, the birth place of Hawaiian English Creole. In contrast, city slaves in Atlantic and Indian Ocean colonies spoke closer approximations of the European colonial languages, having lived in population structures that were different from those of the plantations, where the

From Genetic Creolistics to Genetic Linguistics

slaves constituted the overwhelming majority and were systematically segregated from the European populations, where the proportion of Bozal slaves would be superior to that of the Creole slaves by the late 18th century, and where the Bozal slaves would increasingly learn the colonial vernacular not necessarily from Creole slaves but rather from “seasoned” ones, as explained above.

Pace Bickerton (1981ff), the Hawaiian Islands were neither the typical exploitation colonies nor the typical settlement ones and can in no way be considered as representative of the plantation settlement colonies of the Atlantic and Indian Ocean. They just prove that the ecologies in which vernaculars disfranchised as creoles were not identical or uniform. Perhaps what they share is essentially that they are new vernaculars that evolved from nonstandard varieties of Western European languages among transplanted non-European enslaved or contract laborers in segregated tropical colonies, where they constituted the overwhelming majorities. As I argue below and in Mufwene (2008), they show that race, rather than any particular way in which they evolved, is the tacit primary reason why creoles have been denied genetic affiliation with their lexifiers, have unhesitatingly been disfranchised as separate languages even when their speakers think otherwise (Mühlhäusler 1985, Mufwene 1988), and have been denied membership in the family of Indo-European (IE) languages.

3. Some lessons from the emergence of creoles and pidgins

3.1. No break in the transmission of the lexifier

As shown above, the colonial histories of the territories where creoles have evolved do not suggest any reasons for assuming that there was a break in the transmission of the lexifier. With the exception of Hawaii, the general history suggests that from the time they set foot in the Atlantic and Indian Ocean colonies, the adult African captives and European indentured servants, and other non-European populations that lived together with them in the homesteads were constantly exposed to vernacular varieties of the European colonial languages and had to attempt to communicate in them. Although, to be sure, the learning process entailed an interlanguage stage for the adult learners, there is no historical reason for assuming that the adult Bozal populations of the homesteads communicated in pidgins and waited for their locally born, Creole slaves to make the creole vernaculars for them. Rather, the relevant history suggests that, regardless of how close or distant their approximations were from the native varieties of the lexifiers, the L2 speakers used them as vernaculars. They were not in settings of sporadic contacts, which are typically associated with the emergence of pidgins.

Overall, there was probably more continuity in the transmission of the colonial language in Atlantic and Indian Ocean plantation settlement colonies than in the transmission of Vulgar Latin in southwestern Europe, where the rural Iberians and Gauls, among others who made the overwhelming majorities of the populations from the 5th to the 9th centuries (the period before the emergence of Old French), could still speak their Celtic “patois” as vernaculars. European linguistic history suggests that it took up to the 20th century for countries such as France to fully Gallicize, therefore Latinize, through usage of French (based on the Parisian variety spoken ironically by

the aristocracy) as their vernacular, although it had served as the official and “national” language of the Republic since the French Revolution.

To be sure, conditions favorable to the emergence of a pidgin occurred on Hawaiian plantations largely because the contract laborers were segregated by nationality and continued to speak their heritage languages as their vernaculars (see below). However, these plantation ecologies were different from the city, where the populations interacted more regularly and their children mixed from the time they attended elementary school. That is why Hawaiian English Creole emerged in the city, where Americans, the counterparts of Europeans in the Atlantic and Indian Ocean colonies, were significantly in the minority. Moreover, Hawaii was not colonized in the same style as the Atlantic and Indian Ocean colonies. The following observations are also noteworthy:

1) Since fewer languages were brought in contact in Hawaii than in the Atlantic and Indian Ocean colonies, and the Asian contract laborers continued to speak their heritage languages even in the city, it is not necessary to presuppose extensive multilingualism as a necessary condition for the emergence of creoles. As a matter of fact, we should have questioned the significance of this ecological factor from the time the now (nearly) defunct non-European variety of Dutch spoken on the Berbice River in Guyana (see Kouwenberg 1994 for a detailed analysis) was claimed to be a creole, although it emerged primarily from the contact of Eastern Ijo with nonstandard Dutch. Thus, linguists such as Schlieben-Lange (1977) were not mistaken in comparing the emergence of the Romance languages with that of creoles, although nothing could be gained from also claiming that the latter were also creoles. Perhaps more interesting in this respect is the claim by Faine (1937), Goodman (1964), Posner (1985, 1996) and Trask (1996) that French creoles can be considered as new Romance language varieties, since contact and shift of languages were as much involved in the speciation of Vulgar Latin into the Romance languages as in that of the Romance languages into creoles almost a millennium later.

2) It appears that creoles have spread from their cradles, on the (large) plantations of Atlantic and Indian Ocean colonies and in the urban centers of Hawaii, to the rest of the relevant territories, without displacing the speech continua that obtained from the initial stages of language shift by the indentured servants, the African slaves, and the contract laborers. No particular “decreolization” qua debasilectalization process need be posited to account for present-day basilect-to-acrolect continua, which should actually remind us that these actually also obtain anywhere a distinction has been made between standard and nonstandard language varieties; most speakers can be situated on a continuum between these two poles (Mufwene 1994, 2005).

Unless the continental Celts were all equally competent language learners and had been exposed to exactly the same idiolects of Vulgar Latin, continua must have obtained as early as when the first urban Celts shifted to the ex-colonial language as their vernacular, influencing it in different ways with their substrate features. The continua are a function of the particular varieties the learners were exposed to and of their particular L2 learning skills. This hypothesis accounts both for the gradual appropriation of Vulgar Latin as a vernacular by the continental Celts and for the appropriation of English as a vernacular by the insular Celts. In the case of the Romance

From Genetic Creolistics to Genetic Linguistics

languages, the phenomenon must have become more significant after Vulgar Latin had evolved into various national languages and the elite of the populations forged standard varieties which could only be learned in school and approximated in speech with varying degrees of success. Just like creoles, the longer the new vernaculars evolved in time in new ethnolinguistic ecologies, the more they were influenced by the substrate languages of their new speakers and the farther away they diverged from the earliest approximations of the ex-colonial language, especially when they interacted more and among themselves than with the urbanites. Thus, the new, Romance languages diverged gradually and increasingly from their lexifier, (Vulgar) Latin. It is actually remarkable that Vulgar Latin, rather than its prestigious counterpart, the Classical Latin used as a lingua franca by the intellectual elite, had such a pervasive impact on the indigenous colonial populations.

There is no particular reason we should assume that the evolution of English was significantly different, except that we must recognize that Old English emerged out of contacts between the continental languages spoken by the Germanic invaders among themselves, although the name *English* suggests that the language variety of the Angles prevailed. Subsequent contacts with first the Celtic languages and then other languages account for the speciation of the languages into diverse varieties in and outside England, subject to specific ecological conditions, as in the case of creoles, pidgins, and indigenized varieties of European languages in territories colonized by Europeans since the 15th century.

3) Variation within the lexifier must have been as significant a factor then as in recent history with the development of creoles. The varieties to which the colonized populations were exposed were not necessarily standard. More specifically, Vulgar Latin was not standard, nor were the Middle English varieties targeted by the insular Celts, including the later varieties that would produce Irish English between the 17th and 19th centuries. Noteworthy is also the fact that the varieties of Vulgar Latin targeted by the Gaulish, Iberian, and other continental Celts were not necessarily native, since a significant proportion of the Roman legionaries must have consisted of non-Roman mercenaries, given the size of the Empire. Although Latin was adopted as the language of the colonial administration by the local rulers who only received technical advice and some advisors from Rome, the local or provincial administrations and armies functioning in this (ex-) colonial language were manned by Natives, hence non-native speakers. The Latin that would progressively spread from the Roman-style urban centers and the Christian missions was already indigenized; it thus underwent more of the same process as it spread, being appropriated naturalistically by more and more Celts. This is a continual restructuring phenomenon similar to that of the appropriation of the European colonial languages by more and more Bozal slaves, whose proportions on the plantations of the Atlantic and Indian Ocean colonies eventually overwhelmed that of Creole populations. It is also reminiscent of that of the appropriation of ex-colonial languages in former exploitation colonies, from non-native speakers to new African and Asian learners (see also Schneider 2007), although in the latter cases the languages are being spread primarily as lingua francas and through the school system. Thus, not only should the specific variety targeted by the learners count as an important

ecological factor (an internal one in this case) but also should the medium through which the variety is being appropriated. The school medium is more likely to filter out some substrate influence than naturalistic language “transmission.”

4) There is no particular reason why we must assume that only the varieties that diversified among the IE populations should count as IE languages. Even such appropriations are not evidence of absence of contact, as is evident from the evolution of English among Americans and Australians of European descent, the majorities of whom descend from continental European ancestors. A question we should be addressing is why contact has not caused them to diverge as significantly as English creoles (and pidgins) and African American English. The answer lies in population structure, accounting for the race-based segregation of populations, which affects regularity of interactions and can foster significant divergence for the varieties spoken by the marginalized groups, and in the timing of language shift. Generally the Europeans that were relatively autonomous economically and emigrated on their own settled in their respective mini-national colonies, so to speak, continued to use their heritage languages as vernaculars until relatively late, and shifted to English after American and Australian Englishes had already evolved past their formative stages into new national varieties. Thus, the (descendants of) continental European colonists shifted to English in more or less the same ways as recent immigrants, with the children acquiring American or Australian English natively and the adults speaking them with substrate elements and dying with their accents, leaving only minimal influence on it.

Regardless of whether or not creoles are identified as separate languages relative to their lexifiers, the role of language contact in their genesis is not a good reason for disfranchising them as non-IE vernaculars. Contact was also involved in the emergence of American and Australian Englishes. Although they are arguably less divergent from their European counterparts than creoles, there are ecological factors that account for this difference in outcomes, such as typological kinship among the languages in contact (Chaudenson 2001), timing of language shift, and the social integration of the new speakers. We should also remember that large proportions of Europeans speaking Romance languages as their vernaculars today are of Celtic rather than of Italic ancestry; so are large proportions of speakers of English in the British Isles. Places such as Norway and Sweden likewise suggest that significant proportions of native speakers of Scandinavian languages today are not of Germanic ancestry. Language contacts often involving shifts with modification of the new vernacular must have been a common factor in the speciation of IE (languages).

As made evident by similarities between African-American and American White Southern English, the extent of divergence from the proto-language (colonial English in this particular case) depends largely on the ecology of language shift.⁶ Race segregation was institutionalized rather late in former tobacco and cotton plantation colonies in the

⁶ Differences between African American vernacular English and European American English varieties are more conspicuous outside the American South, because it was transplanted during the late 19th and early 20th centuries to this new, primarily urban ecology where it has remained segregated (see, e.g., Schneider 1995, Bailey & Thomas 1998).

From Genetic Creolistics to Genetic Linguistics

USA, indeed in the late 19th century, about two and a half centuries after (former) slaves and (former) indentured servants had developed a common southern English variety. Anybody familiar with English in both North America and the Caribbean will also notice that African and European Americans are linguistically more similar, class for class, than they are to Black and White Caribbeans, respectively, and vice versa.

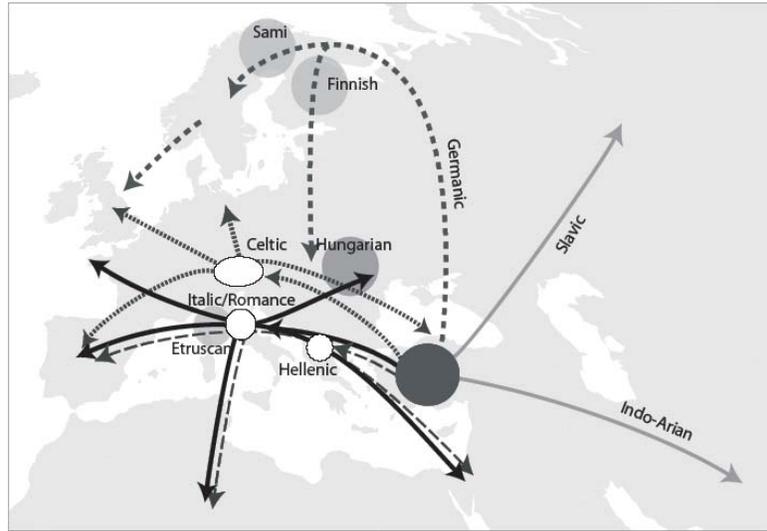
3.2. *The Indo-European dispersal as a colonial expansion*

A change of historical perspective is necessary to understand much of what is proposed above. We must interpret the emergence of the Hellenic and Roman Empires, as well as the Germanic invasion of England, among other similar colonial expansions, as milestones in the continual dispersal of the Indo-Europeans since about six thousand years ago. As such, the European colonization of the world since the 15th century may constitute the latest phase of that dispersal, bringing the Europeans in contact with other ethnolinguistic groups, with their languages being appropriated with modifications by the latter and evolving into new varieties. As illustrated by Maps 2 and 3 below, the history of the IE expansion has been a messy and protracted one, in which the Indo-Europeans colonized not only other populations but also each other.



Map 2: *European colonization of the world since the 15th century:
The latest wave of Indo-European expansion.*

Since the contacts did not all take place at the same time, the recurrent speciation of IE languages can also be attributed to several and successive layers of language contacts which must have always introduced new variants, driven some out, and/or triggered new weightings of current ones. The speciation of IE languages reflects a protracted language restructuring of the same kind that can be observed in the emergence of creoles and various non-creole varieties that emerged in recent colonies, with variation in the contact ecologies accounting for variation in the outcomes of the restructuring.



Map 3: *The Indo-European expansion up to the first millennium CE*

As in modern days, we have no reason for assuming that Proto-IE was homogeneous, let alone whether the migrant groups left at the same time and spoke the same language variety. While military conquests may have contributed to the dispersal of the Indo-Europeans from their original homeland some 6,000 years ago and from later, secondary homelands, as in the case of the Hellenic and Roman empires, then as recently, the IE populations that contributed the most effectively to the spread of their cultures and languages through regular interactions with the host populations relocated either individually or in small groups, as explained by Renfrew (1987). More significant in the IE dispersal are successive initiatives by individual farmers or entrepreneurs who decided to relocate to a new place and eventually formed critical masses significant enough to exert an impact on the host populations by way of language and culture shifts. Most likely, the IE did not disperse as army-like groups directed by a leader who articulated rules of linguistic and cultural engagements for them. Then, as in the more recent waves of population movements and contacts (including those that produced creoles), it was the convergence of related but individual behaviors within particular ecologies of contacts, competition, and selection which caused the languages to speciate recurrently (Mufwene 2008). Much of the explanation for this particular evolution and its actuation lies in the “invisible hand,” which involves extensive interactive complexity whose components still need extricating.

3.3. *Creoles are as young as any modern language varieties*

It has also been claimed that creoles are young languages without much history behind them (McWhorter 2001). The accuracy of such a claim depends largely on whether or not one accepts the discontinuity hypothesis discredited above and whether one accepts them as IE language varieties, as also suggested above. Creoles are as young as modern language varieties are, which are different from the older varieties

From Genetic Creolistics to Genetic Linguistics

they have evolved from. To the extent that mutual intelligibility matters at all,⁷ English creoles are certainly easier to understand for anybody familiar with (other) nonstandard English varieties than Old or Middle English varieties are. If creoles are accepted as new IE language varieties, their histories are as old as those of their lexifiers and other modern varieties they are genetically related to. What really matters comparatively is whether the peculiarities of the ecologies in which they emerged account adequately for the particular ways they have diverged from their creole and non-creole kin alike.

Have creoles really evolved faster than other language varieties? The adequacy of the answer to this question depends on whether one sticks to the claim that these new vernaculars emerged abruptly. The question is fundamentally that of speciation, regarding whether any particular point in time and in the evolutionary trajectory of a language can be singled out as the specific splitting point. Although Chaudenson (2001, 2003) claims that creoles are the only language varieties for which birth certificates of some sort can be issued,⁸ speciation in the history of proto-language has always been noted *post factum*. It has never been observed in process; only particular changes can. Speciation is the assessment of the divergence of a variety from another one or others to which it is genetically related. It is a relative notion.

Although one can claim that the kin varieties from which a particular vernacular diverges may be conservative, this is not necessarily the case for creoles. In some respects, they may be more conservative and the best windows we have into the colonial koinés from which they have evolved. There is thus no particular reason for us to claim that they evolved faster than their colonial non-creole kin. If the hypothesis of the evolution of creoles by gradual basilectalization proposed by Chaudenson (1979ff and Mufwene 1996ff) is correct, it must have taken these new vernaculars at least 150 years to emerge as different language varieties, probably the same amount of time it took American English to diverge significantly from British English, and not much less than it may have taken Old English to emerge from the contacts of the Germanic vernaculars brought by the Jutes, Angles, and Saxons from continental Europe. Vulgar Latin had already diversified into a number of rural varieties (known as *lingua romana rustica*) long before ninth-century Francien, a Parisian variety, was stipulated by scholars as Old French, i.e., the ultimate ancestor of modern French. The Gauls are thus believed to have spoken Romance, *lingua romana*, the post-colonial derivative of Latin, before Old French.

Much of the above distinction may have to do more with the political history of France than with purely linguistic considerations. Noteworthy in this case is also the role of Frankish superstrate influence in contributing to the divergence of Francien from the *lingua romana* spoken elsewhere in the Carolingian Empire. Since every language is

⁷ As explained in Mufwene (2001), understanding another language (variety) depends more on how familiar the interpreter is with it than on how structurally different it is from the language (variety) the interpreter speaks.

⁸ His actual position, as clarified in Chaudenson (2003), is that we know so much about the histories of their emergence that we can identify the probable period, not point in time, when they could be claimed to have been born, once they were identified as different from their lexifiers. This can be done with relatively more accuracy than in the case of the Romance languages, for instance.

constantly being reshaped by its users, an important difference between creoles and their lexifiers lies not in how they evolved but in the specific structural changes and feature recombinations from various sources that make them different.

3.4. *Creoles as new Indo-European language varieties*

An argument advanced by Thomason & Kaufman (1988) against grouping creoles genetically with their lexifiers is that the comparative method cannot even be used in this particular case. The argument amounts to giving up any attempt to learn something before even trying, based primarily on working assumptions which are questionable, such as that creoles have inherited most of their lexica each from one particular language but their grammars from (a) different one(s).

As well argued by Corne (1999), Chaudenson (2001), and Mufwene (2001), among others, congruence played an important role in the evolution of creoles' grammars, favoring structures that were (partly) shared with those of some of the languages that the lexifiers came in contact with. If this position is correct, then genetic linguists need be worried only about two main issues. The first is whether structures of the lexifiers need be maintained intact to guarantee genetic filiation. This would be a denial of linguistic evolution itself in any language. The same answer applies to the issue of contributions of other languages to creoles' structures. Romanists invented the term *substratum* in recognition of the role of Celtic languages in the restructuring of Latin into the Romance languages. Students of Celtic Englishes have probably been even more successful in articulating the nature of substrate influence on the relevant English dialects. If substrate influence has not been an inconvenience in these particular cases, one should wonder why it has become an issue in genetic creolistics.

The second is whether the structures selected into creoles' grammars should have originated in the same dialect. In the case of creoles, it appears that they did not. Creoles actually evolved koinés that were developing concurrently, as European speakers of various dialects, and sometimes different languages, came in contact with each other in the colonies. On the other hand, it is evident that this apparent issue does not also apply to genetic relations involving non-creole varieties. More generally, do we have any convincing reason for assuming that koinéization has not been a factor during the earlier cases of speciation in IE? Are the ideologies of language purity and uniparentalism realistic in the practice of genetic linguistics? Are they supported by the actual histories of the population movements that caused the diversification of IE and other language families?

In any case, regarding whether or not creoles can be grouped genetically with their lexifiers, more recent detailed studies such as Aboh (2006ff) which are better informed about the structures of the relevant African languages that have contributed to those of both Haitian Creole and Saramaccan, which have figured prominently in the debate on the origins of creoles' grammatical features, lead to a different conclusion. There was more continuity, however partial, from the lexifiers than has been assumed in studies that have informed Thomason & Kaufman (1988), Thomason (2001), and the like, including studies that attribute the grammars of creoles to a Universal Grammar putatively accessible only to children (Bickerton 1981ff). The influence from the

From Genetic Creolistics to Genetic Linguistics

relevant African languages is usually partial and often in domains where the similarity to structures of the lexifier, albeit a nonstandard koiné, is not absent. Perhaps we should ask whether the data on which genetic classifications are grounded are not too partial and therefore not fully representative of the languages they are associated with, having been favored by the some sources that history allowed only some literate members of the population of speakers to make accessible.

The ongoing debate on the origins of particular structures in creoles' grammars actually prompts an important question about whether shared forms and structures are sufficient evidence for concluding that two languages are genetically related. In evolution one is expected to distinguish between shared forms or structures that related species owe to a common ancestor, those that have been borrowed from the same third party, and those that correspond to parallel but separate evolutions. French and Portuguese creoles share some structures and perhaps some lexical items not because they have the same lexifier (if, as noted in Mufwene 2001, two closely related creoles could really have the *same* lexifier) but because French and Portuguese are already genetically and, in many respects, typologically related. They can be claimed to be genetically related, albeit indirectly, if they are acknowledged to be Romance language varieties. In many cases, parallel evolution cannot be ruled out as an explanation, either, because more or less the same languages came in contact with either Portuguese or French, although the demographics and the specific contact histories involved were not identical. The same remark also applies to creoles that have evolved nominally from the same language, for instance, Haitian and Mauritian Creoles.

Basically, findings of the comparative method are a necessary but not a sufficient condition for inferring genetic kinship. One must also know the histories of the relevant languages to determine whether contact is the reason why they share forms and structures, through borrowings, or whether they inherited the common materials from a common ancestor. History can also tell whether they share structural materials because they both borrowed them from the same other language. There may also be more complex situations where languages that are actually related genetically share more lexical or grammatical stock than with any other language because some of the materials were borrowed from the same source after their speciation (Meillet 1900; Tremblay 2005; Mufwene 2003, 2008). Creoles are clearly showing how much more complex language evolution is and how even the findings of the comparative method, based on phonemic, morphological, and syntactic correspondences need not be taken at face value.

4. Conclusions

I have argued in this paper that genetic creolistics is part of genetic linguistics and can contribute to a better practice of the latter in a number of ways. However, I would be remiss not to point out that overall genetic creolistics and traditional genetic linguistics have addressed the subject matter of language evolution from complementary perspectives. Genetic linguistics has focused more on showing how different languages may be related genetically (saying little about how they split), while genetic creolistics has focused more on showing how speciation occurs. In this respect,

genetic creolistics has proceeded in the tradition of historical dialectology, with the main difference that in creolistics the new varieties have been stipulated as separate languages, often against the sentiments of their native speakers and have been disfranchised as not being genetically related to their lexifiers.

The reasons for the traditional treatment of creoles as exceptional cases of language evolution, if holders of this position consider them as evolutions at all (rather than as unusual non-evolutionary developments), are amply explained in DeGraff (2003, 2005) and Mufwene (2008). They reveal more of the social dimension of academic research than is usually acknowledged. In this respect, the aprioristic exclusion of creoles from the IE genetic family, especially as Romance or Germanic language varieties, as suggested by the colonial history of the relevant territories, is reminiscent of 19th-century controversies about the membership of Indic languages in the same IE family. An important difference is that race and cultural differences between Europeans and Indians were then overtly adduced as evidence against lumping their languages together in the same macro-family (Maine 1861, Freeman 1881, 1886, 1892). Nowadays, the weight of these factors has remained implicit, although linguists have distanced themselves from the negative attitudes of 19th and early 20th-century philologists toward the alleged anatomical and mental inability of the makers of creoles to learn what they claimed to be the refined structures of European languages (Adam 1882, 1883; Bertrand-Bocandé 1849; Baissac 1880; Vinson 1882, 1888; Gonzales 1922). Much of this may also be a legacy of the colonial philosophy of the 19th century, associated with the ideology of purity of race and language which dismissed the reality of hybridity in all the cases where European populations and their languages mixed among themselves. Perhaps linguistics must face these traditions honestly and then focus more productively on the contributions that genetic creolistics can make to genetic linguistics.

We can certainly learn that actual linguistic data are messy, contrary to the clean written corpora that genetic linguistics has traditionally relied on. The latter are not necessarily representative of the overall populations that had spoken the relevant languages and often fail to capture the variation that obtained among them. They also remind us that native speakers were not necessarily the agents of the changes that occurred and of the speciation that ensued. This appears to be true as much of the spread of Latin in the (former) Roman Empire as of the spread of Western European languages outside Europe since the 15th century, especially that of English, the most “global” of (European) languages today.

Also, although the comparative method has not been used (seriously) in creolistics, it seems increasingly evident that it cannot be used alone to conclude whether two varieties that share lexical and/or grammatical materials are genetically related. One must also know about the histories of their speakers to determine whether (some of) the shared materials have been inherited from a common ancestor, have been borrowed from a third language that they both came in contact with, or have been innovated independently. High percentage of shared materials does not necessarily imply genetic kinship. The irony about creoles is to deny them genetic kinship to their lexifiers and other kin varieties when, on the contrary, the socio-economic histories of their emergence suggest this to be the case.

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From Genetic Creolistics to Genetic Linguistics

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