

UCLA

UCLA Previously Published Works

Title

Review of Gradual Creolization: Studies Celebrating Jacques Arends

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/8ks5p0hs>

Authors

Operstein, Natalie

Davis, Emily

Publication Date

2024-06-30

Peer reviewed

Gradual Creolization: Studies Celebrating Jacques Arends by Rachel Selbach, Hugo C. Cardoso & Margot van den Berg (eds.). (Creole Language Library 34). Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2009. Pp. 392.

Reviewed by Natalie Operstein and Emily Davis (California State University, Fullerton)

This volume, conceived as a tribute to Jacques Arends and edited by his former graduate students, contributes to a long-standing debate in historical creolistics: the “abrupt” versus “gradual” scenarios of creole formation. The abrupt scenario envisions the formation of a creole language within a single generation of speakers, whereas the gradual scenario views it as a multi-generation process. The papers in this collection represent both sides of the debate, though the gradualist view predominates.

The collection consists of two introductory and seventeen substantive chapters divided into Part 1: “Linguistic analysis” and Part 2: “Sociohistorical reconstruction”. The first introductory chapter, “One more cup of coffee: on gradual creolization” by Margot van den Berg and Rachel Selbach, sets the scene by introducing the volume’s purpose and major themes and providing brief summaries of individual contributions. In the second introductory chapter, “Jacques Arends’ model of gradual creolization”, Hugo C. Cardoso outlines Arends’ approach to creole formation, placing particular emphasis on Arends’ attention to the relative roles of L1 and L2 acquisition in this process as well as his careful consideration of primary data, both linguistic and demographic/socio-historical.

The first part of the volume focuses on the linguistic aspects of creole formation. It opens with Philip Baker’s paper “Productive bimorphemic structures and the concept of gradual creolization”, which has two goals: to demonstrate the variety of bimorphemic structures in creoles, and to determine how long it takes for a creole’s features to become fixed. Bimorphemic interrogatives are a common feature in creoles, and have been identified as a creole universal by Bickerton (1981). Study of texts in several pidgin/creoles (P/Cs) – Sranan, Saramaccan, Jamaican – and Chinese Pidgin English (CPE) shows a general trend for bimorphemic forms to increase, and supplant monomorphemic ones, over time. Baker shows that bimorphemic structures in creoles are not limited to interrogative words, supporting this point with a wide range of bimorphemic compounds in English- and French-lexifier P/Cs. Baker’s second goal is to estimate how long it takes for a P/C to attain “grammatical consistency”, the point at which its essential features become fixed. He concedes that selection of “essential features” may be difficult, considering and rejecting bimorphemic structures on the grounds that they also appear in pidgins like CPE. However, using a sample of 14 features in seven pidgins and creoles from an earlier work of his – Baker (1995) – Baker finds that the development of grammatical consistency in Caribbean creoles took approximately 150-185 years. This took so long because, contrary to what is commonly assumed, most creole speakers were not monolingual; a constant influx of foreign-born slaves meant that ancestral languages were used alongside the creole. Only when the slave trade declined did the creole become the only language of its speakers, resulting in its either being “honed” toward grammatical consistency, or its merging with the superstrate.

In “Gradual vs. abrupt creolization and recent changes in Daman Creole Portuguese”, J. Clancy Clements argues that the frequently cited dichotomy between abrupt and gradual creolization is better viewed as a continuum, in which the speed of creolization is determined by demographic and other social factors. At one end of the continuum are creoles like Sranan, which Arends (1989) demonstrated to have developed gradually, and at the other the Korlai and

Daman creoles, which developed more abruptly. Clements relies on the model of Emergent Grammar (EG), which views language as constantly being restructured by its speakers, particularly during acquisition. According to EG, grammaticalization (driven by reanalysis) is a major factor in language change. Two grammaticalization processes have occurred recently in Daman Creole Portuguese (DCP), mostly among younger speakers: the evolution of *se naw* ‘if not, otherwise’ into a coordinating conjunction for sentences, and the use of *de* ‘of’ as a multi-functional locative preposition. To track the emergence of these features, Clements examines texts from three periods: 1880s, 1959, and 1994-2003. Both features are absent in texts from the two earlier periods, and only appear in the 1990s in the speech of some adolescent basilectal speakers. Clements suggests that the use of *se naw* as a conjunction can be explained through the high perceptual salience of this disyllabic form. The use of *de* as a locative is provisionally attributed to English influence, which Clements takes to suggest that gradual creolization processes can continue long after a creole has been formed.

Pieter Muysken, in “Gradual restructuring in Ecuadorian Quechua”, looks at the simplification of Ecuadorian Quechua (EQ) – which has lost some of the complex morphology present in its Peruvian antecedents – through the lens of Arends’ concept of gradual restructuring (Arends 1993, 1996b). Muysken examines philological evidence from the 17th to 19th centuries and determines that EQ was partially restructured before the colonial period, a conclusion also consistent with socio-historical evidence. Muysken suggests that the particular form of restructuring undergone by Quechua – regularization and reduction of morphology in specific contexts – may have been influenced by the language’s agglutinative structure, and therefore that restructuring can be influenced by a language’s morphological typology.

Claire Lefebvre, in “A note on the process of lexical diffusion in the development of creoles: the case of double-object verbs”, aims to demonstrate the role of lexical diffusion in the development of creoles. She examines the double-object construction in Haitian; such a construction is available in its substrate language Fongbe, but not in French. In Haitian, this construction is used with a wider range of verbs than in the substrate, a development that Lefebvre attributes to lexical diffusion. She further hypothesizes that this change may have been driven by the presence of Bantu speakers, whose languages already possessed a wide range of double-object verbs. Lefebvre’s contribution to the abruptness/gradualness issue lies in her discussion of the different assumptions about how long creolization takes; this discrepancy can be accounted for by different implicit understandings of what constitutes creolization. Lefebvre herself views creole development as occurring in two stages: relexification, followed by a developmental phase in which more typical language change processes, such as leveling and reanalysis, take place. If the latter phase is considered part of creolization, then creolization is a gradual process.

In “Change in the possessive system of French Caribbean Creole Languages”, Marie-Christine Hazaël-Massieux sets out to prove that grammatical structure in creoles becomes established only very slowly. She examines data from historical texts in Guadeloupean, Martiniquais, and Haitian Creoles. Two forms of the possessive, with and without the grammatical marker *a*, occur in free variation in early texts (18th and 19th century); there is no evident semantic or contextual difference between them. During the 19th century, the direct form (without *a*) came to predominate in Guadeloupe and Martinique. In Haiti, the situation is more complex, as there were at least two creole varieties; in some regions, the indirect form (with *a*) still persists today. By the 20th century, variation had more or less stabilized in all the creoles. These findings show that the structures and paradigms of creole languages emerge gradually,

supporting Arends' position (Arends 1996a) that modern creoles do not reflect the state of the language at the moment of its emergence.

In "The origin and development of possibility in the creoles of Suriname," Bettina Migge and Donald Winford discuss the different ways in which the expressions of possibility have evolved in Sranan and the Maroon creoles of Suriname: Ndyuka, Pamaka, and Saamaka. The study finds that the modal system of Sranan is more complex than those of the other creoles, and has been influenced by Dutch. For example, the usage of the modal marker *sa* in modern Sranan closely parallels that of Dutch *zullen* 'must'. By contrast, the modal system of Maroon creoles appears to have been influenced by Gbe substrate languages; in particular, the usage of *sa* in these creoles resembles that of the potential future marker in Western Gbe languages. The evolution of the present-day modal systems in Surinamese creoles is traced through an analysis of early textual data, indicating that the grammars of these creoles have evolved over time, as predicted by Arends' (1993) gradualist model.

Peter Bakker, in "The Saramaccan lexicon: verbs", examines the contributions of English and Portuguese to this creole's verb lexicon. Unlike most creoles, Saramaccan draws its basic vocabulary from two languages, Portuguese and English. Bakker limits his inquiry to verbs, finding that although the basic vocabulary of Saramaccan is mostly from English, Portuguese verbs outnumber English verbs in the lexicon. Almost all of the most frequent English verbs – 29 out of 30 – are present in Saramaccan, but very few of the most frequent Portuguese verbs are; this implies that the Portuguese lexical layer is more recent than the English one. Some very infrequent Portuguese verbs made it into Saramaccan, a phenomenon Bakker attributes to their applicability in a plantation-work setting (these verbs denote work or household activities). Bakker's overall conclusion is that the Portuguese words in Saramaccan were added to a pre-existing English base, demonstrating that the language developed over several generations. This did not occur through relexification – which Bakker identifies as an abrupt, deliberate process – but rather through more gradual changes necessitated by the need to communicate in a multilingual setting.

George L. Huttar, in "Development of a creole lexicon", examines the African lexical elements in Ndyuka, a Maroon creole of Suriname, and their relevance to Arends' (1993) gradualist hypothesis. The majority of etyma for Ndyuka words come from Kikongo and other Bantu languages, since most of the slaves taken to Suriname between 1652 and 1700 – shortly before the creole began to develop – were from Bantu-speaking regions. Bantu lexical influence is also evident in Saramaccan and Sranan; 34 items are shared by all these creoles (out of 204 total), indicating that they underwent the same Bantu influence at the same time. However, it seems that the majority of Bantu influence occurred after these languages diverged, because there are 78 Bantu words exclusive to Saramaccan and 41 to Ndyuka, with 34 words shared between these languages but not Sranan. Ndyuka also shows lexical influence from Gbe languages, but the number of Gbe words is only one third that of Bantu words. A slightly smaller number of words come from Akan languages. Finally, some Ndyuka words are from the Gur languages. Other possible sources of Ndyuka etyma are the Delto-Benuic language grouping, which includes Yoruba, Igbo, and Edo; and Upper Guinea languages. The overall message of the paper is that at least the lexical development of a creole – Ndyuka – is a multi-generational process.

"Gradualism in the transfer of tone spread rules in Saramaccan", by Marvin Kramer, is a richly detailed paper that uses evidence from the tonal phenomena in Saramaccan to shed light on the broader history of the language. Kramer begins by noting that Arends' (1993) gradualist

theory of creolization has two important corollaries: creolization processes can happen at different speeds for different syntactic domains, and sources of input to a creole may vary over time in relation to demographic factors. Both of these are relevant to the evolution of tone-spread rules in Saramaccan. Saramaccan has two types of such rules: a “default” leftward spread, and a rightward spread found only in certain types of serial verb constructions. The latter resembles tone-spread rules in Fongbe, its primary substrate language. Furthermore, Saramaccan has a special rule for high tones in quantifiers, which resembles that of Kikongo. Using detailed linguistic and demographic data, Kramer shows that Saramaccan appears to have incorporated tone-spread rules from different languages at different times. Furthermore, Saramaccan’s tone spread rules, for both quantifiers and serial verb constructions, occur only in special syntactic domains, providing support for Arends’ (1993) hypothesis that creolization can occur at different rates for different parts of the grammar.

In “In search of a submerged phonology: the case of early Cape Dutch Pidgin”, Hans den Besten examines early written records to gauge the extent of phonological continuity between Cape Dutch Pidgin (CDP) and present-day Khoekhoe Afrikaans. CDP may have originated from two pre-colonial trade jargons, one based on Dutch and the other on English. Although modern Afrikaans shares some features with CDP, most of its features are traceable to Dutch; however, some CDP influence may exist in Khoekhoe Afrikaans. Evidence for the phonology of CDP comes from a glossary written by Étienne de Flacourt, a French traveler who did not know Dutch or English and thus would have transcribed the words phonetically rather than adhering to the orthography of the superstrate languages, as did most writers. Based on a detailed study of de Flacourt’s transcriptions, den Besten concludes that there is some continuity in pronunciation between CDP and Khoekhoe Afrikaans.

The papers in the second part of the collection consider demographic and socio-historical aspects of creole formation. This part opens with “Bilingualism and creolization in the Solomon Islands” by Christine Jourdan. Jourdan considers how the life and work experiences of the creole creators might have influenced the pace of creolization, focusing her discussion on Solomon Islands Pijin, which fully creolized only after becoming the main language of the multilingual Solomon Islands. Multilingualism was common in the Solomon Islands in pre-colonial times, both for practical reasons and as an expression of personal identity. Colonial administrations later imposed English, which became the high-prestige language. After the Solomon Islands became independent in 1978, many islanders migrated to the capital city of Honiara, but still held onto their ancestral languages. More recently, Pijin became a de facto national language of the islands; most islanders speak it as a second language, and a whole generation of Honiarian children has acquired it, rather than the native languages of their parents, as their first language. For most of its history, Pijin was used in typical pidgin situations – contexts in which interlocutors did not know each other’s primary languages. It was not particularly important to the traditional culture of the islanders, who lived in rural areas and traveled little. When urbanization brought about the emergence of a new cultural world – the city, especially Honiara, – migrants to Honiara lost connection with their ancestral language and culture. Consequently, Pijin became the primary mode of communication in the urban world, reflecting new socio-economic conditions and new ideological notions of self- and group identity. Jourdan suggests that the case of Pijin in Honiara can shed light on the creolization processes that took place in plantation colonies such as Suriname: it shows that multilingualism is common, and plays an important role, in communities where P/C languages emerge. Multilingual speakers may initially shift to the P/C because this language is culturally neutral; at the time of creolization, however,

the P/C becomes associated with “a community of speakers whose linguistic practice has changed” (253). Given the gradualness of the cultural changes that drive the formation of a P/C – continuing access to speakers of ancestral languages, gradual emotional detachment from the ancestral culture, the time it takes for a new culture and identity to develop – the shift to a P/C also occurs gradually.

In “Lingua Franca in West Africa? An evaluation of the sociohistorical and metalinguistic evidence”, Magnus Huber examines the possibility of a connection between the Mediterranean Lingua Franca (LF) and the Portuguese pidgin used in West Africa in the 15th-18th centuries. Huber approaches this task through an examination of the linguistic ecology of Afro-Portuguese contacts on the Guinea Coast, and through metalinguistic references in European accounts of visits to West Africa. The overall evidence leads him to conclude that there might have been two different contact languages on the Guinea Coast, one derived from LF, and a locally created Afro-Portuguese pidgin. This is suggested by the travel journals of John Barbot, from 1688, where LF and Portuguese are separately referred to as languages spoken in West Africa, although Barbot does not seem to use these terms consistently. Huber suggests that the two contact varieties, LF and pidgin Portuguese, may have influenced each other and even merged over time.

John Ladhams, in “The formation of the Portuguese-based creoles: gradual or abrupt?” traces the development of Portuguese-based creoles through socio-historical information. Though early textual data are lacking, the available extra-linguistic evidence suggests that the development of Portuguese creoles in Asia and Africa was likely to have been abrupt. For instance, the African creoles probably did not form gradually because there was no prolonged period of slave importation. Differences between the creoles may be attributed to social circumstances, such as different plantation systems and the degree to which speakers developed a sense of community identity.

In “English-speaking in early Surinam?”, Norval S. H. Smith examines demographic information on Suriname during the period of English dominance and immediately afterward, and looks at its implications for the linguistic situation. Due to the demographics of Suriname during the English colonial period – a ratio of slaves to English people not greater than 2:1 – slaves should have been able to learn English, and might even have continued speaking English while the Dutch controlled Suriname. However, Smith considers it impossible for English to have been the primary language of the slaves, reiterating his previous claims (Smith 2006) that creolization takes place very rapidly and that access to a colonial language does not hinder the development of a creole but is necessary for the transfer of subtle features. Rather than adopting English as their primary language, the slaves would have been motivated to express their common interest and unique slave “ethnicity” by (unconsciously) creating a new language as a means of empowerment and resistance to their masters. Smith also presents a model of “I-creolization”: individual slaves take a selection of lexical items from the superstrate, filter them through phonological rules from the substrates, and combine them with morphosyntactic features from both strates. The “I-creolizer” slaves feel a sense of “emergent proto-ethnicity”, which leads to the development of a creole. Access to the superstrate colonial language is necessary for its features to be transferred to the nascent creole, which then undergoes leveling through interaction between I-creole speakers. Consequently, the “rapid” vs. “gradual” creolization debate may rest on different definitions of creolization: the formation of an I-creole (idiolectal) vs. that of an E-creole (external community language); the former may be abrupt and the latter gradual.

Silvia Kouwenberg examines the socio-historical context of Jamaican Creole formation in “The demographic context of creolization in early English Jamaica, 1655-1700”. Kouwenberg shows that the demographic situation in Jamaica between 1655 and 1675, when the white population outnumbered the black population, would have favored L2 learning among the latter, and thus disfavored the formation of a creole. Unlike some other colonies, Jamaica did not go through a homestead phase because its early economy was dominated by privateering. As a result, Jamaica never had an acculturated population of Africans, nor of poor whites. This meant that, when the slave population quickly swelled during the 1670s following an increase in plantation activity, the newly imported slaves had no linguistic model from either the previous black population or from white planters and indentured workers. Consequently, Jamaican Creole would have emerged fairly abruptly during the final decades of the 17th century. The peculiar nature of Jamaica’s history as a colony – in that a plantation economy was not established until relatively late – thus meant that Jamaican Creole formed “from scratch” within a few decades. If “creolization” is taken to denote the emergence of a stable contact-language variety, then this process occurred fairly quickly in late 17th century Jamaica, while (often gradual) post-formative changes should not be considered part of the creolization process.

In “The Founder Principle and Anguilla’s homestead society”, Don E. Walicek addresses the relevance of the Founder Principle (FP) (Mufwene 1996, 2001) to the development of the English-lexified Anguillian Creole. FP accounts of creole genesis reject the traditional notion of a break in transmission and present creolization as involving the same gradual restructuring processes as “normal” language change. After tracing the complex socio-linguistic history of Anguilla and drawing attention to the ethno-linguistic diversity and social stratification among the creole’s founding population, Walicek formulates three hypotheses relevant to the formation of Anguillian:

1. “[B]oth the pre-settlement chronologies and interactions on the island define and differentiate the experiences and dynamics of this speech community and should be considered in identifying its founders, the language(s) they used, and the nature of the linguistic interactions among them” (360).
2. The group of Anguilla’s “founders” is a diverse and fluid one.
3. “Micro-level distinctions” are important to understanding language contact in Anguilla. Connections between linguistic features and speaker status/identity would differ between different subgroups of founders.

In the final paper, “Demographic factors in the formation of French Guianese Creole”, William Jennings sets out to demonstrate the utility of primary historical and demographical sources to creole studies, to discover more about children in slave-based creole societies, and to test hypotheses about the use of African languages within slave groups. The article uses French Guiana as its test case, looking at its early social history, census data, contemporary evidence for life on sugar plantations, statistics regarding the number of children on the plantations, and the use of African languages by the slave populations. Jennings concludes that the socioeconomic, and therefore the linguistic, situation in French Guiana was different from that of the Antilles and Suriname. The Gbe language was dominant early on and had lasting influence on the emerging creole, as did Portuguese. While creolists have previously paid much attention to age demographics and use of ancestral languages, Jennings argues that these are just two factors among many. He also argues that Guianese Creole did not emerge within one generation, but only after more diverse slaves – specifically, non-Gbe speakers – were imported. The overall conclusion is that no single factor – such as proportion of children or use of ancestral languages

– fully determines how creolization will play out, and also that study of primary sources is vital to creolistics, and historical sociolinguistics in general.

This interesting collection raises a number of issues relevant to the field of historical creolistics, and diachronic linguistics more generally. One of the issues is: what exactly is meant by the term creolization? Should it refer to the initial formation of a stable contact variety, or should it include later formative stages as well? In either case, what should be viewed as the cutoff point, the point at which a creole may be considered as having been formed? Baker points a way to answering this question quantitatively by identifying a list of “essential features” and measuring their development over time. A related issue is how/whether the addition of features may be correlated with social and demographic factors. Also at stake is the very legitimacy of a debate over “abrupt” versus “gradual” creolization. Several of the contributions cogently demonstrate that creolization can be abrupt as well as gradual, or located on a continuum between the abrupt and the gradual, depending on historical, social and demographic factors. This implies that perhaps there is no universal rule for creole genesis, and that each situation of creole formation is unique and has to be approached on its own terms.

Whether directly or indirectly, a number of the contributions challenge the distinction between creolization and “normal” language change. For example, if DCP could be said to have continued “gradual creolization” processes long after its formation (Clements), then perhaps creolization is just part of a greater language-change continuum? Many authors make explicit connections between processes found in pidginization and creolization and language change more generally. For example, Clements suggests that cognitive factors, such as perceptual salience, play an important role in the historical development of languages irrespective of notions of pidginization and creolization (56); Lefebvre observes that lexical diffusion “applies in the development of creoles in the same way as in other languages” (108); and Hazaël-Massieux suggests that creoles might be defined as “languages marked by a certain lack of grammatical differentiation” (127), which leads her to define creolization as a developmental stage that is not limited to a particular type of language but applies to many if not all languages. Muysken’s demonstration that insights from historical creolistics may be applied to the study of languages not typically considered creoles likewise challenges the stance that creolization is qualitatively distinct from “normal” language change.

Some of the papers skillfully use language-specific data in support of broader theoretical claims. For example, the role of salience is projected from the choice of bimorphemic structures in P/Cs to language development more generally (Baker), the rise of double-object verbs in Haitian is tied to the role of lexical diffusion in processes of language change (Lefebvre), the development of polysemy in two grammatical markers in DCP is brought to bear on the question of abrupt versus gradual creolization (Clements), and the stabilization of possessive constructions in French-lexifier creoles is connected to the very definition of the terms “creole” and “creolization” (Hazaël-Massieux).

This volume is a fine tribute to Jacques Arends’ work. Arends’ main research interests are well represented, including his approach to creole formation and his emphasis on the need for a careful study of historical records. Many of the contributions rely on contemporary philological sources for their conclusions (e.g. Hazaël-Massieux, Muysken, Clements, Huber), and papers in the second part of the volume in particular rely on painstaking examination of historical evidence. A number of the papers are devoted to Surinamese creoles (e.g. Smith, Bakker, Kramer, Migge and Winford) or Lingua Franca (Huber), both of which were Arends’ specialist interests. Arends’ views on the study of creoles and creolization are referred to or directly quoted

in every chapter, and beyond its contribution to the issues at stake, this volume is to be commended as a warm tribute to a mentor, colleague and friend.

References

- Arends, Jacques. 1989. Syntactic Developments in Sranan: Creolization as a Gradual Process. Nijmegen: Katholieke Universiteit PhD dissertation.
- Arends, Jacques. 1993. Towards a Gradualist Model of Creolization. *Atlantic Meets Pacific. A Global View of Pidginization and Creolization* ed. by Francis Byrne & John Holm, 371-380. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Arends, Jacques. 1996a. Demographic Factors in the Formation of Sranan. In Jacques Arends, ed., 233-285.
- Arends, Jacques, ed. 1996b. *The Early Stages of Creolization*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Baker, Philip. 1995. Some Developmental Inferences from Historical Studies of Pidgins and Creoles. *The Early Stages of Creolization* ed. by Jacques Arends, 1-24. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Bickerton, Derek. 1981. *Roots of Language*. Ann Arbor, MI: Karoma.
- Mufwene, Salikoko. 1996. The Founder Principle in Creole Genesis. *Diachronica* 13:1.83-134.
- Mufwene, Salikoko. 2001. *The Ecology of Language Evolution*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Smith, Norval S. H. 2006. Very Rapid Creolization in the Framework of the Restricted Motivation Hypothesis. *L2 Acquisition and Creole Genesis: Dialogues* ed. by Claire Lefebvre, Lydia White & Christine Jourdan, 49-65. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.