

Research Report

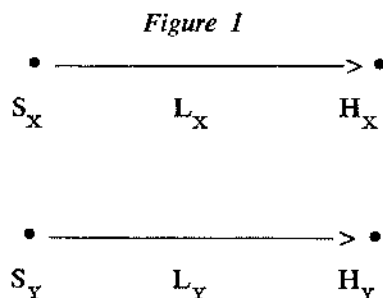
Is Afrikaans a Creolized Language?

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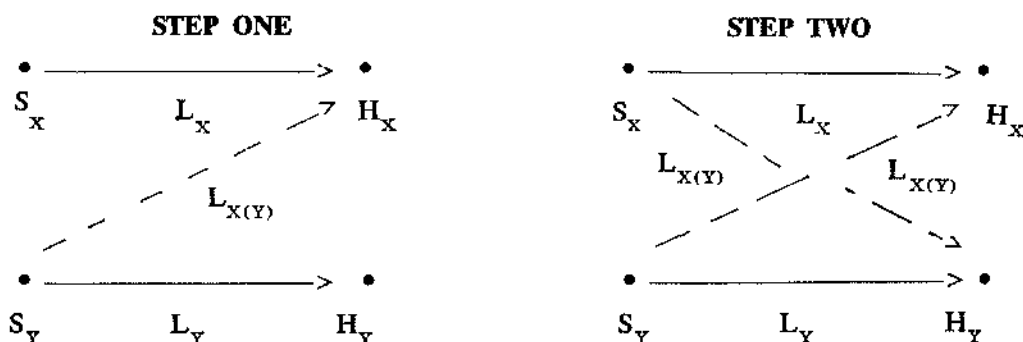
PIDGIN AND CREOLE LANGUAGES

The study of language behaviour generally assumes the existence of the normal communication act where speaker S_x uses language L_x his mother-tongue, when communicating to hearer H_x (with mother-tongue L_x). However, this normal situation is far from being the only one. In the following, the situation is analysed which arises when speakers or hearers of two heterogeneous language systems have to communicate with each other. Given a community, where language L_x the dominant language, is opposed to language L_y , the lower Language:



A pidgin language $L_{x(y)}$ results as a modification of the dominant language L_x through imperfect replication of speakers of the lower language L_y :

Figure 2

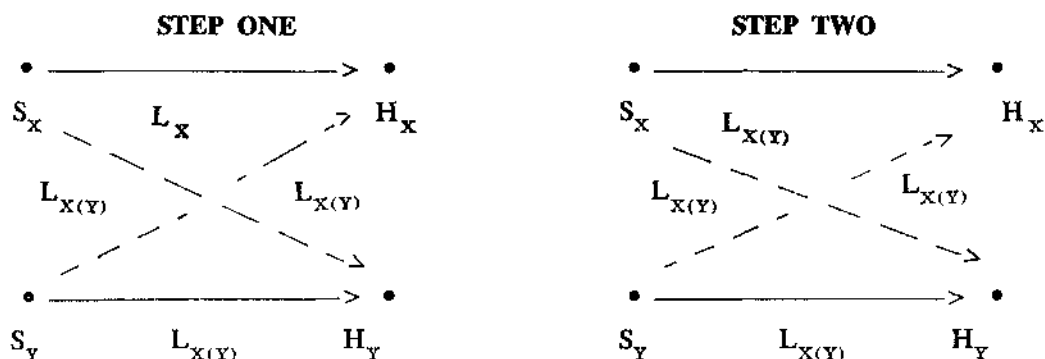


Pidgin languages, such as Melanesian Pidgin (with English and Melanesian as dominant and lower language respectively), are mostly 'trade languages', where S_X and S_Y have to use pidgin when communicating with H_X and H_Y

respectively.

A creole (creolized) language results when a pidgin language comes to be employed as a first language:

Figure 3



'Haitian Creole is a creolized language, based on a reduced or pidginized variety of French, originally spoken in the contact situation between masters and slaves in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries with considerable borrowing of morphological and syntactic features from the West African languages of the slave population.' It is spoken by the entire population of the Republic of Haiti; that is 'Step One' is followed by 'Step Two' (cf. Figure 3).

THE MAKING OF AFRIKAANS

Though not calling Afrikaans a creole language, Marius F. Valkhoff concludes that it contains quite a number of creolisms, such as nasalised vowels and double negation for instance.² On the other hand, the changes leading to the development of Afrikaans can be viewed as innovations in the grammar(s) of the Dutch dialects of the colonists at the Cape, with rules which are innovations in the phonological component, and rules which may be regarded as changes in the morpheme inventory. Thus, instead of suggesting that the Dutch at the Cape underwent a 'partial creolization', one simply states that it underwent changes by the addition of rules to the grammar.

The lexicon of a grammar is probably most amenable to external influences; the phonological component and the morpheme inventory cannot be adduced as easily as evidence for influence such as pidginization or creolization. For two reasons the making of Afrikaans *ons* [ɔ:s] (We us; cf. Dutch *ons* [ɔns], us) represents a test case in this connection. Firstly, the existence of nasalised vowels (viz. [ɛ̃, ɔ̃, ɑ̃]) is regarded as supporting the theory of the creole character of today's Afrikaans. As, however, a well-known change similar to the behaviour in Afrikaans is found in a Northern West Germanic innovation (cf. Old English [u:s] from [ɑ:s]?, as opposed to Old High German [uns]), the vocalic nasalization of Afrikaans may be defined as a belated Germanic innovation and not as a creolism. Secondly, in Afrikaans, the replacement Nominative → Accusative in the personal pronoun, as in *ons* versus Dutch *wij* (we), is usually regarded as a creole feature. A parallel however, can be discovered in today's popular or vulgar Danish where the replacement is effective in all cases; therefore, one might instead propose the term 'Germanic vulgarism'. From this, the complexity of the linguistic nature of pidginization and creolization is evident. Therefore, before using a convenient

notion such as 'creolization', one rather should begin with the neutral statements proposed above.

A NEW APPROACH

The following cybernetic approach is proposed. The 'simplified' structure of today's Afrikaans may be interpreted as a result of a special adaptive manoeuvre, initiated by the Dutch colonists for use with hearers who did not have full understanding of Cape Dutch,

namely the slaves and others from different parts of the East Indies and of Africa with their Portuguese *lingua franca*. In other words, in order to paralyse the influence of the coexisting (lower) language, that is to prevent the (dominant) Dutch language from undergoing pidginization and, later, creolization (cf. Figures 2 and 3), the internal structural changes towards simplification have taken place. Consequently, Afrikaans as originating from Cape Dutch 'foreigner talk'³ would not contain any pidgin or creole feature at all.

REFERENCES

- ¹R. A. Hall, *Haitian Creole: Grammar, Texts, Vocabulary*, The American Anthropological Association, Memoir No. 74 (Supplement No. 2, Part 2 to *American Anthropologist*, 55,), 1953, p.12.
²*Studies in Portuguese and Creole with Special Reference to South Africa*, Johannesburg, Witwatersrand Univ. Press, 1966.
³Discussed in detail in C.A. Ferguson, 'An Investigation into "Simplified Speech" as Used with Hearers Who Do not Have Full Understanding of the Language', delivered at the 3rd International Congress of Applied Linguistics, Copenhagen, August 1972.