MODEL-REJECTION AS AN IMPEDIMENT TO CREOLE STANDARDIZATION

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Modern studies of language standardization tend to start with diglossia, because history records few languages whose entry into the process was not preceded by contact with a previously standardized tongue. Charles Ferguson's article "Diglossia" (1959) established the term in English usage, but other linguists have not always abided by his restrictions on it. Ferguson defined diglossia as

a relatively stable language situation, in which, in addition to the primary dialects of the language (which may include a standard or regional standards), there is a very divergent, highly codified (often grammatically more complex) superposed variety, the vehicle of a large and respected body of written literature, either of an earlier period or in another speech community, which is learned largely by formal education and is used for most written and formal spoken purposes but is not used by any sector of the community for ordinary conversation.

Depending on what is meant by "ordinary conversation", his definition would apply to some creole/target language configurations and not to others. This is one reason scholars have sought alternative models, particularly for cases like Jamaican (Bailey 1966, 1971; DeCamp 1968, 1971) and Guyanese (Bickerton 1975). Others, less conscientious, have simply broadened "diglossia" to cover even those situations Ferguson expressly excluded. I propose that we abide by Ferguson's limits, and extrapolate from his definition a second term, superposition, to cover all cases in which two dialects of unequal prestige coexist within a given speech community.

The low-prestige dialect which attains to standardization must first undergo three types of changes, all intricately interlocked. Alterations of function occur because standardized and nonstandardized dialects are not employed in the same contextual spheres. The newly-acquired functions necessitate changes in form -- to accomodate, for example, advanced scientific, technological, and philosophical endeavor, as well as the nearly inevitable imposition of Greco-Latin-based concepts of grammar. Concomitant with these developments come changes in status: the idiom gradually ascends from its low stratum, in the superposition, ultimately becoming viable as superposed "high" over a different dialect base.
The first language to standardize, somewhere in prehistory, did so without a model -- call it the "Ur"-standard, if you will. But every recorded standardization since the first well-documented case, Latin, has relied on the guidance of some previously standardized dialect in undertaking the requisite changes. For Latin, the model was Greek. For French, it was Latin. For most other European languages, Latin (and often French) played a part. And when Latin plays a part, so does Greek -- at least indirectly, given the "hellenization" of standardized Latin. And so on through history. In a very real sense, all standardized dialects, whatever their linguistic affiliation, have something in common: a tradition of development, an expectation of what a standard language must be and do. One clear, universal example is the acquisition of the immense Greco-Latin lexicon of science, technology, medicine, letters, law. Syntax is also liable to change with use in these domains. Individual cases abound of distortions in semantics, morphology, phonology, even suprasegmentals, brought on by the standardization process (see Joseph 1981: 145-154, 196-199).

None of this comes about automatically. Before a "low" dialect can begin standardization, its speech community must give rise to a "cultural avant-garde", persons who undertake to become proficient in the superposed "high" language and in the constituent functions of a standardized tongue. If after learning these functions in the "high", they experience sentiments of nationalism (or any other sort of home-group pride, be it local, regional, tribal, racial, religious), and come to believe they can indeed carry out the functions in their native idiom, then its standardization will be underway. This is no guaranteed occurrence, however. Belonging to a cultural avant-garde, its membership limited to persons able to function in the exclusive "high" language, carries a tremendous amount of prestige. The temptation to lord it over one's fellow tribesmen or countrymen -- to betray one's culture, in other words -- is strong, and centuries may elapse between the emergence of an avant-garde and the attainment of standard language status.

The avant-garde's task is, essentially, acculturation. This term is more frequent in creole studies than in treatises on standardization; but as Alleyne notes (1971: 175), the contact situation which yields pidginization is "...nothing more than the classical contact situation (Latin with Celtic, Iberian, or Italic) with differences in the degree of social integration, in the quality of the learning situation, and especially differences caused by the diverse ways in which the European/African
contact situation later developed." Thus we find intrinsic resemblances between the processes of pidginization and standardization -- if we focus on this isolated point, that each may be regarded as the process of one dialect approximating structurally toward another.

One might anticipate, then, that creoles have an inherent proclivity to standardization, since the European "parent" tongue or "target" language provides a "high" model ab origine. Nothing could be further from the truth. The matrix is fraught with complications, several of which I shall endeavor to identify.

When creole and "target" language coexist -- as in Haiti, Jamaica, Guyana, indeed in most of the prominent cases -- this "target" is not merely superposed, but "interposed" as well; it helped compose the parent pidgin. Here enters a fundamental paradox. Heinz Kloss (1978; see Joseph 1980) has identified two parameters that a dialect, any dialect, must fulfill before it can claim the status of standard language. The first is Abstand, or "distance". The dialect must be different enough structurally from the nearest-related standard language to justify the reduction in intergroup communicability that its standardization will produce. The second factor is Ausbau, or "development" -- essentially the changes in form which I discussed above. When a creole grows in Ausbau, developing in the direction of its superposed model, it must simultaneously shrink in Abstand, since that model is the same "target" language from which it needs to establish its independent validity. This notion is implicit, mutatis mutandis, in Eersel's (1971: 319) remark on Sranan, the creole English of officially Dutch-speaking Surinam: "In a way Sranan is in a privileged position, compared to many other creole languages. It is completely different from Dutch, and its speakers can easily develop independently a standard of their own." Even so, he admits, "...it is not (yet) fully standardized."

The difficulties a creole speech community faces in asserting its linguistic autonomy from the "target" language are considerably greater than those which early proponents of French or Spanish faced in breaking from Latin, because of "...the greater and more persistent transfer of native speech habits into the learning of the new languages in Africa than is usually accepted in the case of the learning of Latin by Celts and Iberians." (Alleyne 1971: 175).

As if this weren't enough, the creole may face additional Abstand challenges -- perhaps from other creoles of similar origin and structure, perhaps from the non-European component of the parent pidgin. Working toward the standardization of
a creole is rather like a high-wire act. Each step to Ausbau jolts a dialect's structural balance, by definition. The standardizing creole dares not move too much in the direction of those related, previously standardized dialects that menace its Abstand position; yet no other model for development is really accessible. For standardization to succeed, the model needs somehow to be taken as a rough procedural guide rather than a source of direct inspiration — a different and considerably more difficult process than that recorded in the history of most non-creole languages.

The foregoing were the external problems. Now on to those that reside within the creole speech community. Weinreich (1953) established the paradigm of "language loyalty", crucial to standardization. Among creole speakers, loyalty varies vastly. One encounters creolephiles as ardent in their chauvinism as any other downtrodden ethnos, and priding themselves on their exceptionally "good command" of the dialect. Yet it is perfectly common for the "low" community in any situation of superposition to feel that their idiom is "not a language" — "only a dialect" or "patois", even that it is "just slang" or "uneducated speech". With creole speakers, we again see a general problem magnified — so much sometimes that speakers may deny that the creole is "human" speech. Douglas Taylor (1977: 227) tells of how French creole speakers on officially Anglophone islands have for more than a century heard and accepted the opinion that their patois is "a monkey language", while imported elementary school teachers inculcate small children with the idea that use of their mother tongue is "degrading".

Wolfers' (1971: 414) observations on the criticisms of Neo-Melanesian — a pidgin rather than a creole — are nonetheless generally à propos: "that it is a vulgar and degrading way of speaking...really but a species of baby-talk, a debased form of English which no self-respecting European chooses to use..."; "that it is, in fact, no language at all, but serves only to preserve the vocabulary and attitudes of colonialism... Some Papuans and New Guineans feel that it perpetuates social relationships and ways of thinking more appropriate to the colonial past than to the modern society that is emerging in the Territory." A core problem, but what is the answer? Attempt to elevate one of the indigenous languages? Such solutions are usually blocked either by intense linguistic factionalism within the society (a situation commonly favoring the generation of pidgins) or because the indigenous languages have been effectively lost, as in the West Indies. If it comes down to a choice between creole and superposed "target" language, both tools of colonialism, at least the former can claim some indigenous input, and may gain loyalty from the avant-garde on that ground.
But even when there is basic creole loyalty, its usual by-product is an extremist position vis-à-vis the "target" language or other superposed model -- either extremely anti or excessively pro. The first seems easier to comprehend: a superposed tongue nearly always constitutes a threat to the "low" dialect's prestige, and sometimes to its very survival. If the community therefore shuns the "high" language, rejects it out of hand, it is simultaneously rejecting the model for standardization of its creole. This may consolidate loyalty, but will ultimately prove detrimental to anything beyond superficial standardization. The other case, creole loyalty producing a pro-"high" stance, probably occurs for the simple reason that creole loyalty itself represents a "raising of consciousness" -- the initial level of a process that, once begun, is hard to stop. Language loyalty is but one facet of general cultural loyalty. If the creole avant-garde feels the need to make its cause widely known, it must do this in a world language, like the superposed tongue. Hence abandonment of the creole is easily justified. Subsequently, of course, the avant-garde finds that a prestigious world language opens doors to personal ambitions extending well beyond the native community.

A creole may suffer from both the pro and anti effects at once if superposed by two dialects of comparable high prestige. In Louisiana, for example, the ongoing encroachment of English on Cajun and creole speech helps pull together the creole minority; to maintain their non-English cultural identity they appeal to the government of France, which sends them teachers and language administrators who instruct them in Standard French -- considered the only adequate vehicle, after all, for demonstrating the validity of their culture in the face of another world language like English.

To summarize: if the creole cultural avant-garde embraces the superposed "target" language as its model for standardization, it risks: 1) being swept off by the amenities of the "target" culture, such as the "high" tongue's international currency; 2) reducing the creole's Abstand position and thus jeopardizing standardization. Model-rejection, on the other hand, precludes the attainment of standard status by the established, traditional means -- all the more regrettable since standardization is, first and foremost, the process of assimilating to the Western-based concept of what a standard language is supposed to be. It seems to me that creole standardization can best be achieved via a moderate course of model-acceptance (though always at arm's length, and casting a distrustful eye), with cautious, well thought out steps. The process will be slow.
It is with no small trepidation that I propose the following analogy. Mass psychology is a perilous enterprise, inviting overinferences and overgeneralizations; but some creolists have indulged. Alleyne (1971: 180) has written "...the psychological duality of the New World negro wishing to participate in the European way, but yet wishing to preserve something of a separate identity. This duality, this public/private dichotomy or ambivalence is very characteristic of present-day Caribbean peoples." Sociologist Allen Grimshaw, commenting on an observation of J.L. Dillard's, invites an even more deeply psychoanalytic perspective: "Dillard mentions, anecdotally and almost in passing, that urban Haitian boys tend disproportionately to speak creole and girls of the same age and social class to speak French. He suggests that this pattern, like similar patterns reported for English creoles and non-standard Negro English in the USA, is related to concepts of masculinity and femininity." (1971: 439).

Merely on the level of analogy, the correlations between problems of creole standardization and certain causes of psychological maladjustment are striking. It is purely by analogy, of course, that one applies the "parent-child" configuration to pidgins/creoles and the languages from which they have theoretically derived their elements. Whinnom (1971: 91) has gone so far as to stress that "...the analogy of two languages 'mating' to produce a hybrid offspring (a pidgin or creole) is quite false, since this is to equate a language with a biotype which (a) is on a different hierarchical level, and (b) has in fact no linguistic equivalent (since the theoretical 'idiolect' is non-compatible)." All the more reason that the existence and wide currency of this parent-child view are revelatory. Many non-linguists would have it that as French is "daughter" of Latin, Haitian is "bastard" of French.

We are all familiar with the basic Freudian concept of child development, how at the phallic stage the ego must recognize and assert its independence from the parent, build its defenses, and simultaneously battle the incestuous erotic impulses and castration anxieties that follow the parental separation. In a healthy development these feelings will be internalized and will contribute to the growth of the superego. I can bring the whole analogy closer to the matter at hand through the reinterpretation of Freud formulated by his strayed disciple, Otto Rank. Rank's ideas have been thrust into prominence in our own day by the exegetical work of the late Ernest Becker, whose The Denial of Death won the 1974 Pulitzer Prize. The Rank/Becker view finds the overriding determinant of human actions and development not in the sexual impulse, but in the realization of inevitable death, a fact we direct most of our lives toward repressing in a myriad ways.
Rank and Becker see the child's need to establish his independence from the parent as an attempt to create a myth of his own self-generation — hence of his immortality. Norman Brown's (1959) "Oedipal project" becomes Becker's "causa sui project"; Freud's "castration" anxiety becomes Rank's "denial" anxiety.

"Language death" is an ever-present menace within creole culture, and to forestall it requires the establishment of independence from the parent (Abstand) followed by healthy development to maturity (Ausbau). As an analogy this is harmless, and even helps us understand some of the problems of creole standardization. But can we go further?

If there exists within the creole community a widespread, implicit view of creole and "target" language defining a child-parent matrix — that the European trade language or proto-pidgin "impregnated" the "mother" base language or proto-pidgin, yielding this "bastard" — might there not be actual psychological identification with this situation, complicating acceptance or rejection of the superposed standardization model even more?

I cannot presume to answer the question, only to plant it in the creolist's mind. Were he or she to suspect the existence of actual subconscious responses of this sort, certain strategies for uprooting them might be explored. Psychology is useful to the linguist as an analogical tool, senselessly destructive if really interfering in matters, even to a small degree. The defusing is not easy when one is dealing with an entire population. The best weapon is full cognizance of the facts by those actively involved in standardization (the cultural avant-garde), with aggressive dissemination of crucial information to the rest of the community: that creole language and culture are autonomously rich, structurally inferior to none; that the superposed model was itself once "low" and that similar anxieties accompanied its acculturation to a "high" model; that use of the "high" as a standardization model does not entail structural convergence with it, only its service as most convenient source of the "universal" characteristics of standard languages.

NOTES

1. Throughout this paper I keep the term "target" between quotation marks, since it connotes certain implications regarding the relationship of this language to the creole — the very relationship I am attempting to investigate in an objective manner.

2. My tripartite schema of form, function, and status began as a refinement of Klossian Ausbau.
A good recent study on the relationship of creole and "target" language, focusing on Trinidad English, is Winford 1980.


REFERENCES


