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.[1] 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 develop-
ment, 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 seman-
tics, 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 tremen-
dous 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 differ-
ences 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 stand-
ardization -- 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.[2]   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" lan-
guage 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 inde-
pendently a standard of their own."   Even so, he admits, "...it
is not (yet) fully standardized."

The difficulties a creole speech community faces in assert-
ing 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 <u>Ausbau</u>
jolts a dialect's structural balance, by definition. The stand-
ardizing creole dares not move too much in the direction of
those related, previously standardized dialects that menace
its <u>Abstand</u> 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 consider-
ably more difficult process than that recorded in the history
of most non-creole languages.[3]

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 chauvin-
ism 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 accept-
ed 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? At-
tempt to elevate one of the indigenous languages? Such solu-
tions are usually blocked either by intense linguistic faction-
alism 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 follow-
ing analogy. Mass psychology is a perilous enterprise, inviting
overinferences and overgeneralizations; but some creolists have
indulged. Alleyne (1971: 180) has written of "...the psycholog-
ical 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 observa-
tion of J.L. Dillard's,[4] invites an even more deeply psychoana-
lytic 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 psycho-
logical 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 theo-
retically 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 recog-
nize and assert its independence from the parent, build its
defenses, and simultaneously battle the incestuous erotic impul-
ses 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 rein-
terpretation 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 devel-
opment 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 inde-
pendence 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 inde-
pendence from the parent (Abstand) followed by healthy develop-
ment to maturity (Ausbau). As an analogy this is harmless, and
even helps us understand some of the problems of creole stand-
ardization. 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, yield-
ing 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 popula-
tion. 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 autono-
mously rich, structurally inferior to none; that the superposed
model was itself once "low" and that similar anxieties accompa-
nied 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 "uni-
versal" 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.

[3]A good recent study on the relationship of creole and
"target" language, focusing on Trinidad English, is Winford 1980.

[4]Cf. Dillard (1971: 402-403) and Craig (1971: 381-382).

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