8 Theories focusing on the European input

Hans den Besten, Pieter Muysken and Norval Smith

8.1 Introduction

In this chapter we will discuss a number of theories concerning the development of creole languages which lay the prime responsibility for this at the door of the languages of the European colonial powers. These theories are of various types.

First there are those theories that look to **specific European or European-derived language forms** to explain creole origins. We have first the monogenetic theory which claims in its most radical form that all the creole languages of the world derive ultimately from a Portuguese-based pidgin spoken on the coast of West Africa. Then we have the approaches that claim that creole languages are (partially) derived from mixtures of European dialects of European languages. Another type of explanation is claimed to be provided by accounts of influence from European languages in the various locations connected with the slave trade: in Africa, during the 'Middle Passage', and in the Americas. Lastly, we will examine various accounts of the development of mixed European-source creoles.

Second, we have theories that lay stress on the **transformation of European language structures.** The first of these theories – the foreigner talk/baby talk hypothesis – proceeds from the assumption that Europeans deliberately simplified their languages when talking to Africans, so that the Africans did not have a proper chance to learn English, French, etc. The next hypothesis is the imperfect second language learning hypothesis which claims that creoles are basically European languages which the slaves simply failed to learn properly.

8.2 Monogenetic theories

So-called monogenetic theories are theories hypothesizing a single origin for (pidgin and) creole languages. There are basically two primary versions of this. The first would derive all creoles from a West African Pidgin Portuguese. The second version incorporates the first and assumes additionally that this pidgin in turn was derived from the Lingua Franca of the Mediterranean.

Variations on this theme concern the various donor-language groups: Portuguese, English or French, in particular, hypothesizing a single origin for the Portuguese-based, English-based, or French-based creoles alone. We could refer to this type of theory as involving a restricted monogenetic approach.

8.2.1 Monogenesis and West African Pidgin Portuguese

In the 60's and early 70's the monogenesis theory was much in vogue. This theory, articulated first in Taylor (1961) and Thompson (1961), assumed that a West African Pidgin Portuguese (WAPP) was spoken from the 15th century to the 18th century in and around the numerous forts and trading settlements founded by the Portuguese along the West African coast. This was the direct precursor of the various Portuguese-based creoles spoken there. In an attempt to provide an explanation for the deep-seated similarities between these and creoles with different lexical bases, it was hypothesized that the French, English and other creoles were also derived from the WAPP by **relexification**, or the word-for-word replacement of Portuguese lexical items with French or English items.

As such the concept of relexification was sound enough. Clear cases of relexification have come to light – most notably the case of Media Lengua in Ecuador (Muysken 1981b), where several originally Quechua-speaking comunities have basically kept the Quechua grammatical structure of their language, but replaced the Quechua lexical stems with Spanish ones (see chapter 4).

As proof for the relexification of Portuguese words in Atlantic creoles by other lexifier languages, linguists used to cite the case of Saramaccan – one of the so-called Bush-Negro languages of Surinam. This language has roughly about 400 lexical items of Portuguese origin, as compared with around 600 of English origin. This is a fairly unusual situation among creole languages. The Saramaccan case is however no longer regarded as proof for the monogenetic position. A closer examination of the Saramaccan facts makes this clear (see Smith 1987).

8.2.2 Monogenesis and the Lingua Franca

An outgrowth of the hypothesis that all Atlantic creoles were to be derived by relexification from a West African Pidgin Portuguese was the further hypothesis that the WAPP was derived by relexification from the Lingua Franca spoken in the Mediterranean. This primarily Italian/Provençal-based pidgin is assumed to have come into existence around the year 1000, although the first records of it date from the 14th century. The possibility of a role for Lingua Franca in the formation of WAPP cannot of course be denied, but cannot be proved either. In any case, since it must be regarded as clear that the English-based and French-based creoles of the Atlantic area did not arise by relexification from WAPP, it is equally clear that the Lingua Franca cannot have had any role in their formation either.

It must be stated that the monogenetic hypothesis, or any weaker version of it, is fundamentally flawed in any case. The idea that all pidgins and creoles, or even all creoles, or even all creoles in the Atlantic area, require to be derived from a single case of pidginization is completely irrational. A **unique** example of any **type** of phenomenon connected with

human conceptual and cultural activity is just inconceivable – anything that can happen once can also happen more frequently.

8.2.3 Restricted monogenesis

A more restricted approach to explaining the occurrence of English and French-based creoles is to assume that these derive respectively from a West African Pidgin English (WAPE) and West African Pidgin French (WAPF). Each of these two 'families' of creoles display significant parallels, which are not all shared between the two groups. Without going into details, the main question raised in this debate is whether the two main groups of English-based creoles – the Atlantic and the Pacific groups – have a common origin, and similarly whether the two main groups of French-based creoles – the Atlantic and the Indian Ocean groups – have a common origin.

8.3 European dialect (partial) origin hypotheses

We frequently find, in connection with creoles and pidgins based on the European colonial languages, attempts to relate them, in whole or in part, to particular local or regional dialects of these languages. This has been especially noticeable among students of English and French creoles (cf. Chaudenson 1992).

For instance, Faine (1937) makes the claim that Haitian is three-quarters derived from Norman French, a claim he later abandoned. Among the early representatives of this group such explanations of the 'derivations' of creole languages from non-standard European dialects usually go hand-in-hand with attempts to deny more than trivial influence from 'substrate' languages on the development of the creoles. So Faine wishes to deny any significant influence from African languages on any of the French-based creoles of the Americas, barring certain aspects of pronunciation such as the unrounding of French front rounded vowels, and the occurrence of a number of African lexical items.

Turner (1949) cites a number of workers on Gullah (the creole of the Carolina/Georgia coast), writing in the first forty years of this century, who claim that the 'peculiarities' of Gullah are to be explained as a combination of dialectal forms of English, and the influence of other factors usually concerned with language acquisition, such as the effects of the baby talk theory discussed in section 8.6.

The identification of regional and dialectal lexical elements, and occasionally of syntactic influence, has not always proceeded according to a strict methodology. Holm & Shilling's 1982 dictionary of Bahamian is criticized in this respect by Smith (1983), and these criticisms could fairly be applied to many such studies examining the regional provenance of the English creole vocabulary. The basic problem is that dialect lexicographical studies of the

various types of European languages are extremely uneven in their geographical coverage.

8.3.1 English dialects

While in no sense wishing to deny the undoubted contribution of Scotsmen to the development of the various seventeenth century English colonies, the relatively high proportion of lexical items with a specifically Scottish distribution claimed to be found in several lexicographical studies of English-based creoles cannot but be connected with the fact that the coverage of Scots lexicography is better than that of the various English dialects of England, not to speak of those of Ireland or Wales.

It cannot be denied that non-standard lexical items occur with some frequency in both French and English creoles. However it is also notable that **phonological** dialectalisms are conspicuous by their absence, especially in English creoles. For instance, among the Bahamian vocabulary claimed to have a Scottish origin by Holm & Shilling, there is not a single instance of an incontrovertible Scots dialectal pronunciation. In this respect the creoles do not differ from non-creole colonial English. With respect to American English we can point to a similar general lack of dialectal phonetics and phonology, although dialect words are common enough. Smith (1987) demonstrates that virtually all cases of superficially non-standard pronunciations occurring in the English-derived vocabulary of the Surinam creoles are amenable to explanation in terms of the various sociolects of 17th century London English. One (!) very early form may be interpretable as deriving from the local dialect of Bristol, the second port of England.

8.3.2 French dialects

Goodman (1964) argues that many of the claimed cases of Norman and Picard phonological influence in the French creoles are explicable from earlier standard forms, or forms from dialects very close to the standard language of Paris. Hull (1979), on the other hand, does find some evidence of regional French. Apart from Maritime French (on which see below), the influence of the dialects of La Rochelle in the Aunis-Saintonge region of France appears sporadically in creoles.

8.3.3 Dutch dialects

As an illustration for the varying influence of Dutch dialects on the creation of creoles, we can compare the Dutch-derived vocabulary in Sranan with that in Berbice Dutch. Lexical items in Berbice Dutch differ from those in the Surinam creoles particularly in that *ij* – now [ɛi] – is fairly regularly represented by undiphthongized /i/ in Berbice whereas this reflex is rarer in Surinam, with /ei/ occurring much more frequently. This is perhaps to be explained not so much in terms of the 50-year time gap between the settlement of Berbice

by the Dutch, and the beginning of Dutch control of Surinam, as due to the fact that the first colony was founded from Middelburg (Zealand), while the second was run from Amsterdam (North Holland), and that these two maritime provinces, separately responsible for 17th century Dutch colonialism, possessed fairly divergent dialects.

Note that the greater amount of dialect influence observable in Dutch-based and Dutch-influenced creoles is presumably due to the fact that the Netherlands was a much less centralized country than England or France at that time, with a consequent reduction of linguistic standardization.

8.4 Theories concerning the influence of the Atlantic slave trade

The possibilities for the influence of European languages on the development of the various European language-based creoles which came to be spoken in the Atlantic area – of whatever type this influence may be – may be logically divided up into three types. We will discuss this largely from the point of view of English. The three types are:

a) in Africa
b) at sea (nautical language)
c) in America

8.4.1 Influence from English in Africa (Hancock's Domestic Origin Hypothesis)

The most persuasive scenario for the early development of a local form of English in West Africa is provided by Hancock (1985b). Towards the end of the 16th century English-speaking traders, etc. began to settle in the Gambia and Sierra Leone rivers, and neighbouring areas such as the Bullom and Sherbro coasts. These intermarried with the local population leading to a mixed population. A Krio-like Pidgin English is spoken at various places southwards along the coast of West Africa, and this was taken, according to Hancock, to the West Indies with African slaves who had learned it in the slave depots of West Africa, forming one component of the emergent creole languages.

Note that as far as Surinam is concerned any influence from early West African Pidgin English (WAPE) would have to date from the third quarter of the 17th century, and be located in the Slave Coast area – i.e. from Eastern Ghana through Togo (and Benin) to Western Nigeria. So, it is of some considerable importance to attempt to establish if this represents a possible scenario. We have in fact little in the way of direct evidence bearing on this, although Hancock (1969) quotes Barbot (1732) as finding 'good English' spoken by canoemen he met at sea near Elmina on the Gold Coast in 1679.

An indication of the necessity of assuming a connection between forms of West African

English (and Krio) and the English-based creoles of the Americas is provided by the existence of what Smith (1987) has called Ingredient x. This consists of a number of items derived from African coastal languages ranging from Wolof (Sierra Leone) to Kimbundu (Angola). Largely the same group of lexical items is found evidenced in most English-based creoles/pidgins on both sides of the Atlantic. Cf. Wolof *njam* 'eat', found in Sranan, Saramaccan, Ndjuka, Krio, Gullah, Jamaican, Guyanese, Miskito Coast Creole, and Bahamian, among others. In general this group only occurs as such in English-based creoles. Thus we find the word *bakra* 'European' of Efik origin in the English group. In French creoles 'European' is usually *beke* of Ịjọ derivation, for instance.

We would assume these elements to have been present in a pidginized form of English, closely related to the precursor of WAPE, spoken along the West African coast in the 17th century. Krio-like phonological effects are most widely evidenced in the transatlantic creoles spoken in Surinam, as well as in the Jamaican Maroon Spirit Language (MSL) only surviving as a ritual language among the Eastern Maroons of Jamaica (Bilby 1983), but undoubtedly representing a survival of an earlier creole language.

8.4.2 Influence from nautical language

There is a nautical element in the vocabulary of a number of English, French and Dutch-based, creoles and pidgins. Krio has for instance the following elements (Hancock 1969; 1976):

(1)   gjali   'kitchen'   <galley   (Krio)
      kjapsaj   'overturn'   <capsize
      bambotgjal   'prostitute' <bumboat-girl

In Surinam this element is less prominent but still present:

(2)   drifi   'edge up'   <drift   (Sranan)
      ari   'pull, draw' <haul

In French creoles there is a similar nautical influence, sometimes involving related items.

(3)   *Fr. creole*   *distribution*
      hale/rale   'pull, drag'   <haler   LA,HA,ANT,FG,IO
      mare   'tie'   <amarrer LA,HA,ANT,FG,IO
      hele/rele   'call'   <héler   LA,HA,ANT
      (LA = Louisiana; HA = Haiti; ANT = Lesser Antilles; FG = French Guiana; IO = Indian Ocean (Goodman 1964))

In the case of Dutch creoles we find items derived from the Dutch nautical term *kombuis* 'galley' used in Berbice Dutch, Skepi Dutch, Negerhollands and, very significantly, the creoloid Afrikaans.

The precise means of transference of this nautical vocabulary to the various creoles is unclear. A number of possibilities suggest themselves (see also Hancock (1986).

1) they were acquired by the mixed population of the Gambia-Sierra Leone coast.
2) they were acquired by slaves during coastwise sea journeys in Africa.
3) they were acquired by slaves during their imprisonment in slave depots in Africa.
4) they were acquired by slaves during the Middle Passage (from Africa to America).
5) they formed part of the vocabulary of the colonial whites, having been picked up by them during the week/month-long voyages from Europe to the colonies.

Note that very likely a combination of these factors played a role, rather than that any single factor was responsible.

8.4.3 Influence from English in the Americas

Our examples of English input are taken from the creole languages of Surinam. This is because the English items in these languages have been fairly closely examined, and because the influence of English itself has been negligible in modern times.

The area of English influence is virtually restricted to the lexical. Although there are only about 700 English lexical items represented in the languages of Surinam, different strands of English influence may be recognized. Most striking is the fact that two types of English at least may be distinguished. There are clear indications of the presence of an **r-less** and an **r-ful** form of English. These two types are both frequent in the English-speaking world. Notable is the fact that both are represented in the colonial English of North America. In the Caribbean, however, most forms of English are r-less, except for the English of Barbados. As the major colonial effort in Surinam came from Barbados, the presence in Surinam of an r-ful strand may be connected with that island. Examples of the developments reflecting the r-less type are as follows:

(4)	EME	*via*	*Surinam*	*examples*
	ɛlr	elə	ei	ei (Sr: hare), séséj (Nd: shear)
	ɛːr	ɛə	e/ɛ (Sar)	dɛ́ (Sar: there), ke (Sr: care), hɛ́ (Nd: hare)
	air	aι-ə	aja	fája (Sr,Sar,Nd,Al: fire)
	ɔːr	ɔə	o/ɔ (Sar)	fɔ́ (Sar: four) fo (Sr,Nd,Al: four)

The r-ful type is on the other hand reflected by developments such as:

(5)   EME   *via*   *Surinam*   *examples*

ɛːr   ɛːr   er(i)   Sr. kwéri 'square'

ar   =   ar   ar(a)   Sr. fára 'far'

ɔːr   ɔːr   or(o), (ɔɔ) (Sar)   Sr. móro 'more'

The r-less forms of English are very close to what we find in Krio and WAPE, so that we may hypothesize that the source of these items in Surinam is similar to that we suggested for Ingredients x and y above. The scenario would then be that in Surinam/Barbados two strands of English became united in a pidgin/creole – the local (r-ful) colonial English and an (r-less) pidgin English brought from Africa by the slaves. This would be supported by the nautical evidence in most creoles.

8.5 Mixed European-source creoles

We have seen above that the European evidence itself is often complex. For some creoles the full story is even more complicated. These are creoles that appear to have not one but two European lexifier languages. For instance Smith (1987) proposes the following historical descent for (components o f) Saramaccan. Saramaccan is the descendant of a mixed language – a mixed pidgin or creole in fact – known as Dju-tongo (Jews' language). This resulted from the marriage of a putative Surinam Pidgin English of Barbadian provenance, and what has been described by Smith as Surinam Portuguese Creole – from which a couple of sentences have been preserved. This marriage took place on the middle Suriname River where Portuguese Jews from Brazil owned many plantations. Both the English and Portuguese strands in Saramaccan have been claimed to derive ultimately from Africa (see above for the English strand).

(6)   West African Pidgin Portuguese
                    |
    Early Gulf of Guinea Portuguese Creole   West African Pidgin English
                    | |
    Brazilian Portuguese Creole   Barbados Pidgin English
                    | |
    Surinam Portuguese Creole   Surinam Pidgin English
                    └──────────────── Dju-tongo ────────────────┘
                                         |
                                   Saramaccan
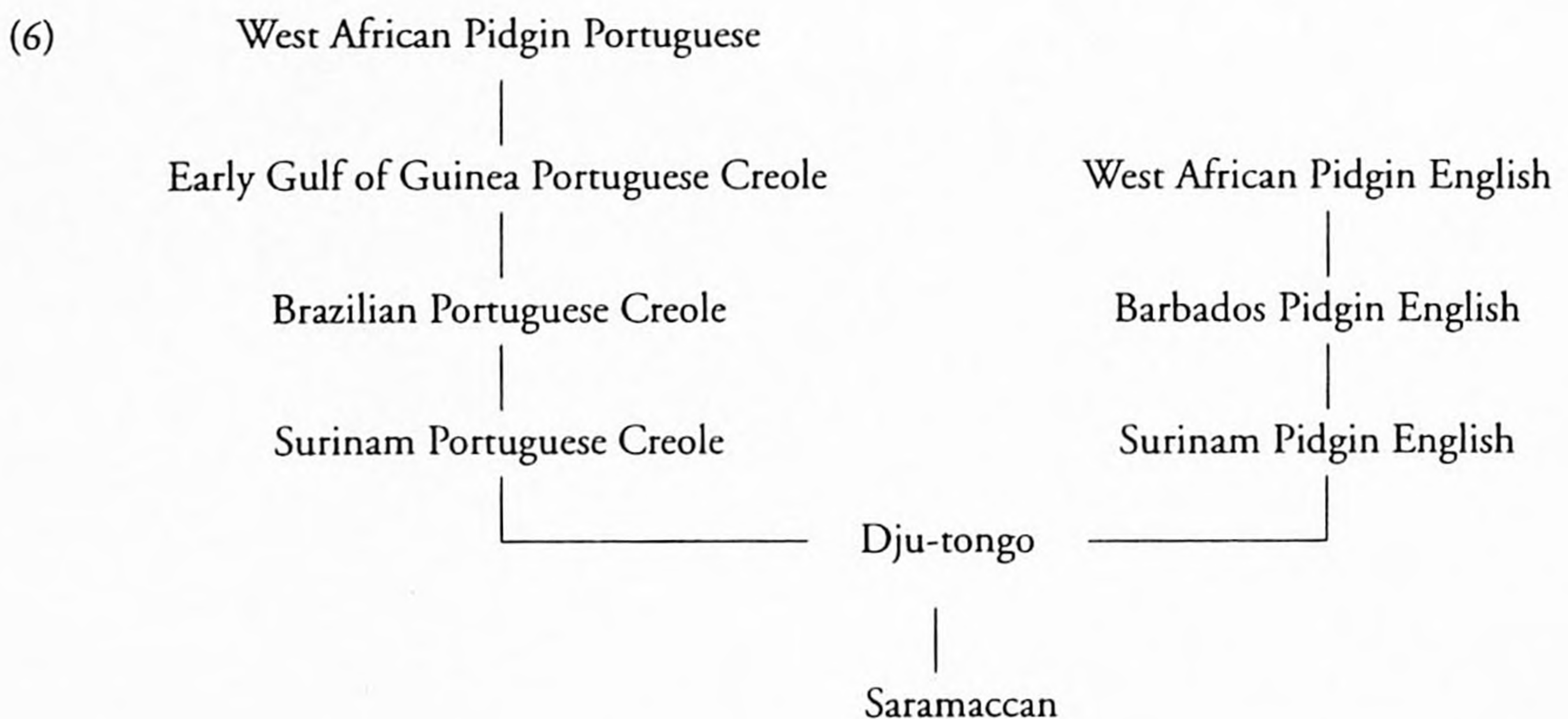
It is of interest to examine the evidence for this claimed Surinam Portuguese Creole:

(7)	Praga	beroegoe	no	mata	caballo.	(Wullschlägel 1856)
	/praga	burugu	no	mata	kabalo/	(phonological interpretation (Smith))
	curse	ass	NEG	kill	horse	(glosses)

'The curse of an ass will not kill a horse.'   (literal meaning)

This proverb, or something similar, is known from numerous languages, including Portuguese creoles like Senegal Crioulo, and the mixed Spanish-Portuguese Papiamento. New evidence for the Brazilian connection is provided in Holm (1992), which gives a Brazilian Portuguese parallel for the proverb.

(8)   Surinam: Praga beroegoe no mata caballo   Brazil: Praga de burrico não mata cavalo

Other evidence of a lexical and phonological nature is available which would tend to confirm the Brazilian connections, of Saramaccan.

8.6 Foreigner talk and baby talk

It is commonly known that people will simplify their speech when talking to foreigners. The result has been called Foreigner Talk in the sociolinguistic literature, and some authors claim that this could have formed the basis for the formation of pidgins and ultimately creoles. We will first briefly look at the characteristics of foreigner talk and then consider the possible consequences for pidgin genesis. Foreigner talk is in fact the result of at least four separate processes: accommodation, imitation, telegraphic condensation, and adoption of conventions, often derived from holiday experiences or colonial usage.

Accommodation to the non-native competence of the other results in slower speech, shorter and less complex sentences, the introduction of pauses between constituents, the use of general and semantically unspecific terms, and repetitions. An example would be:

(9)   NS: Could you please repeat the problem that your wife was mentioning?
       FS: What you say?
       NS: You wife has a problem, a difficulty. ... Please say it again, please repeat the problem. ...
           Please say it again.
       (NS = native speaker; FS = foreign speaker)

Imitation of the speech of the non-native interlocutor can take various forms, depending on the nature and level of the interlocutor's second language competence. An example:

(10)   FS: I no hear vot you say.

       NS: You no hear?

Telegraphic condensation leads to deletion of function words such as articles, auxiliaries, and copulas.

(11)   NS: Did you get the package that was sent from Hongkong?

       FS: What you say?

       NS: Package arrive Hongkong. You get?

The adoption of **conventions** again can take various forms, of course: often it involves traditional pidgin-like features such as epenthetic vowels, the use of strong pronouns, specific foreign vocabulary, etc. Here a colonial tradition in the community of the native language may provide certain elements. In literature such forms are often perpetuated in the way low-status foreigners' speech is portrayed. An example from the way a non-European sailor is presented in Herman Melville's Moby Dick:

(12)   kill-e ... ah! him bery small-e fish-e; Queequeg no kill-e so small fish-e; Queequec kill-e big whale.

In addition to these four processes, often speakers will adopt strategies used with the hard of hearing such as very loud speech, gestures, etc. Sometimes people will fall back on conventional aspects of ways of speaking with children, such as diminutive use. Hence the term Baby Talk, which is often used as an equivalent term for Foreigner Talk. An important point, stressed by Valdman (1981), is that the social status of the non-native speaker is a crucial factor. Speech addressed to low-status foreigners will often draw on conventions such as those mentioned above, while speech addressed to foreigners accorded a high-status often rely on accomodation strategies.

    After this introduction, let us now turn to the role that Foreigner Talk may have played in the genesis of pidgins. Schuchardt (1909) drew attention to the fact that verbs in the Lingua Franca of the Mediterranean often have a form derived from the Romance infinitive. Now, infinitives, Schuchardt claims, are not the most frequent verb forms in ordinary spoken language. Hence we must assume that simplification of Romance languages (Italian, French, Spanish) must have been the basis for the Lingua Franca, i.e. a kind of Foreigner

Talk. The most vocal supporter of this line of thinking in the recent literature is Naro (1978), who formulated the Factorization Principle: 'express each meaning-bearing element with a separate a stress-bearing form', as a way of accounting for the genesis of West African Portuguese Pidgin. Naro also tries to show, on the basis of historical documents, that the Portuguese pidgin must have emerged in Portugal itself as a **reconnaissance language** (i.e. a simplified form of Portuguese deliberately taught to African interpreters), rather than in Africa.

Whatever the merits in the Foreigner Talk theory, it is fairly clear that it (a) risks being circular; (b) that it makes certain specific predictions that are not borne out. The risk of circularity lies in the fact that forms of Foreigner Talk are often modeled on pidgins, so that the latter may erroneously be thought to have emerged out of the former. It is particularly the 'conventionalized', non-accomodative type of Foreigner Talk that resembles pidgins.

Those cases where we know that Foreigner Talk-type simplification and the type of simplification resulting from second language (L2) learning (see below) differ (rather than surmise it, as Schuchardt did), the pidgins and creoles resemble the result of L2 learning rather than of Foreigner Talk. A case in point is word order in Negerhollands and Berbice Dutch Creole. Dutch Foreigner Talk, particularly the type directed at low-status foreigners, is highly ov in its nature, consisting mostly of commands that take the infinitive form:

(13)   Tafels   schoonmaken!
        tables   clean
        'Clean [the] tables'.

However, it is well-known that the Dutch creoles show very consistent svo order. Since this cannot be attributed completely to substrate influence (notice that the African source language of Berbice Dutch Creole is the sov language Ijo (see Chapter 19), and fixed svo patterns are highly characterisic of the L2 learning of Dutch. This fact speaks against the Foreigner Talk hypothesis as a general solution in the Dutch case.

8.7 Imperfect L2 learning

This brings us to the imperfect L2 learning hypothesis, which claims that pidgins are primarily the result of the imperfect L2 learning of the dominant lexifier language by the slaves. This was first proposed by Coelho (1880) (see also chapter 11 on universalist approaches). The large research literature on naturalistic L2 processes that has appeared since around 1970 has revealed a number of features of 'interlanguage systems' that we also see in many pidgins and creoles:

(14)   a.   invariant verb forms, derived either from the infinitive, or from the least marked finite form of the verb;

b.   either no determiners, or else the use of demonstratives as determiners;

c.   the invariable placement of the negator in preverbal position;

d.   the use of adverbs to express modality;

e.   a fixed single word order, no inversion in questions;

f.   reduced or absent nominal plural marking.

While certainly not all features of creoles can be explained by appealing to imperfect L2 learning, it must have played an important role. In chapter 9 we look at the role of interference or transfer in L2 learning, when discussing the role of African substrate languages.

Further reading

For an up to date view on a number of different types of European influence on creole languages the reader should consult Goodman (1986), Hancock (1986) and Smith (1987).