

Review of *Ibero-Asian Creoles: Comparative Perspectives*

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Introduction

Reading the eleven chapters in this volume — the proceedings of a conference held in October of 2010 at the University of Macau — has made two main impressions on me. The first is that the Spanish- and Portuguese-based creoles of Asia were born into and have developed within intricate linguistic ecologies, in which contact between genetically-unrelated and typologically-diverse languages has been the norm. The second point — perhaps a corollary to the first — is that research into these languages requires engaging head-on with multiple areas of scholarship. To tell a coherent story about these creoles, one must have extensive knowledge of the history of Spanish and Portuguese; enjoy deep familiarity with the grammatical structures of indigenous Asian languages; and pay detailed attention to the historical processes that have shaped contact between Iberian traders and colonizers, on the one hand, and various Asian populations, on the other. Fortunately, the chapters in *Ibero-Asian Creoles: Comparative Perspectives* largely rise to face these challenges. The result is a book which can hold appeal for many different audiences: creolists, typologists, specialists in Romance or Southeast Asian languages, and even historians interested in the interplay between linguistic and societal development.

Part of what makes research into the Ibero-Asian creoles so challenging is that the theoretical conceptions of Atlantic creolistics do not necessarily find natural counterparts in Asia. Even terms such as ‘lexifier’ and ‘substrate’ can be problematic, as Ian Smith points out in his essay on different sources of influence on creole word orders:

The effect of the lexifier on creoles with which it remains in contact is well known from the Caribbean creoles. The substrates, however, have disappeared from the Caribbean, and only their early influence can be gauged. The Ibero-Asian creoles, on the other hand, remain in contact with their substrates, whose continuing influence in their role as adstrates must be considered. (p. 126)

As Smith points out, a single language can play different roles over the course of a given creole’s development. But the editors, Hugo C. Cardoso, Alan N. Baxter and Mário Pinharanda Nunes, take this point further: in their words, “the substrate-adstrate opposition is often untenable” (p. 9) for the creoles discussed in this volume. They draw attention to a “circumstance which, though not exclusive of the Ibero-Asian creoles, is particularly typical of the Ibero-Asian creoles: the fact that they have coexisted for protracted periods of time with both their main lexifiers and various

adstrates” (pp. 8–9). Certain creoles in India, for instance, have enjoyed centuries of regular contact with both Portuguese and Gujarati/Marathi. Furthermore, as Cardoso explains in his study of comparative constructions, another “complicating factor . . . is the possibility that the various Luso-Asian Creoles establish relationships of progeny and/or diffusion” (p. 81). That is, as linguistic spread has been facilitated by the movement of goods and peoples across significant distances, creoles now spoken quite far from one another may share common historical roots and may have engaged in past contact. This point in turn adds another degree of complexity into an already packed ecology. Regardless of whether one wishes to salvage the substrate/adstrate/superstrate distinction (or to maintain a sharp line between genetic and areal relationships), teasing apart the historical forces that have helped to shape the Ibero-Asian creoles is by no means straightforward.

This review discusses seven of the volume’s eleven chapters, selected so as to represent the range of approaches visible in *Ibero-Asian Creoles*. I first address three chapters which tackle typological issues across creole languages, from both diachronic and synchronic perspectives. I then discuss two chapters which use variation within Spanish and Portuguese to better chart the provenance of words and particles that enjoy a wide areal distribution in Southeast Asian creoles. Finally, I discuss two chapters which examine how some Ibero-Asian creoles have interacted with other pidgins, creoles, and contact languages, and how they fit into a broader contact typology. This thematic division is largely expository, given that most of *Ibero-Asian Creoles*’s entries make use of the methodologies and findings of multiple subfields of linguistics. It is worth emphasizing that the four pieces not discussed here — J. Clancy Clements’s ‘Notes on the phonology and lexicon of some Indo-Portuguese creoles’ (pp. 15–46), Baxter and Augusta Bastos’ ‘A closer look at the post-nominal genitive in Asian Creole Portuguese’ (pp. 47–79), Eeva Sippola’s ‘Indefinite terms in Ibero-Asian Creoles’ (pp. 149–179), and Carl Rubino’s ‘*Bilug* in Zamboangueno Chavacano: The genericization of a substrate numeral classifier’ (pp. 239–261) — are also interesting, insightful pieces of research. Their omission from this review is due to limitations of space only.

Historically-mindful typologies

Ian Smith’s ‘Measuring substrate influence: Word order features in Ibero-Asian Creoles’ (pp. 125–148) examines and analyzes nine different morphosyntactic properties in one Spanish-based and seven Portuguese-based creoles of Asia. These are Zamboangueno Chabacano and Ternateño Chabacano (Spanish-lexified) and the creoles of Daman, Diu, Korlai, Sri Lanka, Malacca, Batavia, and Makista (all Portuguese-lexified). The properties under consideration include various ordering relationships on both the word- and morpheme-level: subject, verb, and object; possessor and possessum; adjective and noun; adposition and noun; demonstrative and noun; cardinal numeral and noun; relative clause and noun; degree word and adjective; and the position of interrogative phrases. For each property in each creole in the sample, Smith gives a score between –1 and 1, determined from the creole structures’ proximity to the corresponding structures in the relevant substrates/adstrates. It is important to note that Smith himself calls these ‘Substrate Influence Scores’ “an unsophisticated overall measure of the penetration of substrate or superstrate word order patterns” (p. 143), and he acknowledges that his analysis makes sometimes crude distinctions when comparing structures across the different creoles under examination. The results, however, are still quite striking: the SIS ranking for an individual creole is an almost exact inverse of the historical presence of the Portuguese/Spanish languages in the locations where those creoles developed and are spoken. The creole spoken in Macau, Makista, has the highest SIS rank because it shows the greatest degree of typological affinity with Portuguese — and Macau was the very last of Lisbon’s Asian holdings to undergo decolonization. On the other end of the spectrum, the Portuguese-based creole of Sri Lanka matches its substrates/adstrates, Sinhala and Tamil, throughout the surveyed morphosyntactic traits — and Sri Lanka was among the first of their Asian territories from which the Portuguese departed, in the mid-17th century.

Cardoso’s essay, ‘Luso-Asian comparatives in comparison’ (pp. 81–123), examines comparative constructions in the creole languages of eight different sites of Portuguese colonization in Asia:

Diu, Daman, Korlai, Cannanore, Batticaloa, Malacca, Batavia/Tugu, and Macau. As in Smith's article, the number of creoles and substrates/adstrates to be examined is challengingly high; but Cardoso successfully compiles data from sources as varied as 19th-century documentation, recent description, and his own impressive array of fieldnotes. Most usefully, the chapter is organized by substrate/adstrate: Batavia/Tugu Creole and Malacca Creole are treated in the same section as Malay; the nearly-extinct Macau Creole immediately follows a discussion of comparative constructions in its adstrate, Cantonese; and so on. Following the typological classification of comparatives by Stassen (2008), the analysis classifies comparative constructions according to the kind of nominal case they impose upon the standard vis-a-vis the comparee and to the kind of morphosyntactic structures they utilize. In the discussion section, Cardoso explicitly compares the comparative constructions used by each of the eight creoles under discussion against the lexifier (Portuguese) and the relevant respective substrates/adstrates, and he provides an 'Index of Reliance on Lexifier' that weighs a given creole's Portuguese-like features against the features shared between Portuguese, on the one hand, and that same creole's substrate(s)/adstrate(s), on the other. The broader results point toward "a certain inverse correlation . . . with time elapsed since break of significant contact with Portuguese" (p. 117): Portuguese-like comparative constructions are prominent in those creoles which were in contact with Portuguese for the longest amount of time. This finding closely mirrors Smith's conclusion concerning word order relationships; but, also like Smith, Cardoso acknowledges that his "generalizations must be taken as hints rather than as holistic, established facts" (p. 117).

I enjoyed both of these chapters and believe that their conclusions, however tentative, hold considerable promise for creolistics and for studies of language contact more broadly. My principal critique is one which the authors themselves directly acknowledge: comparing so many constructions across so many languages can lead to less-than-precise generalizations. In particular, Smith's typological classification suffers from the same challenge that impedes many broad typological surveys, namely, it is not clear how to weigh different properties against one another. More problematically, classificatory measures such as SVO and SOV are known to obscure other syntactic properties and to discount important considerations such as alternative word order configurations that relate to information structure. Regarding Cardoso's study, I found myself wondering about the different semantic properties of these comparative constructions. Although his attention is rightfully restricted to 'comparisons of superiority,' the constructions lumped together in Stassen's typology do not necessarily enjoy the same truth conditions; treating them as a natural class risks conflating distinctions that do not share the same meaning. (See Kennedy 2007 and Bochnak 2013 for discussion of this point.) As the two authors reach the same general conclusion – namely, that substrate influence on a given creole is inversely related to the duration and intensity of contact with the lexifier – I would like to see their chapters expanded and brought together into a more elaborated work. Should their hypothesis continue to accrue empirical support (as I suspect that it will), Smith and Cardoso will have provided us with a powerful new explanatory mechanism.

Pinharanda Nunes's 'Traces of superstrate inflection in Makista and other creoles' (pp. 289–326) sidesteps many of the methodological issues facing broader typological surveys. This chapter looks at Makista (Macau Creole Portuguese) and draws key comparative data from two other sources: the three closely-related Indo-Portuguese creoles of Diu, Daman and Korlai, and Kristang, or Malacca Creole Portuguese, from which Makista descends. While Makista had been described by earlier sources as possessing verbal morphology based on Portuguese infinitives and third person forms, Pinharanda Nunes shows that the language actually "presents a wider range of superstrate morphology than previously reported" (p. 319). He carefully and helpfully walks the reader through this argument: after outlining present, past perfective, and imperfective past verbal morphology in Portuguese, he provides explicit 'identification criteria' for such structures in Makista and then describes their distribution in his oral corpus of Makista. The data from the oral corpus are compared against 19th- and 20th-century written corpora, and the relevant structures in Kristang and the three Indian creoles are also examined. The ample sociohistorical discussion crucially contextualizes Makista within the linguistic ecology of Macau and the surrounding region: population movements

in Southeast Asia brought various ethnic groups to new locations and allowed for language contact and spread to take place across a wider and more diverse space. For substrate speakers, Pinharanda Nunes argues, there was “habitual inaccessibility . . . to the ruling European minority’s language”, and multilingualism in pidgins, creoles, and Asian languages “allowed for local in-group models to emerge as the TL [Target Language] instead of Portuguese” (p. 316). Drawing on language-internal and broader historical evidence, Pinharanda Nunes concludes that the growth of superstrate verbal inflection in Makista represents a process of gradual decreolization; and, I would add, this process of decreolization cannot be divorced from the sociolinguistic setting of Macau within the region and the broader Lusophonic world. I very much appreciated the explicit precision and clear assumptions of this chapter, which provides a natural complement to the wider typological surveys featured elsewhere in this volume.

Variation within and across lexifiers and adstrates

Mauro A. Fernández’s ‘*Nenang, nino, nem não, ni no: Similarities and differences*’ (pp. 205–237) traces the development of the Kristang negation particle *nenang*, as well as other negators in South-east Asian creoles and adstrates. The author argues that the Kristang particle developed directly out of the Portuguese *nem não*, which remains in use of some varieties of Portuguese and has been historically documented. The Spanish equivalent, *ni no*, in turn has entered Zimboanga Chabacano and other creoles of the Philippines. Part of what makes Fernández’s argument so interesting is the fact that *nem não* and *ni no*, which translate (awkwardly) as ‘neither not,’ have fallen out of common use in the European varieties of Spanish and Portuguese but are well-attested in the varieties of particular ex-colonies. The bigger puzzle is how the creole forms acquired their meaning of ‘not yet,’ given that the original Romance meaning is akin to ‘neither’ or ‘not even.’ Fernández provides evidence that the present meaning of *nenang* in Kristang is due in part to relexification from Malay, whose negative particle *belum* could have shaped the semantics of the creole form. The extensive discussion section at times seems to raise more questions than it can answer, and it reads in parts as reliant upon conjecture. But if this chapter — which addresses deep questions regarding the genesis of the Spanish-based creoles of the Philippines — cannot claim to fully resolve the diachronic semantics of *nenang* and its relatives, it does succeed in shining “some light into this small, unstudied corner of the history of Spanish and Portuguese” (231).

Similarly, Nancy Vázquez Veiga and Fernández’s chapter, ‘*Maskin, maski, masque. . . in the Spanish and Portuguese creoles of Asia*’ (pp. 181–203), reiterates the sheer difficulty of tracing etymologies in the Ibero-Asian creoles. The authors challenge the common assertion that the *maski/maskin/masque* particle, now present in a host of Spanish-based creoles, must have descended from Portuguese; they instead argue that Spanish independently provided this form to the creoles of the Philippines. They show that Spanish also possessed a concessive or modal *mas que*, and that the descendant form *maskin* in Chabacano, a creole of the Philippines, has retained much of the original Spanish concessive and modal meanings. Furthermore, *maskin* has “acquired from the Philippine languages a new scalar or intensifying function, in addition to that of focal or indefinite quantifier” (p. 191). So the creole *maskin* has come to combine semantics from both Spanish and indigenous languages of the Philippines; and *maskin* has also entered the lexicons of many of those same indigenous languages. Did Spanish loan this particle directly to the native languages, or did a creole serve as an intermediary? Was transmission even more complicated, with some native languages acquiring the particle from the Spaniards and others from speakers of creole? The contact-abundant linguistic ecology of the Philippines makes tracing the diachronic development of this particle (and perhaps any other lexical entry) extremely difficult. Yet Vázquez Veiga and Fernández show that progress can indeed be made on this front; and their chapter serves to remind the reader that to unravel the histories of creole languages, one must command a solid knowledge of the histories of their lexifiers.

That being said, a comment about this chapter’s tone is in order. The opening pages challenge Keith Whinnom’s mid-twentieth century work on the creole languages of Southeast Asia, in particular his theory that a Portuguese-Malay pidgin played a role in shaping Philippine creoles. This

part of the discussion reads as unfairly aggressive and disparaging; three times on pages 182–183, Whinnom is said to have ‘failed’ to draw some conclusion or connection that Vázquez Veiga and Fernández consider obvious. As the authors explicitly mention how the resources of the Internet have given them an “enormous advantage” by making their research into the diverse languages of the Philippines “far easier” (p. 197), more gracious criticism of those scholars who lacked these tools would seem warranted.

Creoles and language contact

Stephen Matthews and Michelle Li’s ‘Portuguese pidgin and Chinese Pidgin English in the Canton Trade’ (pp. 263–287) examines the role of Portuguese-based pidgin in shaping the contact language of Chinese Pidgin English. Consulting phrasebooks that Chinese speakers used to learn pidgin, they show that “Portuguese and English lexical items coexisted for some time in the China trade” (p. 271). In terms of grammar, they argue that two oddities of Chinese Pidgin English — the uses of *have* as a copula and of *for* as a non-finite complementizer — “cannot be readily explained on the basis of English or Cantonese” (p. 280). Crucially, however, Portuguese can and does provide a ready template for these very constructions: the verb *ter* has been assuming the functions of an existential copula for centuries (and has largely supplanted the older *haver* in Brazilian Portuguese), and the preposition *para* regularly introduces non-finite clauses. Based on the lexical and grammatical evidence, they conclude — albeit tentatively — that Portuguese pidgin has played a greater role than previously recognized in the development of Chinese Pidgin English. Their evidence, even if limited, is persuasive, and it raises questions concerning the phylogeny of other creoles and pidgins. This is a topic worthy of continued investigation.

The volume’s closing chapter, Anthony P. Grant’s ‘Mindanao Chabacano and other “mixed creoles”: Sourcing the morphemic components’ (pp. 327–364), aims to contextualize Mindanao Chabacano within a broader understanding of ‘mixed creoles’ and language mixing. Grant looks at how Chabacano has acquired over 10% of its Swadesh List lexicon from sources other than its chief lexifier, Spanish (with the 10% threshold used to define mixed-lexifier creoles), and compares this and several other mixed-lexifier creoles’ broader properties against typologies of contact and language mixing. Particularly interesting is the discussion that frames these mixed-lexifier creoles against the best-known cases of mixed languages: Ma’á (which brings together Cushitic and Bantu), Media Lengua (Spanish and Quechua), Mednyj Aleut (Russian and Aleut), and Michif (French and the Algonquian language Plains Cree). Grant argues that, whereas “mixed languages use (somewhat regularised, less allomorph-heavy and scaled-down) versions of sets of their contributory languages’ inflectional (and often derivational) morphology,” creolization is fundamentally different: “creators of creole languages construct new morphological systems over time . . . drawing on typological blueprints provided by their substrate languages” (p. 346). One wonders how this distinction will need to be qualified in light of new evidence concerning Australian mixed languages, such as Light Warlpiri (O’Shannessy 2013) and Gurindji Kreol (Meakins 2011), whose speakers appear to have happily innovated new structures. In some respects, Grant’s survey comes across as more compilation and comparison than synthesis. Yet his findings — that “[t]here is only a rather weak correlation between the amount of borrowed basic lexicon in a mixed-lexifier creole and the proportion of borrowed structural features and function words” (p. 355) and that “[m]ixed lexifier creoles do not constitute anything more than a weakly defined class . . . as opposed to less mixed lexifier creoles” (p. 356) — are interesting and worthwhile *precisely because* they are hedged. They point toward the conclusion that the languages we call creoles, as but one instantiation of a much broader class of contact languages, form a highly heterogenous group (if they form any group at all!). That these languages’ historical development and synchronic composition resist easy characterization and unified treatment reiterates the need for an approach that does not take ‘creole’ as any kind of primitive. Similar points have been made, for example, by Mufwene (2008).

Conclusion

It is to the authors' and editors' credit that *Ibero-Asian Creoles: Comparative Perspectives* — which is full of data from many different languages, addresses regional issues across an enormous territory, and examines evidence stretching back over the last half-milennium — coheres so successfully. Even though the eleven chapters tackle different questions and draw independent conclusions, the overall narrative is both internally consistent and thought-provoking. I hope and trust that this volume will generate more interest in the Ibero-Asian Creoles and will inspire other scholars to research these languages' historical development and present-day structures. In addition, I look forward to seeing extended versions of the cross-creole typologies presented here. If the insights and findings discussed in this book come to inform research on creoles and contact languages more broadly, the field of linguistics will surely benefit.

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