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Introduction

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In the beginning, science was mostly about distinguishing and classifying objects and notions in order to establish boundaries and binary contrasts between pairs of notions such as earth and sky, land and sea, domestic and wild, useful and useless, allowed and forbidden, vowels and consonants. Research has, however, consistently shown that such boundaries and distinctions are fuzzy and blurred, and at best function as prototypes or targets. The more we know, the more old, reassuring certainties collapse, the more scatter plots and probabilities replace the clear dividing lines.

The realm of linguistics is no exception to this. Seducing and detailed as they may seem, the neat rules of ‘standard’ or prescriptive grammars fail to fully describe and encompass the complexity of human language as it is attested in the daily speech of billions of people around the world. And with respect to the specific field of Creole studies, much remains to be done in order to take language variation into account in a more comprehensive manner. If we look at APICS (Michaelis & al. 2013), the widest ever published cross linguistic study of Pidgin and Creole languages, many of the linguistic varieties described therein appear as relatively homogeneous systems. This seemingly uniform structure is linked to traditional descriptive approaches, whereby the grammar-writer is supposed to choose one (or a few) form(s) or paradigm(s) considered to be most representative of *the* language, in this case *the* Creole. Similarly noteworthy is the scarcity in Creole studies of linguistic atlases (exceptions seem to be found mostly in the domain of French-based Creoles, e.g. Carayol & Chaudenson 1984–1995 (Reunion), Fattier 2000 (Haiti) and Le Dù and Brun-Trigaud 2011–2013 (Lesser Antilles)),¹ revealing a frequent lack of attention paid to diatopic variation in Creole and Pidgin languages.

However, research on Creoles has played a significant role in critically examining the very notions of language and speech community and in enhancing our understanding of the nature of variation and how it relates to society. At the end

1. See also Quint (forthcoming) for a work devoted to Portuguese-based Creoles.

of the 19th century, a first generation of scholars (e.g. Schuchardt) chose to study Creole and Pidgin languages at a time when most people, including researchers, considered them as ‘corrupt’, ‘degraded’ or ‘incomplete’ forms of their respective lexifiers and therefore unworthy of academic attention. This early generation of scholars stood out precisely because they took linguistic variation into consideration rather than dismiss it. They opened up the possibility to systematically investigate variation in language.

In the second half of the 20th century, two important concepts emerged in relation to Creoles and variation: diglossia and the post-creole continuum. Following Ferguson’s (1959) example of Haitian and French in contact in Haiti, the French-speaking research tradition on Creoles adopted the notion of diglossia which argued that French and French-based creoles are in complementary social distribution and have different levels of overt prestige. The concept was very productive for a long time probably because the Haitian situation appeared to closely resemble that of other regions in which French-based Creoles, the low-prestige languages, are in contact with French, the high-prestige language, such as the French overseas regions of the Lesser Antilles and La Réunion in the Indian Ocean. The notion was useful for capturing the status of the languages in a territory (Hazaël-Massieux 1978 for Guadeloupe; Carayol and Chaudenson 1978 for La Réunion; Prudent 1982 for the Lesser Antilles), for accounting for language use according to interlocutors and social settings and for representing the discourses of Creole speakers on minoritization (March 1996; Bavoux 2002). By focusing on the relationship between a high and a low variety, the framework echoed the very hierarchy between the acrolect and basilect varieties observed by researchers working on English-based creoles. The approach was not accepted by all though. Carayol and Chaudenson (1978), for example, promoted the notion of a continuum and Prudent (1981, 1993), in an attempt to show the limits of the continuum, proposed the notion of an interlectal zone, an area which borrows from the two languages that make up the linguistic repertoires of bilinguals. More recent work within the French tradition shows, from a linguistic perspective, how those interlectal zones can be operationalized for analytical purposes via floating zones (Ledegen 2012)² or multiple transcripts using annotation tools that were developed at the crossroad between corpus and contact linguistics (Vaillant & Léglise 2014; Léglise & Alby 2016).

The post-creole continuum model was coined by DeCamp (1971) and popularized by Bickerton (1975), and has played a dominant role in conceptualizing variation in research on English-based Creoles. It argues that in communities where an

2. Ledegen shows that such floating predicates can account for as much as 16% of the total corpus in the speech of people from La Réunion Island.

English-based creole, the so-called *basilect*, co-exists with its original lexifier, the *acrolect*, a ‘set of varieties’ linguistically intermediate between them, also referred to as the *mesolects*, will emerge when speakers of the *basilect* start acquiring the *acrolect*. Mesolects combine English-like forms with *basilectal* functional and semantic content (Craig 1978). In communities such as Jamaica and Guyana, speakers are assumed to occupy different positions on the linguistic continuum based on their degree of acquisition of (features of) the *acrolect* or their relative use of *basilectal* features. As speakers’ level of knowledge of English rises across society, *basilectal* features are assumed to contract, giving rise, over time, to the dominance of English-like varieties, or so-called intermediate creoles. The process of decreolization is allegedly at the heart of this change. Although originally conceptualized as a qualitative process of language change, whereby *basilectal* features are gradually replaced by *acrolectal* ones, Rickford (1983) successfully argued in favor of a quantitative conceptualization. He demonstrates that language change in creole continua is due to a decline in the number of people who use *basilectal* varieties, rather than mostly a replacement of linguistic features (Rickford 1983). An important tenet of the post-creole continuum is that the *lects* of the continuum cannot be separated from each other due to continuous variation between them. In Bickerton’s (1975) view, this continuous set of *lects* constitutes a linguistic system.

This conceptualization of language practices in creole speaking communities was challenged in subsequent years by quantitative sociolinguistic research. Focusing predominantly on morphosyntactic patterns of variation such as the copular domain and pronouns, the research aimed to establish the social and linguistic factors that condition variation between English and Creole features. It revealed that creole communities are made up of two or more co-existing socially and linguistically distinct language systems (Devonish 1992), namely a Creole and a European (or another dominant) language. Traditionally, each variety is associated with a particular type of context – Creole: informal contexts; European language: formal contexts – and with particular social groupings – Creole: rural and lower-class populations; European language: urban and middle class populations. But Creole communities do not conform to Ferguson’s (1959) notion of diglossia (Winford 1985) because most contexts and populations do not just make use of one language. Code-switching is productively used by community members to negotiate social relationships and social identities (Escure 1982; Fenigsen 2005; Migge 2005a, 2007) as in any bilingual or multilingual community. In countries such as Guyana and Jamaica intermediate varieties also constitute focused systems in their own right (Rickford 1974; Patrick 1999). They are linked to urbanized working class populations and code-switching takes place between them, the ‘deep’ Creole and Standard Englishes. Creole continua then constitute a repertoire of varieties that speakers manipulate in various ways (Winford 1997).

Although this research has helped to demystify the notion of post-creole continuum and shed some light on the nature of language variation in Creole communities, it continues to uphold the tacit assumption that the two linguistic poles of the continuum, ‘the’ Standard and ‘the’ Creole are the main resources for variable language choices. Creoles have different varieties (Patrick 1997; Migge & Léglise 2011, 2013; Jourdan & Angeli 2014; Quint 2014) and variation may also take place between these varieties. Early quantitative sociolinguistic studies using macro social categories showed that Caribbean communities are stratified according to social class (e.g. Winford 1972; Rickford 1991; Patrick 1999) and ethnicity (Escure 1979, 1982) while more recent, anthropologically oriented research demonstrates that variation is not only constrained by factors such as gender (Sidnell 1999), context, audience and aims of the interaction but is also actively deployed to manage social relationships and identities (Fenigsen 2005). In their research on the emergence of new newer creole varieties, Migge & Léglise (2011) also showed that processes of identity formation give rise to processes associated with koineization involving mixing of features from different related regional varieties of the Creole, levelling of such features, formal reduction, and finally focusing of a new mixed variety (Siegel 1985). Moreover, while earlier research investigating linguistic prestige and language attitudes (Ferguson 1959; Rickford 1985; Winford 1985; Mühleisen 2001; Beckford Wassink 1999) focused on the distinction between covert and overt prestige and how they relate to the two main varieties, ‘the’ Standard and ‘the’ Creole, Migge & Léglise (2013) demonstrate how language ideologies play a significant role in the different ways in which both linguists and speakers conceptualize language practices as either languages or varieties that can neither be easily characterized as monostylistic nor as monolingual. Léglise & Migge’s (2019) research on the Surinamese and French Guianese border zone also demonstrates that different sets of ideologies, such as traditional emic and modern state-based language ideologies as well as emerging discourses in the urban context may co-exist and productively function as an important force field for shaping Maroon’s social and language practices and identities. Finally, Migge’s (2004, 2005a, 2005b, 2011) research among urbanizing Maroons suggests that changing notions of linguistic politeness are an important motivation for changes in language use, leading to both the emergence of new language varieties or practices and changes in the social values of existing social varieties.

There is also research on variation in Creoles from the perspective of mediated language use such as the use of Creoles in literature otherwise written in a dominant language (e.g. Mühleisen 2002; Lalla 2005; Pollard 2014), the use of Creoles in broadcast media (e.g. Garrett 2000; Managan 2011), music performances (e.g. Herzfeld & Moskowitz 2004; Farquharson 2017) and in electronic media or computer-mediated communication (CMC) (Deuber & Hinrichs 2007; Dupré 2013; Moll 2015; Migge

2020). This research investigates variation in language use and discursive practices focusing on both the identification of linguistic, including orthographic, and language use patterns and their social meanings and functions.

Recent qualitative studies on variation among multilingual speakers, influenced both by linguistic anthropology and 3rd wave sociolinguistic research (Eckert 2018) show that variation is often idiosyncratic. However, it is productively employed to index interactional relationships, stances and new transnational and cosmopolitan social identities. Speakers, as language users, deploy their entire linguistic repertoire, made up of social styles, dialectal variables and a variety of heterogeneous language forms, as resources to position themselves in their everyday interactions (Léglise & Sanchez Moreano 2017). Linguistically heterogeneous practices (Léglise 2017) perform various discursive and social functions and constitute important resources for conveying various types of social and interactional meanings.

To sum up, research employing early quantitative sociolinguistic methods was instrumental in shedding light on the makeup of linguistic varieties in creole communities and the linguistic aspects of variable patterns. However, it did not provide a comprehensive analysis of the micro-social aspects of variation because it focused on macro-level relationships and inferred social meanings from statistical correlations of linguistic and macro-social categories. It was the greater use of qualitative methods, including ethnographic investigation of the social context and attention to language ideologies through discourse-based analysis of monolingual and multilingual variable practices across different types of social domains and interactional contexts that opened up more detailed insights into the linkages between language and micro-social practices. As in non-creole contexts, language and social ideologies and changes in both play a crucial role in motivating language variation and change, both its occurrence and directionality, but changes are rarely unidirectional and linguistic practices are seldom associated to just one social or interactional meaning. Variable linguistic practices and contact patterns are important indices of ideological processes, but an understanding of their indexical work requires close attention to both people's practices and discourses.

The papers in this special issue explore variation in a range of Creoles and represent different approaches to researching variation. Two of the papers follow a typical quantitative sociolinguistic approach. They focus on one linguistic feature, or variable, and correlate its distribution with independent linguistic factors (Riccelli's paper) and with linguistic and social factors (Cardoso and Costa's paper) to uncover the constraints that govern the distribution of that variable. Evans' paper differs from these studies in that it investigates variation in legal translations from English to Kwéyòl. It attempts to establish the degree of pragmatic and legal equivalence in the interpretations of on sight translations of an important English legal phrase, the pre-trial right to silence or police caution, and the social factors that

condition this variation. The other two papers in the special issue follow a linguistic anthropological approach to variation in that they investigate types of variable linguistic practices, rather than single variables, and speaker's discourses about them, in order to understand how speakers conceptualize these practices (Schneider) and how these conceptualisations feed into identity formation (Jourdan & Angeli).

Britta Schneider's extensive work on a Belizean village draws on the fundamental question of linguistic ideologies to understand patterns of linguistic prestige. As in many other places, several languages coexist in the village with Kriol (the local English-based Creole language) being the main spoken vernacular. Nevertheless, the way Kriol speakers feel towards their language is not easy to define. Kriol is at the same time an indexical marker of local and Belizean identity and a variety that is not always consciously viewed as really different from English, the only official language of Belize. She shows that prestige relations are not necessarily binary but that different language ideologies exist side-by-side and that linguistic choices have several indexical meanings.

Jourdan and Angeli's paper, which is based on long-term ethnographic research in the Solomon Islands, demonstrates how the development of weak normativity in Solomon Islands Pijin in the capital Honiara closely parallels the emergence of a new socio-cultural group, the Pijin-speaking urbanites. The linguistic practices that index their social identity draw on the existing linguistic resources, the indigeneous Micronesian languages, rural and more conservative L2 varieties of Pijin and English, the sole official language in the country. This Honiaran urbanite identity is far from linguistically fixed as several varieties of Pijin coexist and influence each other, in addition to English which is also present (with diverse types of insertion) in most of the spoken productions of Honiaran Pijin speakers.

Evans' paper investigates variation in legal language focusing on how the pre-trial right to silence or police caution is translated on the spot from English to Kwéyòl by police personnel in St. Lucia. Her analysis reveals considerable variation in illocutionary force but fairly strong form-based similarity between translations. Evans suggests that this discrepancy is due to social factors such as the language competence and professional experience of the translator. She argues that only the existence of a standardized and legally binding translation of the police caution can guarantee the equality of access to justice for speakers of Kwéyòl.

Cardoso and Costa show how in Sri Lanka Portuguese Creole, the paradigm of personal pronouns displays a much wider variation than had hitherto been recorded by previous descriptive studies. These results seem to be due to several factors, such as linguistic obsolescence (differences based on age) and diatopic variation – which Cardoso and Costa are probably among the first to really explore – and presumably also metatypy due to close contact with the main local substrate/adstrate, namely Tamil, a Dravidian language, and English, one of the main media

of education in Sri Lanka, which both exert a growing influence on language use of the tiny Creole community whose direct contact with its lexifier (Portuguese) was severed several centuries ago. Thus, in spite (or because?) of their reduced number, the speakers of Sri Lanka Portuguese Creole seem to display a significant degree of variation in their language practices.

Riccelli's analysis of the subject domain in Santiaguense Capeverdean introduces us to yet another dimension of variation. Although the debate about the existence and the status of null subjects in this variety has been ongoing for more than two decades, Riccelli is probably the first researcher to study the expression of the subject argument in Santiaguense based on spoken language corpora. His analyses reveal that semantic notions such as ANIMACY, SPECIFICITY, and DEFINITENESS condition the (non)-occurrence of null subjects in Santiago Capeverdean. In addition, Riccelli notices that the way these factors influence the realization of the subject follows a gradient rather than a categorical or discrete distribution.

The papers in this special issue explore linguistic variation at various levels, whether semantic, diatopic or social and their link to language ideologies, that resist simplistic approaches and concepts. Such explorations undoubtedly pave the way for a better understanding of Creole languages in their complex sociocultural environments.

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