

## SHORT NOTE

### THE JOURNAL OF PIDGIN AND CREOLE LANGUAGES AND THE SOCIETY FOR PIDGIN AND CREOLE LINGUISTICS, IN RETROSPECT<sup>1</sup>

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I was involved from the beginning with both the journal and the society, and would like to share with you some of my thoughts on their foundation and history and how I perceive them to have shaped our profession.

This Special Short Note comments on how both the journal and the society came into being, and how they have developed over the years. Special attention is paid to the role of Stanley Tsuzaki and John Reinecke as seminal figures who challenged my thinking and prepared me mentally, so to speak, for a commitment to edit an international journal for an indefinite period. Also, I want to highlight the role played by the 1985 Amsterdam Symposium on *Universals versus Substrata in Creole Genesis*. My goal at that time, which was in line with the thinking of my associates, the publishers, and my university, was to provide to the profession a general journal of pidgin and creole languages, irrespective of the languages involved, especially of the lexifier, and irrespective of the approach or viewpoint taken by the authors. In keeping with the standards of linguistics journals edited in the United States and elsewhere, a system of rigorous and blind peer review was set up for article submissions. We planned that considerable page space would be set aside for book reviews which we thought would both inform and challenge our readers. A column, like a license to print money, as our

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first columnist Derek Bickerton put it, would allow distinguished scholars in the field to explore what concerned them, free from peer review and editorial constraints. As it turned out, we had considerable success in publishing articles on pidgins and creoles with Portuguese and Dutch lexifiers, less so with non-Indo-European lexifiers.

I focus on the genesis of SPCL to the Society for Caribbean Linguistics meeting in the Bahamas in 1988, along with the decision to meet in conjunction with the winter Linguistic Society of America, the search for a name for the Society, and the preparation of its constitution. The link with the LSA turned out to have the desired effect of augmenting the audience for our papers with large numbers of linguists outside of creolistics. The waning years of the last century showed definite signs that our discipline had matured and was being taken with increasing seriousness by everyone.

In a recent essay, "Fading Species and Dying Tongues: When the Two Part Ways" from the May 27, 2003 Tuesday Science section of the New York Times, David Berreby discusses the unwelcome fact that numerous languages appear to be dying before our eyes. He says that the argument linking them to the death of biological species is mistaken. Berreby makes the interesting argument that old established languages like English, Spanish, Russian, and French are being constantly altered by their speakers to suit changing times, and he specifically cites pidgin and creole languages like Tok Pisin and Haitian Creole as examples of new languages which the dying species theorists haven't taken into account.

Furthermore, he implies that the creation of New Languages might compensate to a greater or lesser extent for the loss of old ones. He recognizes that in the case of pidgin and creole languages the changes are very rapid. If a forward-looking Roman during the time of the Empire could have glimpsed the seeds of future French, Italian, Spanish, and Portuguese in the Peoples Latin manifested all around him, then in the same way we might gain an idea of future offshoots of English by looking at its local adaptations to changing circumstances the world over. There is a special fascination in hearing "advanced forms" of world languages such as *français avancé*, which is Robert Chaudenson's term for maritime French (as for example French in Réunion), or the corresponding "Advanced English," something which William Stewart may have had in mind when he characterized Jamaican as English rather than as a creole. Personally, I am very conscious of language development; I like to look backward in history, but also forward to the future: there is an

attraction to accelerated change, language intertwining, and the prospect of eventual new languages. In the case of the United States, it seems that such processes might offer important insights into why American English is not a carbon copy of British English, and why it has taken a different direction.

Following a series of fortuitous events, the Journal of Pidgin and Creole Languages was founded seventeen years ago, in 1986. While I was still in Austin at the University of Texas analyzing the accelerated change in German and other European immigrant languages introduced into central Texas in the 19th century, the appearance of Frederic Cassidy's *Jamaican Talk* and John Reinecke's *Language and Dialect in Hawaii* in the late 1960s turned my thinking in another direction, namely to the accelerated development of English intertwined with other languages in creole societies. I left Austin in May 1970 to join the faculty of Southern Illinois University at Carbondale. As part of the package offered with my new position, SIU awarded me a summer stipend to attend the California Summer Institute of Linguistics in Santa Cruz in the summer of 1971. The first week I was in Santa Cruz, I wrote to Stanley Tsuzaki at the University of Hawaii asking if there might be an opportunity to come to Honolulu for a few days to meet him and John Reinecke in order to find out more at first hand about Reinecke's outstanding work from the middle 1930s in the sociology of intertwined languages.

The day after I posted the letter, a letter from Tsuzaki arrived in the mail saying he heard that I was in California and asking whether I might like to come to Honolulu for a guest lecture discussing my work with European immigrant languages. It was an auspicious beginning for the pidgin/creole part of my career in linguistics.

From the first moment I met John Reinecke his quiet charisma, enhanced by an amazing mental capacity, was quite overwhelming. He was without doubt the most perceptive student of the sociology of pidgins, creoles, and jargons of his generation. It was easy to see how Tsuzaki, who was finally able to hire him as his research assistant at the university C his first official employment there since 1938, by an act of the legislature I believe C fell under his spell, as I did too.

Among other things, Reinecke encouraged me to look at the work of the German-Austrian linguist, Hugo Schuchardt, and also of the Dutch linguist, Dirk Christiaan Hesselning, on pidgins/creoles and intertwined languages. One letter from Hesselning I found among Reinecke's carefully organized papers at the Hamilton Library at the University of Hawaii after his death was

especially intriguing: Hesseling wrote him in 1938 that he viewed Afrikaans as a language that had almost creolized, but had pulled back at the brink. My puzzlement at what this meant and what it implied, and other controversial positions associated with the Dutch scholar, who remained relatively obscure since he preferred to publish in his native Dutch, led to my sabbatical proposal to my university in 1984 and 1985 to spend a year in the Netherlands studying Hesseling's unpublished papers in the University Library in Leiden.

Although the Hesseling project turned out to be relatively uninteresting, mainly because the bulk of his papers appears to be lost, my association with the Creolist Group in Amsterdam turned out to be a powerful stimulus to continue in creolistics: Mervyn Alleyne, Pieter Musyken, Pieter Seuren, Norval Smith, Hans den Besten, Peter Bakker, Silvia Kouwenberg, and Jacques Arends are some of the names and faces that come to mind. The Jamaican scholar, educator, and creolist, Mervyn Alleyne, who was spending a sabbatical year in the Netherlands generously invited me to stay with him whenever I came to Amsterdam to hear Pieter Muysken lecture on creole topics. Then, too, Alleyne's presence at these lectures and lively discussions at the University of Amsterdam gave Muysken an opportunity to lecture in English rather than in Dutch, something which allowed his students who weren't Dutch to take a much more active part.

A highlight of the spring of 1985 was the Symposium "Substrata versus Universals in Creole Genesis," sponsored by the Creolist Group at the University of Amsterdam. I was especially grateful that my South African student, Dennis (aka K.D.P.) Makhudu, had received a stipend from the Dutch government that allowed him to travel from Carbondale to the Netherlands to take part. Makhudu was perhaps the student who was most influential in my thinking in those years at SIU. His 1984 MA thesis, *Is Afrikaans a Creole Language*, is still unpublished, although clearly its scope and impact were equivalent to a substantial dissertation. Makhudu's work later drew the attention of creolists interested in Afrikaans, such as John Holm and Hans den Besten. (Holm, for example, in Volume 2 of his book on Pidgins in the section on Afrikaans, cited Makhudu's examples at length to provide readers with an idea of the true Afrikaans.) His fluent command of Standard Afrikaans, Colored Afrikaans, and Black Afrikaans, as well as English, none of which were his native language, made me acutely aware that the existing normative Afrikaans dictionaries and grammars did not reflect at all how the language was actually used by both Blacks and Whites in South Africa.

In the discussions of the Amsterdam Creole Group, both before and after the Conference, it became evident that a journal dealing with pidgins/creoles of all kinds would be a desirable step forward. One weekend that spring, I prepared a proposal for a general journal devoted to not just the most commonly described pidgins/creoles based on English and French, but also those with Portuguese, Dutch, and Spanish lexifiers, as well as non-Western European and non-Indo-European lexifiers. Novel approaches and new ideas were to be encouraged, staid articles in the mould of the past discouraged. Short Notes or Squibs were provided for, as well as a Column, which our first columnist Derek Bickerton relished as a vehicle to report to the profession what was on his mind C mental currency it could be called.

Shortly before the Amsterdam Symposium, in spring 1985, Pieter Muysken arranged a meeting with Claire and John Benjamins at their publishing headquarters in an 18th century Dutch patroon house on a picturesque Amsterdam canal, replete with mahogany and rosewood bookcases filled with old leather-bound books lining the walls. Muysken rode his bicycle to the meeting, got lost, and traveled several kilometers out of his way. He arrived perspiring and out of breath, with apologies, but also a wink of good humor. The Benjamins, the influential husband and wife publishing team whose books are notably expensive, but also nurturing of new directions in linguistics, greeted the idea with enthusiasm. I knew that editing a journal of the magnitude envisaged would take an unforeseeable amount of time and energy, but I was quite willing to commit some years of my life to it. Little did I know that the commitment would extend into the next millennium.

The Benjamins asked me to be the editor, Mervyn Alleyne to be Associate Editor and Book Review Editor, and Pieter Muysken to be Editor of a companion book series to be called *The Creole Language Library*. The familiar yellow, grey, black, and white covers of both publications were designed by Marius van Leeuwen, who I understand is a student or disciple of the Dutch painter Escher. Heidi Langner Burns, now head of Peter Lang Publishing's Baltimore office, became the first Editorial Associate in Carbondale. Some years later, Salikoko Mufwene succeeded Mervyn as Associate Editor, and he was followed by Armin Schwegler, who has now served for many years as our distinguished Associate Editor. Mervyn and Salikoko were and are knowledgeable in French, whereas Armin, who was brought up bilingually in German and French (he told me recently that if pressed he would have to hold German as his L1), is more specialized in Spanish and Portuguese, al-

though none of them are strictly speaking native speakers of the languages in question. From the beginning, every attempt was made to encourage articles on Dutch, Portuguese, and Spanish lexifier pidgins/creoles, as well as those based on non-European languages. Over time, in return for the steadily increasing price of JPCL, we were able to negotiate with Benjamins a sizeable increase in page allotment, to 360 printed pages a year. We were thus better able to give considerable encouragement to younger scholars and to publish very different approaches to creolistics, with a good number of book reviews.

Two JPCL Editorial Boards were formed: a Board in the traditional sense, and an Advisory Board. Strenuous efforts by the publishers, the editors, and the two Boards to build up circulation were met with fair success. We generally did not get a response from the Head of the Library we were advising of our new publication, but one letter in our files is a pleasant exception. It was a personal letter from the Director of the MIT Library System, not noted for the kind of linguistics we were advertising, saying that a subscription to our interesting publication would be entered as soon as the budget allowed, which actually happened a few months later. JPCL's files, chock full of interesting correspondence, manuscripts, and other papers covering the period 1985 to 2001, chronicle the development of our field over many years, in both a public and a personal way. These files should be catalogued (much as Reinecke did with his own fascinating work), with unrestricted access to interested persons, respecting living scholars' privacy of course.

JPCL never enjoyed a formal affiliation with existing scholarly societies such as the Society for Caribbean Linguistics, the French Creolistics Association (linked with *Etudes Créoles*), or the Creole Language Group in Amsterdam, mainly because of their respective regional or single-language focus; nevertheless I was well aware that it would be to JPCL's advantage to have a professional affiliation of this type. At the Society for Caribbean Linguistics meeting in the Bahamas in August 1988, I broached the idea of a general society for pidgin and creole languages to participants like John Holm and Geneviève Escure, and I remember the enthusiasm that they and others at the Nassau conference had for a professional society for pidgin and creole linguistics, in the broadest sense of the word. Likewise, John and Claire Benjamins embraced the idea, as they hoped (rightly, it turns out) that the circulation of JPCL would be enhanced.

An affiliation with the winter meetings of the Linguistic Society of America was recommended, with much the same set up as the American Association of Applied Linguistics (AAAL) and the American Dialect Society (ADS). An organizational meeting with the winter 1989 LSA meeting in Washington, DC was planned. For that meeting, I prepared SPCL's draft constitution drawing heavily on the LSA itself, as well as organizations like the Society for Caribbean Linguistics, the American Dialect Society, and the American Association of Applied Linguistics, but adapted to our particular circumstances. I remember in the fall of 1988 in my study at home in Carbondale that I had written down on a single sheet of paper some thoughts about possible names for the Society, such as *The American Creolistics Society*, *The American Society for Pidgin and Creole Languages*, and *The International Creole Linguistics Alliance*. Four couplets/triplets of words seemed to be uppermost in naming the Society: American vs. International; Languages vs. Linguistics; Pidgin and Creole vs. Creolistics; Association vs. Society vs. Alliance. In a way, the journal, JPCL, might be viewed as leaning more toward languages, per se, whereas the society might be thought of as more "linguistic." Attention-getting names like "Alliance" did not seem to fit our image, and in the end the most neutral name was chosen. No one had an objection to Society for Pidgin and Creole Linguistics when the constitution was approved. The acronym, SPCL, now sounded similar to the official journal of the Society: JPCL.

The first meeting in Washington in early January 1989, was memorable. There was a surprisingly large contingent of scholars from the Pacific area, mostly there for the Linguistic Society of America Annual Meeting. I remember with pleasure talking at length with Roger Keesing, who had a rare enthusiasm and a fund of knowledge about a part of the world I knew little about.

The link of the winter meeting with the LSA led, as we hoped it would, to increasing and enthusiastic attendance by scholars outside of creolistics, the presence at our meetings of well-known general linguists and of linguists with other specialities. Summer meetings have also done well. The success of SPCL says it all. Creolistics has become part of mainstream linguistics. It has come of age.

In August 2001, the editorial home of the Journal of Pidgin and Creole Languages was transferred to Ohio State, under Don Winford's direction. John Benjamins continues its considerable support for the journal even though

one might suspect that it has been no big moneymaker for them. The criticism directed at Hugo Schuchardt in the 1870s as to why he should fritter away his time studying “funny languages” has now come full circle. Every student of linguistics wants to learn something about them, as they appear to offer precious and fundamental insights into the nature of all human language.