

Predicting grammatical substrate features in creole languages

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In this talk I start out from the observation that creole languages, the result of recent language shift situations during the European colonial expansion between the 16th and 19th centuries, differ in a great number of grammatical features from one another (e.g. obligatory vs. optional subject pronouns; presence vs. absence of serial verb constructions; double-object constructions vs. indirect-object constructions). But when rigorously comparing a large number of unrelated creoles with each other (as in Michaelis et al. 2013, *Atlas of Pidgin and Creole Language Structures*, apics-online.info), a striking picture emerges. Whereas the bulk of the lexical material of creole languages goes back to the European (or other) lexifier languages (for instance, verbs in Seychelles Creole stem from dialectal 18th century French: *manze* ‘eat’, *koze* ‘speak’, *gete* ‘look’ etc.), valency and event framing patterns cannot be traced back to the lexifier languages, but consistently derive from the relevant substrate languages (Blasi et al. 2017, Michaelis 2019). Some characteristic patterns are shown in the following table.

VALENCY/EVENT FRAMING PATTERNS	CREOLE	(AFRICAN) SUBSTRATE(S)	LEXIFIER(S)
ditransitive	double-object 'Peter gives Marcel a mango'	double-object 'Peter gives Marcel a mango'	indirect-object 'Peter gives a mango to Marcel'
experiencer	body part is subject 'My head is aching (me)'	body part is subject 'My head is aching (me)'	experiencer is subject 'I have a head-ache'
raining	rain is subject 'Rain falls'	rain is subject 'Rain falls'	expletive subject 'It is raining'
motion-to/-from	identical marking 'I go/come Leipzig'	identical marking 'I go/come Leipzig'	different marking 'I go to/come from Leipzig'

I propose that due to universal processes of second language use the creole creators systematically *impose* valency and event framing patterns from their African, Indic, Oceanic etc. native languages (substrates) onto the nascent creoles (Siegel 2008). Therefore, the results of such language change processes of imposition are to a large extent predictable during creolization scenarios.

References

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