1 The study of partially restructured vernaculars

Introduction

Language is a kind of social behavior, one of the many ways in which individuals interact with those around them. Thus linguistics is a social science, and linguists take pride in thinking of themselves as scientists, with all the objectivity that word denotes. Unfortunately, objectivity is very hard to achieve, especially in the social sciences, and linguistics is no exception. It is hard to imagine any study of language which manages to put away all ideology, but in the case of the languages discussed in this book, the task is unimaginable.

African American English – also called AAE, Ebonics, or just Black English – is a good case in point. Until at least the middle of the twentieth century, the overwhelming majority of white Americans saw their country and its culture as the product of their European roots flourishing in a new land. This ideology allowed very little room for the contribution of other cultures, so that even the distinctiveness of the folk ways and speech of African Americans was attributed to their frequent lack of access to education and general ignorance – if not to their very intelligence. Thus well into the 1950s Negro Nonstandard English (as AAE was then called) was usually considered bad English in need of eradication rather than study. In so far as its origins were considered at all, it was assumed to have descended solely from British dialects that had been left untended in America.

In the 1960s the civil rights movement sharply changed this ideology: equal citizens could not logically be unequal human beings, and there was a new willingness to reconsider African Americans, as well as the development of their language and culture in the United States. By the 1970s there was widespread agreement – at least among linguists – that the distinctive features of AAE identified it as a post-creole: the descendant of a variety of English that had first been creolized or restructured when it was learned by adult African slaves on plantations (as English had been creolized in Jamaica, for example). Subsequently this speech
underwent decreolization, or the loss of many of its distinctive creole features through contact with standard English. Dillard's influential book, *Black English* (1972) popularized this view, convincing many that AAE, like its speakers, was much more African than anyone had realized. This was part of another growing ideology, supported by many blacks, that affirmed a very separate cultural identity for African Americans.

But there were problems in explaining AAE as a post-creole. Most importantly, no one could find reliable historical evidence of the widespread, stable creole from which AAE had supposedly decreolized. The known passages purporting to represent the speech of blacks in North America during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries remain ambiguous. Quite aside from the inherent problem of the authenticity of such fragments, almost all of which were actually written by speakers of standard English, there is an even greater problem in accurately identifying the kind of speech represented. Unless the purported speaker’s background is documented, it is impossible to determine whether it represents the foreigner’s English of Africans, the Caribbean Creole English of slaves imported from the West Indies, a pidginized variety of English from West Africa, or an indigenous creole such as Gullah, the fully restructured variety spoken along the coast of South Carolina and Georgia.

Up to this point linguists had generally assumed that decreolization could account for the varying distance between the grammatical structure of different creoles and that of the European language they were based on: AAE and Caribbean creoles based on English were viewed as post-creoles at different stages of decreolization away from some very early fully creolized variety. By the mid-1980s there were growing objections to this all-or-nothing model of creolization and skepticism that it could account for what was becoming known about the earlier structure of AAE (Hancock 1987:264–265; Schneider 1989; Holm 1991:247). Much of the most recent debate focuses on the nature the language of blacks born in North America (outside of the creole-speaking Gullah area): whether it was from its very beginning a fully restructured creole or rather a compromise between the pidgin or creole brought in by slaves from the West Indies and Africa and the regional speech of British settlers (Winford 1997; Rickford 1997, 1999), and whether partial restructuring can account for the known sociohistorical and linguistic facts concerning AAE and some other languages that apparently had a similar genesis, such as nonstandard Brazilian Portuguese and Caribbean Spanish, Afrikaans (the South African language descended from Dutch), and the vernacular French spoken on the island of Reunion in the Indian Ocean (Holm 1992, 2000).

These language varieties, which appear to have grown out of the partial restructuring of older varieties spoken in Europe that came into contact
The study of partially restructured vernaculars with non-European languages, today have some 200 million speakers, placing them among the major languages of the world. They present formidable challenges not only to linguistic theory but also in practical matters like the language-related problems encountered in education by speakers of nonstandardized varieties, which include all of the language varieties discussed here, except for standard Afrikaans. These problems have shown no signs of going away. And each of these languages has been studied through the prism of particular, often local, ideologies, as Heliana Mello has shown for her own language, Brazilian Vernacular Portuguese (Mello 2001).

Of course the concept of a partially restructured language as opposed to a post-creole (which was fully restructured but then decreolized through contact with its lexical source language) has its own ideological implications. If the restructuring of the English spoken by blacks in most of North America was only partial, this implies that the transmission of the English language (and, indeed, other aspects of English culture) to African Americans was much more complete than it has been fashionable to assume. The cultural separatism of the 1960s and 1970s may have distorted the issue by insisting on the Africanness of African Americans to the virtual exclusion of their Europeanness.

These languages, then, would require new study if only because our sense of identity and ideology shift with time. But there is a more pressing scientific reason for reassessing them. The genesis and development of such partially restructured languages have become one of the most important leading edges of contact linguistics as a whole. The languages discussed here have a number of the structural features of creoles but appear, nonetheless, never to have undergone full creolization. Their reduced inflectional morphology – particularly in the verb phrase and noun phrase – seems to have been transmitted from one generation to another largely like that of unrestructured overseas varieties, rather than having been reacquired by more basilectal varieties during decreolization, which distinguishes them from post-creoles. Some of the most interesting research in this area has been the effort to correlate the synchronic structure of these languages to the sociolinguistic history of their speakers: the demographic balance of native versus non-native speakers of the target language at the beginning of the speech community's settlement, their relative power, their migrations, and the nature of their contact.

There has also been a shift in theoretical perspective that is facilitating progress in this area of inquiry. More of us working in pidgin and creole linguistics are coming to see our field as only one part of a broader area of research: contact linguistics, as defined by Thomason (1997). The scope of this wider field includes language varieties that have resulted not only from pidginization and creolization (to whatever degree) but also from
such processes as intertwining (Bakker and Muysken 1994), koinéization, or indigenization (Siegel 1997). Such studies promise to increase our understanding of the range of possible outcomes of language contact by encompassing varieties that fail to fit neatly into the definitional boxes in which we have often tried to restrict pidgin and creole linguistics.

In addition to the five partially restructured varieties mentioned above, which have received considerable scholarly attention, there are a number of less well-studied varieties that seem likely to have undergone a similar process, such as the nonstandard English of American Indians, Australian Aborigines, and others. There are also partially restructured varieties which appear to have evolved solely through community-wide language shift, such as Irish English. Whether these are indeed the same kind of language, which is the position of Winford (2000:216), has yet to be demonstrated. Specialists in Irish English such as Hickey (forthcoming) are not convinced (see section 2.1.1).

This chapter examines how scholarship on each of these five varieties – based on five different European languages – has taken its own course, the literature on each being largely in the corresponding standard language. Although language barriers are still surprisingly effective in limiting the horizons of linguists, there has been a certain amount of communication across these barriers so that research on one variety has sometimes cast light on theoretical problems connected with another. After surveying general views on full and partial restructuring from the earliest creolists until the 1980s (section 1.1), this chapter examines scholarship on each variety, beginning with AAE (1.2). To a limited extent (especially in more recent years) AAE studies have provided models for interpreting the historical development of the other varieties, from (a) the model of a purely European dialect reflecting general Western European tendencies such as the loss of inflections; to (b) the model of a post-creole retaining sub-stratal features; to (c) the model of differing degrees of restructuring, varying according to social factors. This review of the theoretical underpinnings of research on AAE will then be compared with that of work on the other four varieties: Afrikaans (1.3); Brazilian Vernacular Portuguese (1.4); Nonstandard Caribbean Spanish (1.5); and the Vernacular Lects of Réunionnais French (1.6). The final section (1.7) describes recent comparative research in partial restructuring.

1.1 Partial restructuring versus decreolization

The theoretical foundations for the study of fully creolized languages have been developing since the eighteenth century – particularly since the middle of the twentieth century (Holm 1988–89:13–70). However, linguists
The study of partially restructured vernaculars have had more difficulty developing an adequate theoretical model for dealing with partially restructured languages – one that would allow reliable predictions about the interrelationship between the social history of their speakers and the linguistic structure likely to emerge from a particular context.

We have long known that fully creolized languages exist – languages whose linguistic structure differs radically from that of the older languages from which they drew most of their lexicon. For example, the generally synthetic structure of the Western European languages used by colonists (Portuguese, Spanish, French, Dutch, and English – which still use a number of inflections to convey grammatical information) was replaced by an analytical structure in the Atlantic creoles derived both from these European languages and from the isolating Niger-Congo languages spoken by Africans brought to the New World. There is fairly general agreement that the isolating structure of the creoles – using free rather than bound morphemes to convey grammatical information – was determined by several factors: (1) the tendency towards isolating structures that was already widespread in the European superstrate languages; (2) the almost categorical use of isolating structures in the African substrate languages; (3) the universal tendency of adults to use isolating structures when learning a second language (e.g. the pidgins that developed into creoles); (4) the internal systematicity that would have spread the use of isolating structures as the creoles developed; and (5) the converging influence of two or more of these tendencies.

Of all the structural similarities of the Atlantic creoles, the common trait that indicates most clearly the completeness of their restructuring is the completeness of their analyticity. If we leave aside the non-Atlantic creoles (whatever they may have been called) has been acknowledged since the early eighteenth century, and references to what can only be interpreted as more and less fully restructured Caribbean varieties date from the latter part of that century:

die creolische, oder Negersprache . . . wird aber von den blanken Creolen feiner gesprochen, als von den Negern. [. . . the creole, or language of the blacks . . . is spoken better by the white Creoles than the blacks. ] (Oldendorp 1777:263, quoted by Stein 1984:92)

(Of course feiner, translated as ‘better,’ here means more like the European source language.)
However, it was not until the late nineteenth century that a linguist observed that there were language varieties that combined features of creoles with those of non-creoles. Schuchardt (1889:480) coined the term *Halbkreolisch* (literally ‘half-creole’) for certain varieties of Indo-Portuguese and Caribbean Creole French that had taken on superstrate features:

> Ueberall wo eine kreolische Mundart gesprochen wird, liegt Mischung mit der europäischen Muttersprache sehr nahe, mit anderen Worten: es stellt sich leicht ein individuelles oder gelegentliches Halbkreolisch ein. Indem wir die Bedingungen für dasselbe näher suchen, bemerken wir einerseits dass Europäer die des Kreolischen nicht wirklich mächtig sind, sondern nur dunkle Vorstellungen davon haben, such bemühren von den Einheimischen verstanden zu werden – kreolisiertes Europäisch; andererseits dass Europäer die des Kreolischen mehr oder weniger mächtig sind, irgend eine Form der Darstellung wählen, für welche das Kreolische nicht ausreicht, oder dass Kreolen die des Europäischen nicht mächtig sind, ihren sprachlichen Ausdruck zu verfeinern sich bemühen – europäisiertes Kreolisch.

(Wherever a creole dialect is spoken, mixture with the European mother tongue lies very close at hand; in other words, an individual or occasional semi-creole easily appears. When we look more closely into the underlying conditions, we see on the one hand that [1] Europeans who do not really know the creole, having only a confused notion of it, may strive to make themselves understood by the natives, producing a creole-influenced variety of the European language. On the other hand, [2] Europeans who are more or less at home in the creole may use constructions not found in it, or [3] Creoles who have not mastered the European language may attempt to refine their creole, producing a European-influenced creole).

The first situation produces a variety similar to what Mühlhäusler (1982:456–457) calls *Tok Masta*; the second situation produces a variety like the lects of Negerhollands and Papiamentu spoken by Europeans; the third produces what are now called decreolized varieties.

Schuchardt’s idea of *Halbkreolisch* was interpreted by Tagliavini (1931:834) as a language that was half-way in the process of being creolized, and so he translated the term into Italian as “lingue creolizzanti.” Unfortunately the present-participial ending might suggest that such languages are “creolizing” in the sense of still undergoing restructuring; Reinecke (1937:22) translated the term as “those tending toward the creole, the creoliant dialects.”

Schuchardt also noted that African American English seemed to be losing its creole features:

The Negro English that is most widely known is spoken in the southern United States . . . those variants which still show a creole-like character are increasingly falling into disuse by being accommodated to the English of the whites by means of an intermediate speech variety. (Schuchardt c. 1893, in Gilbert 1985:42)
In this view, African American English originated as a full creole that later acquired non-creole features from contact with regional English. Later Bloomfield (1933:474) reasoned that a restructured variety of English had become nativized among Negro slaves in many parts of America. When the jargon has become the only language of the subject group, it is a creolized language. The creolized language has the status of an inferior dialect of the masters' speech. It is subject to constant leveling-out and improvement in the direction of the latter. The various types of “Negro dialect” which we observe in the United States show us some of the last stages of this leveling. With the improvement of social conditions, this leveling is accelerated; the result is a caste-dialect... It is a question whether during this period the dialect that is being de-creolized may not influence the speech of the community – whether the creolized English of the southern slaves, for instance, may not have influenced local types of sub-standard or even of standard English.

This view was not elaborated into a full-blown theory of decreolization until interest in AAE and the English-based Caribbean creoles became widespread in the 1960s. Stewart asserted that the non-standard speech of present-day American Negroes still seems to exhibit structural traces of a creole predecessor... One of the more important changes which have occurred in American Negro dialects during the past century has been the almost complete de-creolization of both their functional and lexical vocabulary. (1968:51–52)

DeCamp (1961, 1971) developed the idea of a continuum of lects for Jamaican, ranging from the most creole-like to the most English-like. Stewart (1965) applied this idea to African American English, introducing the terms acrolect for the variety closest to the standard and basilect for the variety furthest from it, with mesolect for those between. Later the continuum model was further refined by others (e.g. Bickerton 1973, Rickford 1987).

By the end of the 1970s there was a general assumption that decreolization explained the varying structural distance between different creoles and their lexical source language: Caribbean creoles based on English, for example, were actually post-creoles at different stages of decreolization away from a very early fully creolized variety that may have resembled the modern Surinamese creoles, which were cut off from contact with English in the seventeenth century.

The idea behind the modern meaning of partial restructuring originated in Hesseling (1897), who pointed out that “the Dutch on the Cape was on the way to becoming a sort of creole... [but] this process was not completed” (1979 translation, p. 12). Shortly afterwards, Vasconcellos noted that
The Portuguese were sometimes obliged to learn the indigenous languages and the indigenous people Portuguese. The second fact is my only interest for the time being because it resulted in the formation of creole dialects and other Portuguese varieties. Between the two groups, one could say there is a question of degree.

The first recognition of a whole category of such languages can be found in Reinecke (1937:61):

In several instances the slaves were so situated among a majority or a large minority of whites (and there were other reasons as well for the result), that they, or rather their creole children, learned the common language, not a creole dialect; or the plantation creole dialects that had begun to form never crystallized, never got beyond the makeshift stage. This happened in . . . Brazil, Cuba and the Spanish-speaking Caribbean countries in general, and in the southern United States in general.

Reinecke was also the first to put this meaning together with the term semi-creolized, which he used in reference to Afrikaans (1937:559). He also pointed out that the English-based creoles of the Caribbean did not seem to have been completely restructured:

The Surinam dialects, like West African Pidgin English, are unmistakably creole dialects in the sense of being simplified to a purely analytic structure. The other West Indian dialects are not, however, so completely pruned down [. . . and] may be regarded as what Schuchardt called creolizing languages – dialects on the way to complete analytic simplification, but which for various reasons stopped a little short of it. (1937:274–275)

As recently as 1962, Stewart considered Suriname to have the only real creoles based on English in the Caribbean area: “Jamaican and other regional varieties of English are best treated as dialects of English” (1962:50–51). In a personal communication, Stewart explained that at the time it seemed more prudent to exclude these varieties from the discussion of creoles since it was unclear whether they were creoles that had acquired non-creole features or vice versa. By 1967, however, he felt confident that additional historical sociolinguistic information had made it clear that the West Indian varieties were in fact post-creoles.

However, the fact that this view came to be widely accepted among creolist does not in itself prove that Reinecke had not been right – that these varieties had never been as fully creolized as the Surinamese varieties. An additional possibility that could explain the considerable structural gap
between the Surinamese and West Indian varieties of creolized English is that Sranan may have been repidginized in the late seventeenth century, leaving it even further from English than it had been prior to 1667. Bloomfield (1933) had indirectly implied that a non-creole language might take on creole features (a process that could lead to partial restructuring) when he asked, “whether the creolized English of the southern slaves, for instance, may not have influenced local types of sub-standard or even of standard English” (1933:474).

Later Silva Neto (1950a:12) followed Schuchardt (1889) in referring to re-lusitanized Indo-Portuguese as a \textit{semi-crioulo}. That same year he extended the use of the term to the Portuguese spoken by non-whites during the early settlement of Brazil:

\begin{quote}
constituíu-se, no primeiro século da colonização (1532–1632), na boca de índios, negros e mesticos, um falar \textit{crioulo} ou \textit{semi-crioulo}. [. . . there arose during the first century of colonization (1532–1632) a creole or semi-creole language used by Indians, blacks and people of mixed race] (1950b:166)
\end{quote}

Although Silva Neto never spelled out the sequence of social and linguistic events that may have led to the partial restructuring of a language variety from the very beginning of its existence, this possibility struck me as worth exploring when I was working on the same problem of the development of Brazilian Vernacular Portuguese (Holm 1984). Thomason, who was then working on a comparative study of a number of different kinds of languages resulting from contact (Thomason and Kaufman 1988), agreed that it would be useful to reserve the term \textit{semi-creole} for those varieties that appeared never to have been fully creolized. Therefore I contrasted the term with

\textit{post-creole} varieties such as (according to some) American Black English . . . or vernacular Brazilian Portuguese. . . . Others would call these varieties \textit{semi-creoles}, which also means that they have both creole and non-creole features but does not necessarily imply that they were ever basilectal creoles, since both creoles and non-creoles (e.g. Caymanian English . . .) can become semi-creoles by borrowing features. Thus some believe that Afrikaans . . . particularly the variety spoken by some people of mixed race . . . could safely be called a semi-creole but not a post-creole (Holm 1988–89:9–10)

The term is also used in this sense by Thomason and Kaufman in reference to Afrikaans (1988:148). Around the same time, Mufwene (1987:99) noted that

the results of half-creolization and decreolization may look alike, but the processes responsible for the structural likeness of their outcomes are certainly not the same. Whichever is the case for B[lack] E[nglish] still needs to be demonstrated.
Bickerton (1984:176–178) proposed what he called a pidginization index to explain why the structure of some creoles is quite close to that of their lexical source language (e.g. Reunionnais) while that of others is quite far from it (e.g. Saramaccan). Although the mathematical formula which he proposed to indicate the degree of restructuring proved “unworkable” (Singler 1990:645), Bickerton did recognize that creoles stand at different distances from their source languages in terms of the degree of restructuring that they have undergone, and that this differentiation could occur at the beginning rather than the end of the process of restructuring (see the introduction to chapter 2).

It was during this period that linguists began to question whether decreolization alone could adequately account for the varying distance of the structure of different creoles from that of their lexical source language. Hancock (1987) put it thus:

I do not, then, believe that, for example, Black English was once like Gullah, or that Gullah was once like Jamaican, or that Jamaican was once like Sranan, each a more decreolized version of the other along some kind of mystical continuum. . . . My feeling is that most of the principal characteristics that each creole is now associated with were established during the first twenty-five years or so of the settlement of the region in which it came to be spoken: Black English has always looked much the way it looks now . . . (1987:264–265)

The theoretical importance of gradience in creolization was signaled by a conference on “Degrees of Restructuring in Creole Languages” at the University of Regensburg in Germany in 1998, resulting in an entire volume on this topic (Neumann-Holzschuh and Schneider 2000).

1.2 The study of African American English (AAE)

The decreolization theory for the origin of Black English – the “creolist” theory that finally received the imprimatur of Labov (1982) – was a much more satisfactory explanation for that variety’s creole features than earlier hypotheses that traced its origins solely to British dialects. However, my own work on the lexicon of two much more restructured varieties – Nicaragua’s Miskito Coast Creole English (Holm 1978) and Bahamian Creole English (Holm with Shilling 1982) – made it clear to me that archaic and regional British English must have played a primary role in the genesis of all three African American varieties. Research on possible British origins of specific creole grammatical features had been unfashionable in the 1970s, but in the 1980s two such studies – Schneider 1981 (translated in 1989) and Rickford 1986 – had an important impact on the field, reopening the question of the degree to which British syntactic patterns had been preserved in African American varieties.