1 Introduction

This chapter is written primarily to clarify concepts such as "ecology," "evolution," and "language," which are central to the book. It also states some of my most important arguments, e.g., (1) creoles have developed by the same restructuring processes that mark the evolutions of noncreole languages; (2) contact is an important factor in all such developments; and (3) the external ecological factors that bear on restructuring also bear on aspects of language vitality, among which is language endangerment. I will go beyond the brief explanations given in the Preface but will not pre-empt the more elaborate discussions presented in, for instance, chapters 2 and 6. In the present chapter, I simply provide basic information that readers will find useful to understand the book.

1.1 Communal languages as ensembles of I-languages

To the lay person the term *language* means something like "way of speaking." Thus *English* originally meant "the way the English people speak" and *kiSwahili* "the way the waSwahili speak." In the case of *kiSwahili*, the Bantu noun class system makes it clear through the instrumental prefix *ki-*, which suggests a means used by *waSwahili* to communicate. Those more knowledgeable about communication extend the notion "language" beyond the spoken mode, applying it also to written and signed means.

Linguists have focused more on the abstract systems that generate utterances and written or signed strings of symbols identified as English, American Signed Language, or the like in lay speech. The systems consist of sets of units and principles, which are selected and applied differently from one language to another, despite many similarities. The units are identifiable in various interfacing modules: e.g., the phonological system (dealing with sounds), the morphological system (dealing with minimal meaningful combinations of sounds), and syntax (how words combine into sentences). Some principles are generally combinatoric, in the form of positive rules and negative constraints on how the units can combine together into larger units. Some others are distributive, specifying, for instance, how the phoneme /t/ in American English is pronounced differently in words such as

tea, state, and *water*, viz., aspirated before a stressed vowel, unaspirated after /s/ regardless of what follows, often with unreleased air at the end of a word, and as a flap between a stressed and an unstressed vowel.

Language change is generally about different aspects of linguistic systems. For the purposes of language **transmission** from one group of speakers to another,[1] any of these units and principles may be identified as a linguistic feature, roughly on the model of *gene* in biology. Let us bear in mind that the notion of linguistic species proposed below need not be analogous to that of biological species in all respects, not any more than there is an empirically validated unified notion of biological species in the first place.

Quite germane to some of my arguments about language evolution is Chomsky's (1986:19–24) distinction between internalized language (**I-language**) and externalized language (**E-language**). An I-language is basically an **idiolect**, an individual speaker's system of a language. It is to a language what an individual is to a species in population genetics. Among the questions I address are the following: How and when can features of individual idiolects be extrapolated as characteristic of a language as a **communal system**? Is knowledge of a language as a property of an individual speaker coextensive with knowledge of a language as a property of a population? What is the status of variation in the two cases and how does it bear on language evolution?

Chomsky defines an "E-language" as the set of sentences produced by a population speaking a particular language. This conception of a language is inadequate (McCawley 1976). Chomsky is correct in rejecting it as leading the linguist nowhere toward understanding how language works in the mind. It just provides data for analysis. Fortunately, few linguists have subscribed to this notion of a language. Most linguists have been Saussurean, both in treating languages as mental systems and in assuming them to be social institutions to which speakers are enculturated. Meanwhile they have failed to address the following question: What role do individual speakers play in language change? This question is central to language evolution and I return to it below.[2]

Idiolects and communal languages represent different levels of abstraction. The former are first-level abstractions from speech, the latter are extrapolations that can be characterized as ensembles of I-languages. Neil Smith (1999:138) denies the validity of "collective language." However, we cannot speak of language change or evolution, which is identified at the population level, without accepting the existence of a communal language.

To be sure, a communal language is an abstraction inferred by the observer. It is an extrapolation from I-languages whose speakers communicate successfully with each other most of the time. It is internalized to the extent that we can also project a collective mind that is an ensemble of individual minds in a population. Since this higher-level abstraction is what

discussions of language change are based on, I capitalize on interidiolectal variation, among other properties of communal languages, and argue in chapter 6 that a language is a species. I will then use the competition-and-selection dynamics of the coexistence of I-languages to explain how a language evolves over time.

Two questions arise from this position:

(i) Is every feature that is true of a communal language qua species also necessarily true of I-languages? For instance, does the fact that the following sentences are acceptable in some nonstandard English dialects necessarily make them well formed in all English idiolects or even dialects?

(1) *I ain't told you no such thing*.
"I haven't told you such a thing" or "I didn't tell you such a thing."

(2) *Let me tell you everything what Allison said at the party*.
"Let me tell you everything that Allison said at the party."

(ii) When do changes that affect individual members amount to communal changes?

As noted above, the latter level of change is among the phenomena I identify as **language evolution**. This can also involve nonstructural changes, for instance, the acceptability of peculiarities of the sentences in (1–2) for a larger or smaller proportion of speakers in a community. This book says almost nothing about such nonstructural changes. However, much attention is devoted to **speciation**, when, for structural or ideological reasons, it is found more appropriate to no longer group together I-languages that used to form one communal language. Rather, they are classed into subgroups identified as separate languages or as dialects of the same language. This is precisely where the identification of creoles as separate languages fits, in contrast with the equally novel and contact-based varieties of European languages spoken by descendants of Europeans (e.g., American English and Québécois French) which have been identified as dialects of their lexifiers (chapters 4–5). I return to these questions in sections 1.3 and 1.4.

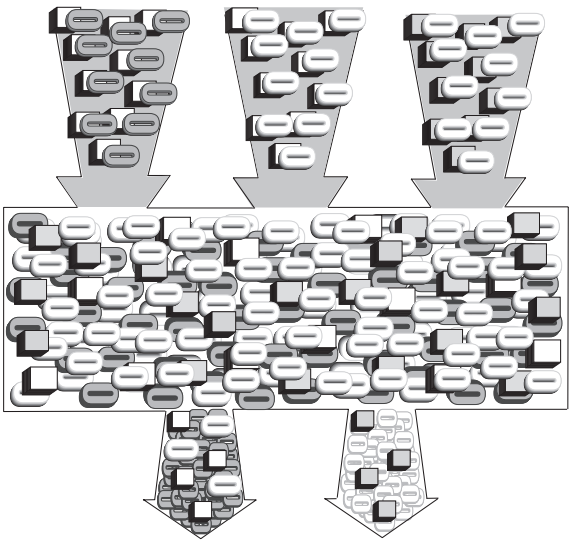
1.2 Pidgins, creoles, and koinés

Pidgins and koinés play a very negligible part in the next chapters. However, it is difficult to define creoles without mentioning them and it is almost impossible to make sense of some of the issues I raise in this book without also clarifying the conceptual distinction between creoles and koinés. There is a genetic relationship between these two, because the **lexifiers** of creoles, those varieties from which they have inherited most of their vocabularies, have often been correctly identified as colonial **koinés**. These are compromise varieties from among diverse dialects of the same language. Instead of selecting one single dialect as their lingua franca, speakers of the European

lexifiers wound up developing a new colonial dialect which included their common features but only some of those that distinguished them from one another. Such selections did not necessarily originate from the same dialect, nor were they the same from one colony to another – a fact that accounts in part for regional variation. Why those particular selections were made and not others is a question that deserves as much attention as the selections that produced different creoles from the same lexifier (chapters 2 and 3). The inset text sheds some light on this question.

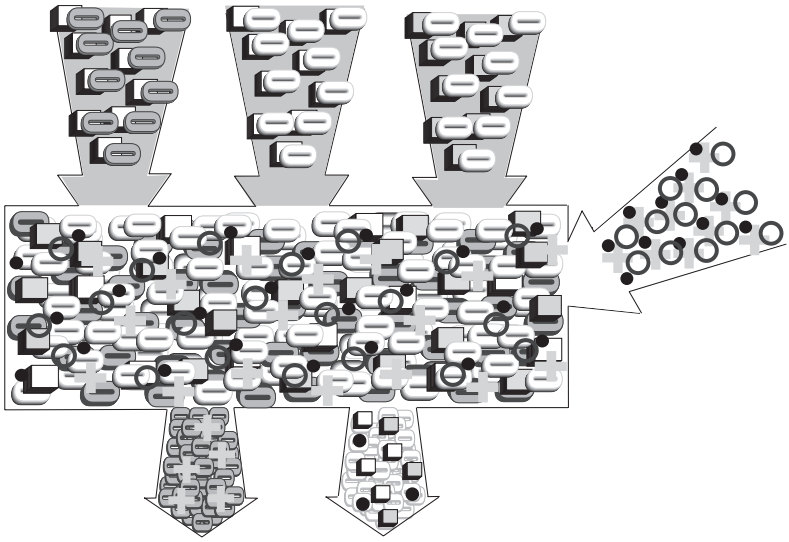
Restructuring into koinés, creoles and other varieties

These three diagrams illustrate dialect and language contact where creoles developed. They suggest that basically the same mechanisms were involved in the restructuring processes which produced creoles as in those which generated koinés. They show that the contact of the different metropolitan varieties brought over by the European colonists (represented in the upper tiers) produced the "feature pool" shown by the box in the middle tiers. The outputs (represented in the bottom tiers) are the local, colonial varieties as they developed in forms that differed from the metropolitan varieties. There is no particular input-to-output ratio of number of varieties. There may be fewer outputs than input varieties and vice versa, just as the number may be equal. What matters is that the structures of the output and input varieties are not identical.



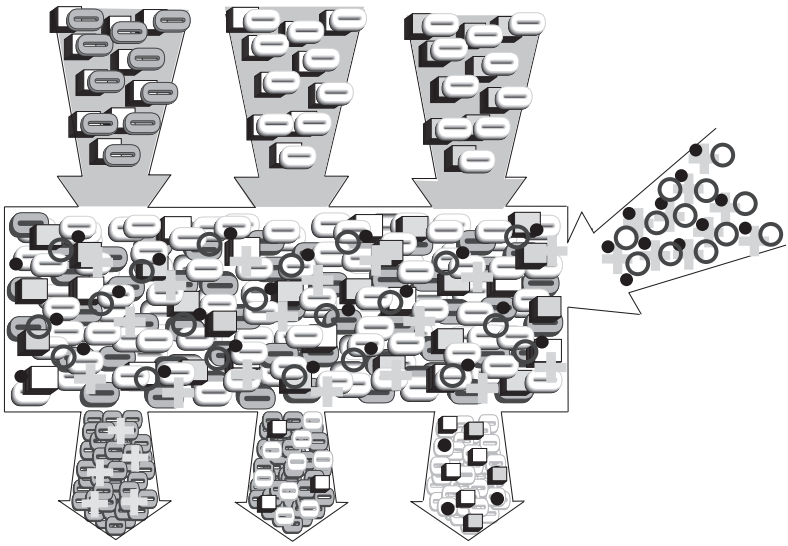
The middle tiers represents the "arena" where features associated with the same or similar grammatical functions came to compete with each other. It is also the locus of "blending inheritance," in that features which are similar but

not necessarily identical came to reinforce each other, regardless of their sources, and produced modified variants of the originals in the emergent varieties. The outputs represent variation in the ways particular (combinations of) features were selected into the emergent varieties, according to principles that still must be articulated more explicitly as we get to understand language evolution more adequately. Markedness has been proposed to be among those principles, but the subject matter can also be approached with alternative constraint models, as long as they account for the specific choices made by speakers of particular varieties. The diagrams also suggest that there is little in the structures of the new vernaculars that has not been "recycled" from the lexifier and/or the other languages it came in contact with. What makes the new varieties restructured is not only the particular combinations of features selected, often from different sources, into the new language varieties but also the way in which the features themselves have been modified, "exapted," to fit into the new systems.



The first diagram represents what has been identified as *koinéization*. It diverges from the established position that koinés develop by leveling out differences among dialects of the same language or among genetically and typologically related languages, and by reducing the varieties in contact to their common denominator. This is not what has been observed in places where, for instance, English dialects in England have been in contact with each other. The outcomes show apparent replacive adoptions by some dialects of elements from other dialects, more like the results of competition and selection than any kind of common denominators of the dialects in contact. Simplification of morphosyntax in the development of the original *koiné* in the Hellenic world did not amount to a common denominator of

Greek dialects. After all cross-dialectal variation had been eliminated, it would have consisted of a skeletal basic system that probably would not have been helpful to the Greeks themselves, barring any concurrent drastic changes in their world view. The name left alone, *koinéization* is but the restructuring of a language into a new dialect out of the contact of its pre-existing dialects or, by extension, the development of a new language variety out of the contact of genetically and typologically related languages.



The other two diagrams illustrate what happened when those metropolitan dialects of a prevailing European language came in contact with other languages. Since linguistic features are abstractions that are in a way different from the forms that carry them, those other languages too made their contribution to the feature pool, increasing the complexity of the condition of competition. Thus they bore on the structures of the outcome varieties, making allowance for selection of features from outside the range provided by the metropolitan dialects of the lexifier. For instance, languages that allow copula-less adjectival predicates would make this syntactic option an alternative for the colonial varieties of the lexifier. In some cases they simply favored an option that was already available in some of the metropolitan varieties but was statistically too insignificant to produce the same output under different ecological conditions. The colonial varieties of European languages reflect this more complex level of feature competition. Thus aside from the social bias in the naming practice, the diachronic difference between koinés, creoles, and other new varieties lies not in the restructuring process but in the numbers and kinds of languages that came in contact, and sadly also in the ethnic identities of their typical speakers.

What I present below about pidgins and creoles is only a brief summary of what is discussed in substantial detail in Mühlhäusler (1986), Chaudenson (1992), and Mufwene (1997a). Pidgins have traditionally been characterized as reduced linguistic systems which are used for specific communicative functions, typically in trade between speakers of different, mutually unintelligible languages. They are second-language varieties that developed in settings where the speakers of the lexifier had only sporadic contacts with the populations they traded with. The adoption of the lexifier as a lingua franca by multilingual populations who had little exposure to fluent models accounts in part for its reduced and, to some linguists such as Bickerton (1981, 1984, 1999) and Holm (1988), seemingly chaotic structure.

Although part of colonial history has tied the development of pidgins with slavery, the connection is accidental. In trades between the Europeans and Native Americans, fur was the chief indigenous commodity. On the West coast of Africa, not only slaves but also food supplies (especially along the "Grain Coast"), ivory, and gold were traded. The common denominator is the *sporadic* pattern of the trade contacts and this is equally true of those varieties identified pejoratively by the French colonists or travelers as *baragouin*s "gibberish, broken language" and more commonly by others as *jargon*, with almost the same meaning.

In many parts of the world, as in Nigeria, Cameroon, and Papua New Guinea, pidgins have increased their communicative functions and are also spoken both as mother tongues for large proportions of their populations and as major lingua francas. They are called **expanded pidgins**. The stabilization and complexification of their systems have to do less with nativization than with more regular usage and increased communicative functions.

Creoles have been defined as nativized pidgins. Aside from the arguments presented below against this position, it is useful to consider the following. If creoles had really been developed by children, they would be languages in arrested development stage (Mufwene 1999a). The alternative is that they would have acquired adult structures when the children became adults, which raises the question of why their parents would have been incapable of developing such structures during the pidgin stage. Would slavery have affected their language faculties so adversely?

The irony of deriving creoles from pidgins lies partly in the fact that the term *pidgin* (from the English word *business*, in the phrase *business English*) emerged only in 1807 (Baker and Mühlhäusler 1990), over one century since the term *creole* had been used in Romance languages for a vernacular. The date of 1825 reported by the *OED* for *creole* applies to English only. In the colonies where new vernaculars which developed from European languages were identified by laymen as *creoles* or *patois* the term *pidgin* is nowhere attested in reference to earlier stages of their developments. Besides, the first variety to have been identified as *pidgin English*

(< *business English*) developed in Canton in the late eighteenth century, long after most creoles had developed. Moreover, no creole has been identified in that part of the world.

These arguments are not intended to deny the plausible hypothesis that those who contributed the most to the restructuring of the European languages into the classic creoles (e.g., Jamaican, Guyanese, Gullah, Mauritian, Seychellois, and Papiamentu) must have gone through interlanguage stages. However, **interlanguages** are individual phenomena, restricted to the development of I-languages. They are based on no communal norm, especially in the settings where the creoles developed (chapter 2). In this respect, they are very much unlike the pidgins as communal systems.

The socioeconomic history of European colonization suggests a territorial division of labor between the places where creoles developed and those where pidgin and indigenized varieties of European languages did. The best known pidgins developed in European **trade colonies** of Africa and the Pacific (around trade forts and on trade routes), before they were appropriated politically and expanded into **exploitation colonies** in the second half of the nineteenth century.[3] They were based on the nonstandard vernaculars spoken by the European traders, to which their non-European counterparts were exposed during their occasional mercantile encounters. Although they have often evolved structurally and ethnographically to serve diverse and more complex communicative functions, originally they were indeed structurally reduced and served very basic and limited communicative functions. Note that in trade transactions nonverbal communication often compensates for shortcomings in the verbal mode (Calvet 1999).

During the exploitation colony period, when territories larger than the original trade colonies were under the administrative control of European nations, scholastic varieties of their languages were introduced through the scholastic medium, so that they could serve as lingua francas between the indigenous colonial auxiliaries and the colonizers. Owing to regional multilingualism, the colonial rankings of languages led the emerging local elite to appropriate these scholastic varieties as lingua francas for communication among themselves too. This process nurtured their **indigenization** into what is now identified with geographical names such as Nigerian, Indian, and East African Englishes.

In places like Nigeria and Cameroon, Pidgin English and the local indigenized English varieties have coexisted happily, with the pidgin almost identified as an indigenous language (vernacular for some but lingua franca for others) while the indigenized variety is associated with the intellectual elite. An important difference remains between, on the one hand, pidgins (including also West African "français tirailleur" and "le français populaire d'Abidjan") and, on the other, indigenized varieties of European languages

(e.g., Indian English and African French), lying in the following fact: the former's lexifiers are nonstandard varieties, whereas the latter have developed from the scholastic English or French introduced through the school system, usually through teachers who were not native speakers. See, e.g., Kachru (1983), Gupta (1991), and Bamgbose et al. (1995) on the latter varieties.

Pidgins in the Americas developed out of similar trade contacts between Europeans and Native Americans, before the latter were absorbed by the expanding European settlements. However, creoles developed in **settlement colonies**, marked by contacts that were initially regular and intimate between the slaves and the European colonists. Most of these were indentured servants and a large proportion of them did not speak the European lexifier natively (chapter 2). Like pidgins, creoles too had nonstandard lexifiers.

The socioeconomic histories of the New World and Indian Ocean, on which our **heuristic prototypes** of creoles are based,[4] do not suggest that these vernaculars have any structural features which are not attested in pidgins (Mufwene 1991a; Baker 1995a), nor that creoles developed (necessarily) from pidgins (Alleyne 1971, 1980; Chaudenson 1979, 1992), nor that creoles developed by **nativization**, as acquisition of a community of native speakers, from any erstwhile pidgins (Mufwene 1999a, contra Bickerton 1999). In the New World, it is not obvious that European-lexifier jargons or pidgins spoken by Native Americans contributed more than some lexical entries to the creoles developed by the African slaves. From the founding stages of the colonies until the times when these new vernaculars developed, the Africans interacted regularly with speakers of the lexifiers, although these were not always native or fluent speakers (chapter 2).

Creole vernaculars, originally confined to plantations of the Atlantic and Indian Ocean island and coastal colonies, emerged in contact settings where the development of pidgins would be inconsistent with the received doctrine that they are reduced systems for limited and specialized communicative functions. Creole populations, those born in the settlement colonies from at least one nonindigenous parent,[5] preceded the emergence of creole vernaculars, in the homestead conditions in which non-Europeans were minorities and well integrated, though socially discriminated against. They had full access to European languages, albeit their colonial, koiné varieties, which they acquired through regular interactions with their native or fluent speakers, just like European indentured servants did (Tate 1965; Chaudenson 1979, 1989, 1992; Berlin 1998; Corne 1999). They did not speak the varieties identified later on as creoles.

It was indeed later approximations of their colonial vernaculars by slaves of the plantation period which produced creole vernaculars, through what Lass (1997:112) characterizes as "imperfect replication" and Deacon (1997:114) as "transmission error." This process was intensified this time by

the decreasing disproportion of native and fluent speakers (creole and seasoned slaves) relative to nonproficient speakers (the bozal slaves). As discussed in chapter 2, the **basilectalization** process that produced creoles was gradual.[6] However, avoiding treating it as a regular case of language evolution, some creolists (e.g., Bickerton 1984; Thomason and Kaufman 1988) have characterized the process as abrupt. Ironically, there is no evidence that, for example, Gullah – the creole of coastal South Carolina and Georgia in the USA – developed more rapidly than any other North American English variety. Nor has it been proved that the evolution that produced it was not as gradual as those that yielded other contemporary English varieties, which developed between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries.[7]

The development of creoles has also been associated with a break in the transmission of the lexifier (e.g., Polomé 1983). There is, however, hardly any evidence of this, even in polities such as Suriname, where native and large proportions of speakers of the lexifier left roughly fifteen years after the colony was founded in the mid-seventeenth century. A break in the transmission of the lexifier would have entailed no exposure to any form of the language and therefore nothing to restructure. This is quite different from the historical reality that the slaves who arrived during the plantation period were exposed to varieties more and more different from the languages brought from Europe or spoken in earlier colonial periods.

As noted above, the earliest documentation of the term *pidgin* is reported to be 1907 (Baker and Mühlhäusler 1990). This was over two hundred years after the term *creole* had been in usage in reference to colonial language varieties, in contradistinction from the metropolitan ways. Linguists have posited in anachronistic order the dubious developmental link between pidgins and creoles. No evidence other than that pidgins have more reduced systems than creoles has been adduced.

In the absence of evidence of structural features peculiar to creoles (Mufwene 1986a, 2000a), Chaudenson's (1992) characterization that creoles are specific vernaculars which are defined by the time, place, and conditions of their development seems correct. They emerged during the European colonization of the rest of the world starting in the seventeenth century, typically on island or coastal colonies between the tropics, in the contact settings of plantations. In these places, the non-European labor outnumbered even the European indentured servants, not only the native speakers of the lexifier. The creoles developed during a period when the populations were also racially segregated and grew more by importations of new labor than by birth.

Consequently, I use the term *creole* in its sociohistorical sense to identify primarily those varieties that have been identified as "creole" or "patois" by nonlinguists. I use it also loosely for varieties such as Gullah, which linguists