



The Creole Debate

Creoles have long been the subject of debate in linguistics, with many conflicting views, both on how they are formed, and on what their political and linguistic status should be. Indeed, over the past twenty years, some creole specialists have argued that it has been wrong to think of creoles as anything but language blends in the same way that Yiddish is a blend of German and Hebrew and Slavic. Here, John H. McWhorter debunks the idea that creoles are created in the same way as “children,” taking characteristics from both “parent” languages, and its underlying assumption that all historical and biological processes are the same. Instead, the facts support the original, and more interesting, argument that creoles are their own unique entity and are among the world’s only genuinely new languages.

JOHN H. MCWHORTER is Associate Professor of English and Comparative Literature at Columbia University. Having written nineteen books on both language and race issues, he is also a prolific voice on a number of political and social issues, and has been published in the *New York Times*, the *Atlantic* and the *Wall Street Journal*.

Cambridge University Press
978-1-108-42864-4 — The Creole Debate
John H. McWhorter
Frontmatter
[More Information](#)

The Creole Debate

JOHN H. MCWHORTER
Columbia University, New York



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press
978-1-108-42864-4 — The Creole Debate
John H. McWhorter
Frontmatter
[More Information](#)

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom
One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia
314–321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre,
New Delhi – 110025, India
79 Anson Road, #06–04/06, Singapore 079906

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781108428644

DOI: 10.1017/9781108553308

© John H. McWhorter 2018

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2018

Printed in the United Kingdom by Clays, St Ives plc

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library.

ISBN 978-1-108-42864-4 Hardback

ISBN 978-1-108-45083-6 Paperback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this publication and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

Contents

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	<i>page</i> vi
Introduction	1
1 The Creole Exceptionalism Hypothesis	9
2 Is Creolization Just Language Mixture?	33
3 Is Creolization Just Second-Language Acquisition?	63
4 What About Complexity?	90
5 Newer Challenges	110
6 Envoi	129
<i>References</i>	150
<i>Index</i>	165

Acknowledgments

This book is, to a considerable extent, a product of over twenty years of exchanges about the nature and genesis of creole languages with Mikael Parkvall. Peter Bakker has enlightened me with many years of similar exchanges, and has also been of endless bibliographical help to me in preparing this book. I have also learned a great deal about language change and contact from Stephane Goyette. Each of these three scholars differ from me on assorted points in this book, and any errors in it are my responsibility. However, I wrote the book with a sense of all three watching over my shoulder.

I learned a great deal about what languages are like worldwide when I taught at the University of California at Berkeley. My ideas about language change and contact were inestimably enriched there by conversations with, especially, Larry Hyman on Niger-Congo, Jim Matisoff on Southeast Asia, and Richard Rhodes on Algonquian. My thoughts on contact and complexity have also been shaped by what I have learned about Austronesian and “Papuan” languages from David Gil.

I am also eternally grateful to Helen Barton at Cambridge for giving this rather odd monograph a chance.