IDENTIFYING THE CREOLE PROTOTYPE: VINDICATING A TYPOLOGICAL CLASS

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An increasingly influential current in creole studies considers there to have been no appreciable break in transmission or simplification in the birth of creole languages, instead treating creoles as gradual, relatively nondisruptive developments of their lexifiers amidst conditions of heavy language contact. Central to this superstratist view is the claim that creole is a sociohistorical, but not synchronic, term. This article outlines three features which in fact render creoles synchronically distinguishable from other languages, all three of them clear results of a break in transmission followed by a development period too brief for the traits to be undone as they have been in older languages. It is also shown that an expanded data set reveals flaws in the sociohistorical argumentation behind the superstratist framework.*

Before the official establishment of creole studies, some prominent thinkers treated creole languages as genetic offshoots of their lexifiers; e.g. Haitian Creole as a kind of French rather than as a separate language (Hjelmslev 1938, Hall 1958). Concentrated research starting in the late 1960s however, suggested otherwise. Bickerton (1981, 1984) identified creoles as the product of catastrophic breakdowns of lexifier grammar. Meanwhile, Alleyne (1980a), Boretzky (1983), Holm (1988) and others called attention to the extensive role that substrate languages played in the development of these creoles after the breakdown Bickerton referred to. By the 1980s, a consensus had emerged that creoles were challenges to the STAMMBAUM model of language change, being genetic descendents neither of their lexifiers nor of the languages spoken natively by their originators. This perspective finds its hallmark exposition in Thomason & Kaufman 1988.

Various Francophone creolists, however, led by Chaudenson (1979, 1992), have long maintained a SUPERSTRATIST perspective, analyzing plantation creoles as varieties of their lexifiers, in whose history pidginization and substrate transfer have played minimal roles (cf. also Fournier 1987, Hazaël-Massieux 1993, Fattier 1995). Working in relative isolation from other creolists, this school has had little influence on general creolist thought until recently, but over the past decade Mufwene (1986a, 1991, 1992, 1994a,b, 1997a) has adapted the Francophone superstratist framework and brought it to the general attention of the linguistic community. In each of a series of articles, he has treated a given topic as a springboard for the gradual development of a model called THE FOUNDER PRINCIPLE, summarily outlined in Mufwene 1996a.

The superstratist framework proceeds upon a series of three novel interpretations of creoles and their history. The first is Chaudenson’s observation that for their first several decades, plantation colonies were generally dominated not by large plantations but small farms, where African slaves were often outnumbered by indentured whites. Chaudenson proposes that because they had free access to the colonizers’ language, early plantation

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slaves spoke not creoles, but close approximations of the lexifier, non-native competence leading to only relatively slight reduction.\(^1\)

As small farms were converted to large plantations, African slave gangs were gradually expanded. Chaudenson supposes that as this influx mounted, new slaves gradually came to be exposed less to whites' native variety of the lexifier than to slaves' approximations thereof, this becoming their primary model. Developing an approximation of this approximation, these new slaves in turn served as a model for subsequently imported slaves. Under this scenario, plantation creoles were the end result of a series of such 'approximations of approximations'.

Crucially, Chaudenson does not consider this series of approximations to have resulted in a variety appreciably removed, in any taxonomic sense, from the lexifier. In particular, he claims that there was no break in transmission of the lexifier, merely a gradual 'transformation' thereof. This eliminates any pidgin stage, which in most models constitutes a critical genetic discontinuation between lexifier and creole. This motivates the second keystone of the superstratist model, that not only did early slaves speak relatively close approximations of the lexifier, but even creoles are simply varieties of their lexifiers (Chaudenson 1979, 1992, Mufwene 1996a:124).

To support this claim, superstratists have rightly criticized the tendency to compare creoles with standard varieties of their lexifiers, calling attention to the models for creole constructions in now-obscure regional dialects spoken by the white colonists. Scholars in this vein are highly chary of appeals to substrate influence. Mufwene is slightly less absolute than Chaudenson, but has been consistently skeptical of most substratist arguments (1990, 1994d). Indeed, the 'founders' referred to by the founder principle are in essence the whites, with substratal influence largely restricted to cases of convergence with the lexifier (1996a:114–22).\(^2\)

Taken alone, the above two positions would merely indicate a healthy difference in perspective among creolists. The model is doubtless a useful check on the excesses of various schools of creolist thought. For instance, the Haitian Creole future construction *m pu ale* 'I will go' appears less radical a departure from French when we recall that regional Frenches include the construction *je suis pour aller*. Similarly, overt habitual marking in Gullah English Creole (*ee blant si i brera* 'she sees her brother' [Hancock 1987:288]) is less plausibly treated as a calque on West African habitual markers when we note sentences like *'e do b'long smawken' cigars* in the English of Cornwall (Hancock 1994:104).

\(^1\) It is clear from his general discussions that Chaudenson refers to relatively full acquisition, moderated only slightly by paradigmatic reductions, overgeneralization, and preference for analytic over synthetic constructions. He usually brings nonstandard regional dialects to bear for comparison, arguing that the only thing distinguishing creoles from these is a minor disruption in transmission via non-native approximation. However, a major weakness in his argument is that where the reduction or reinterpretation in a creole exceeds the boundaries of such relatively intact transmission, he refers instead to foreigner talk varieties for comparison (e.g. Chaudenson 1992:161). The problem here is that these, unlike regional dialects, are clearly cases of severely incomplete acquisition, leading to the question of what distinguished the slaves' *français approximatif* from pidgin or creole French. (Cf. Baker 1996, McWhorter & Parkvall 1998.)

\(^2\) Chaudenson allows the term creole somewhat more validity than Mufwene does, but concurs with Mufwene in considering creoles to differ only slightly from regional dialects and ordinary contact varieties (1992:136).

This is why we can consider that the compositional and fundamental features of creolization are less linguistic structures themselves (which are found, for the most part [emphasis mine], often in basic outline and sometimes even in identical form, in marginal or approximative French varieties in America or Africa) than in the autonmization of these usages in new systems. [translation mine]
However, the superstratist model in fact proposes a radical reconception of the frame of reference within which creole studies have been conducted over the past forty years. In a third key assertion, Mufwene claims that nothing distinguishes creoles from other varieties that have undergone extensive language contact, such as Romanian, Yiddish, or Farsi.

The histories of the colonies in which creoles developed suggest that no language-development processes were involved that were unique to these new vernaculars, just the same ones assumed in historical linguistics, except for the emphasis on language contact. (Mufwene 1996a:107)

There is really no particular reason why the developments of creoles should not be treated as consequences of normal linguistic interactions in specific ecological conditions of linguistic contacts. (1996a:121)

Most striking, however, is the natural conclusion to which Chaudenson (1992:135) and, most explicitly, Mufwene, take the previous three interpretations. The fourth keystone of the superstratist model is the assertion that creole is not an empirically valid classification term, since nothing distinguishes the creole from other languages.

Creoles do not form a valid structural language type. (Mufwene 1994b:71)

The current inadequate usage of the terms 'pidgin' and 'creole' as type names should apparently be discontinued. (Mufwene 1997a:57)

Il n’y a pas de critère formel qui définit les créoles à part des langues non-creoles. (Mufwene 1986a:143)

Thus in treating creoles as varieties of their lexifiers, modern superstratists, unlike Hjelmslev and Hall, do not intend a broadening of our conception of the lexifiers in order to incorporate creoles. On the contrary, under their conception, our conception of the lexifiers remains constant, because creoles are considered simply contact-heavy vernaculars, not an empirically valid class.3

Mufwene finally takes the superstratist framework to a further conclusion, that since creole is presumably a vacuous term, one language cannot be more or less ‘creole’ than another (1994b:71, 1997a:59–60).

Few creolists have adopted the superstratist framework as wholeheartedly as Chaudenson, his French followers, and Mufwene. However, the idea that creole is not a valid synchronic term is encountered with increasing frequency (Kihm 1980:212, Chaudenson 1992:135, Corne 1995:121, Jennings 1995:63, Huber 1995:219). In addition, the idea that creoles did not arise from pidgins, and the resultant treatment of pidgins as a separate concern from creoles, is increasingly influential (Alleyne 1980b:126, Lefebvre 1993:256).

In this article, I will demonstrate that while the superstratist model of creole genesis has clear intuitive appeal, the data themselves do not bear it out. I will argue that creole is a synchronically definable typological class; that this class is demonstrably the result of the pidginization of lexifier sources; and that linguistic plausibility and historical documentation speak against the foundations of the superstratist model.

1. Data sample. Those claiming that creole is not a valid typological class suppose that the term is strictly a sociohistorical one.

The term is fundamentally a useless one, although it is so firmly anchored in the usage (and, no doubt, the careers) of creolists that it will probably bedevil the study of the languages so designated for many years to come. There are no ‘Creole languages’ in a linguistic and typological sense (cf. Romance languages, Austronesian languages, etc.). The term refers to a subset of those languages, all with a

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3 For example, regarding serial verbs, for which the substratist case is strong (Boretzky 1983, McWhorter 1992a,b, Post 1992), Mufwene prefers to treat the substrate as having acted solely in conjunction with European constructions like go get (Mufwene 1996a:115–17).
relatively short history, which have emerged from various situations of language contact (usually, more than two languages), and which are native languages of a given community. (Corne 1995:121)

In fact, however, the languages traditionally identified as creoles are indeed definable linguistically as well as sociohistorically. I will demonstrate this with reference to a sample of eight languages with what I call the CREOLE SOCIOHISTORICAL PROFILE: natively spoken languages that were created via rapid adoption as a lingua franca by slave populations five hundred years ago or less. Note that the definition makes no reference to linguistic structure at this point, to avoid circularity. The languages:

1. **Ndjuka English Creole** is spoken in the interior of Suriname by descendants of African slaves who escaped from coastal plantations in the 1700s. It is an offshoot of the more famous Sranan English Creole, which formed in the mid-to-late 1600s. Ndjuka will serve our purposes better since it is less profoundly impacted than Sranan by three centuries of contact with Dutch, the official language of Suriname. Data source: Huttar & Huttar 1994.

2. **Tok Pisin English Creole** of Papua New Guinea is often called a ‘pidgin’, but is now widely spoken natively, and even adults had long structurally elaborated it to a degree rendering its inclusion in the pidgin category rather vacuous. It traces ultimately to a pidgin spoken by Australian aborigines (Baker 1993), which was later expanded by Melanesians working under the English in various commercial activities in, among many other locations, New Guinea (Keesing 1988). Tok Pisin in one of a group of closely related dialects which Goulden (1990) suggests be called Bislamic Creole (others being Bislama, Solomon Islands Pijin, and Torres Strait Broken). Data source: Wurm & Mühlhäusler 1985.

3. **Saramaccan English Creole** is spoken in the interior of Suriname by descendants of African slaves who escaped from coastal plantations in the late 1600s. It is the product of the partial relexification of early Sranan English Creole by Portuguese, when Portuguese Jewish immigrants bought Sranan-speaking slaves from the resident English (Goodman 1987:375–82, McWhorter 1996a:462–70). Data source: study by the author.

4. **Haitian French Creole** is the Caribbean French Creole least affected by French, with 90 percent of Haiti monolingual in it. It was developed by African slaves in the late 1600s. Data source: Michel DeGraff, p.c.

5. **St. Lucian French Creole** is one dialect of the Antillean French Creole spoken on various Caribbean islands including Martinique and Guadeloupe. Antillean emerged on the latter two islands in the late 1600s among African plantation slaves, and was disseminated to the others via intercolonial population movements. Data source: Car- rington 1984.

6. **Mauritian French Creole** is the vernacular lingua franca in Mauritius, developed by West African, Bantu, and Malagasy plantation slaves starting in the early 1700s (Baker & Corne 1982). Data source: Philip Baker, p.c.

7. **Fa D’Ambu** (or Annobonese) Portuguese Creole is a dialect of Gulf of Guinea Portuguese Creole, spoken on the island of Annobón off of the west coast of Africa (the other dialects are Sáo Tomense, Principense, and Angolar). Its progenitor, Sáo Tomense Portuguese Creole, emerged on Sáo Tomé amidst Portuguese-African marriages, and was adapted as a plantation lingua franca by African slaves (Ferraz 1979). Data source: Post 1992, 1995.

8. **Negerhollands Dutch Creole**, recently extinct but well documented, was spoken in the Virgin Islands, having developed among African plantation slaves in the late 1600s. Data source: Stolz 1986.
If it were true that creoles are not a synchronically characterizable class, we would predict that there would be nothing to distinguish the above eight languages from Russian, Tagalog, and Hindi other than their sociohistorical roots in the colonial crucible (and, of course, their lexicons). This is not the case however.

To be sure, we must not be misled into attempting to define creole languages on the basis of particular constructions, such as serial verbs, preverbal markers of tense, mood, and aspect, or multipartite copulas. As has been often noted (e.g. Mufwene 1986a), such constructions can be found in ‘regular’ languages, often even clustering in them, such as in the Chinese languages, just as they do in creoles. However, the conclusion many have drawn from this, that creoles therefore cannot be synchronically defined, is mistaken.

2. THREE CREOLE TRAITS. There are three structural traits which, WHEN THEY CLUSTER, distinguish the creole language. These traits cluster in creole languages because all of them involve features which BOTH

(a) combine low perceptual saliency with low import to basic communication, encouraging learners acquiring the language rapidly and informally to bypass acquiring them,

AND

(b) only develop internally as the result of gradual development over long periods of time.

2.1. INFLECTIONAL AFFIXATION. Perhaps the most salient feature of the eight languages above, and others known as creoles, is their minimal usage of inflectional affixes. Five of our eight sample creoles (Ndjuka, Saramaccan, Haitian, St. Lucian, Mauritian) have no inflectional affixes. To be sure, languages with the creole sociohistorical profile are not always completely devoid of inflectional affixes, but they rarely have more than one or two. Fa D’Ambu, for example, has a mere one, which is only marginally productive (Post 1995:195–96). Tok Pisin has the transitive marker -im and the marker -pela which indicates adjectivehood (but does not transform constituents into adjectives) but only these (Mühlhäusler 1985a).

(1) Tok Pisin

Em i kam pain-im Jisas. Dis-pela man i save slip long ples matmat. he PM come find-TR Jesus this-ADJ man PM HAB sleep in cemetery

‘He came to find Jesus. This man slept in the cemetery.’

(Mühlhäusler 1982:462)

Inflectional affixes have been analyzed as one end of a cline of increasing grammaticalization. The pathway from lexical item to inflectional affix entails, in part, an increasing degree of categoricity of expression, of OBLIGATORINESS (Lehmann 1985:307–9). In this light, it is significant that when languages called creole have inflectional affixes, these tend to be only weakly obligatory—affixation is in general a marginal aspect of the grammar. For example, Negerhollands had one inflection, the plural marker sini (< sende ‘they’), whose expression was largely optional.5 There were conditions upon

4 The predicate marker i (as well as the famous irrealis marker bai) are not analyzable as inflectional, given that other items may intervene between them and a following constituent (i.e. man i bin kam ‘the man came’).

5 In its Hoogkreols variety, spoken with and by Europeans and leaning more towards Dutch, Negerhollands acquired some additional inflections such as the Dutch -en/-s plural, etc. I refer strictly to the basilectal variety.
its expression, but their looseness is demonstrated in 2, where syntactic and semantic context is held constant between two sentences.

(2) Negerhollands Dutch Creole
   a. Ham a jak ši kabrita sin a sabán.
      he PAST drive his goat PL to savanna
      ‘He drove his goats to the savanna.’
   b. Anaansi a ko, so los alma ši hundu ə abit abini di yard.
      Anaansi PAST come so let all his chicken out in the yard
      ‘Anansi came and let all his chickens out into the yard.’
      (Stolz 1986: 123)\(^6\)

Finally, when languages known as creoles do have inflectional affixes, these are always monomorphemic. Paradigms of allomorphs, so familiar in many regular languages, are alien to languages with the creole sociohistorical profile.

The paucity of inflection in creoles initially results, of course, from the fact that the rapid non-native adoption of a language as a lingua franca entails stripping down a system to its essentials, for optimal learnability and processibility. The natural result is the virtual or complete elimination of affixes, sometimes replaced by more immediately transparent analytic constructions.

Meanwhile, diachronically, inflectional morphology typically results from gradual processes of reanalysis such as the grammaticalization of erstwhile lexical items, as in the classic example of the development of future tense inflections in Romance from a periphrastic construction in Vulgar Latin: cantare habemus ‘we have to sing’ developed into the Italian cantaremo ‘we will sing’. Creoles simply have not existed for long enough a time for this to have proceeded very far. As we see, some creoles have developed some inflectional affixes. In natively spoken Tok Pisin, new ones are apparently on the way to emerging: mi save kaikai banana ‘I eat bananas’, with habitual marker save, is pronounced [mi sakaikai banana] in rapid speech (Mühlhäusler 1985a: 338–39). The short lifespan of creoles, however, ensures that few surpass this minimal degree of inflection.

Yet as often noted (e.g. Hymes 1971a:70–71), absence of inflectional affixation is also found in regular languages, the Chinese languages being among myriad examples. Thus this alone fails as a diagnostic of the creole language.

2.2. TONE. Rarely acknowledged, however, by those observing the structural similarities between Chinese and creoles is the crucial fact that Chinese languages, after all, are tonal. In contrast, among languages known as creoles, tone generally carries a relatively low functional load. More specifically, languages known as creoles make very little or no use of tone to (a) lexically contrast phonetically identical monosyllables, as in the Mandarin ma which can mean ‘horse’, ‘mother’, ‘scold’, or ‘hemp’ depending on its tone; or (b) encode syntactic distinctions, as in Bini where past tense is signalled

\(^6\) The facts are similar with the pluralizer ma- in Palenquero Spanish Creole. (Thanks to Armin Schwegler for this recorded data.)

(i) a. to ma kusa lo ke asé-ba ablá
   all PL thing which make-PAST talk
   ‘all the things that we said’
   b. to ma kusa lo ke ma hende asé-ba ablá
   all thing which PL people make-PAST talk
   ‘all the things which people told me’
with a high tone on a verb’s final syllable (ima ‘I show’, imá ‘I showed’). This is true of all eight sample languages above.

These two uses of tone are rare in creoles first because both are relatively opaque to non-native learners. Like inflections, they require a subtlety of perception unlikely to develop amidst the rapid, utilitarian acquisition typical of settings which give birth to a contact language. At the same time, both features only emerge independently via gradual evolution.

It must be clear that there are other uses of tone to which one or both of these descriptions does not apply, and which therefore occur quite readily in creoles. For example, where a lexifier uses stress in functions that parallel common uses of tone, tone language speakers have often substituted tone-based patterns for the stress-based ones—a substitution based on an immediate and natural reinterpretation. Papiamentu Spanish Creole, for instance, has tonally distinguished minimal pairs reflecting stress-based contrasts in Spanish, such as papá ‘father’ vs. papa ‘the pope’ (Munteanu 1996: 185). Saramaccan has a handful of tonally distinguished lexical pairs reflecting what were stress differences in English and Portuguese. For example, kái ‘call’ is derived from English call, while kai ‘to fall’ is derived from Portuguese cair; bigí ‘begin’ is derived from begin while bigi is derived from big. Tone language speakers may also apply some uses of tone to a creole independently of stress patterns in the lexifier; for example, in many English-based creoles of the Caribbean and West Africa, tone plays a largely suprasegmental but vital role, most likely a West African influence (Carter 1987).

However, the tonal contrast of monosyllabic lexical items could not be based on a reinterpretation of a stress pattern, because all lexical monosyllables in stress languages carry stress. Moreover, where stress is used syntactically (other than to express contrastive focus), it is in morphosyntactic contrasts such as the Italian parlo ‘I speak’ vs. parlò ‘he spoke’, which would be precluded from reinterpretation as tonal by the abovementioned loss of inflectional affixes in pidginization.7 Thus these two particular uses of tone could only come into a creole from a tonal lexifier, and since, as noted, their relative opacity would impede their survival amidst emergency acquisition, their appearance in creoles is virtually prohibited.

It is well documented, for example, that stress-language speakers tend to eliminate a lexifier’s tone in transforming it into a pidgin or creole. One example is the absence of tone in Fanakalo Zulu Pidgin/Creole, the product of contact between tonal Zulu and stress-based English.

More germane, however, is whether speakers of tonal languages would retain such features, since our claim is that the elimination of such features is prototypical of creole genesis in all contexts. As it happens, in all of the cases known where tone language speakers transformed a tonal lexifier into a creole, the learners’ native languages were closely related to the lexifier. This naturally made even the more idiosyncratic uses of

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7 An exception here is Papiamentu, which has retained the Iberian morphosyntactically indicated infinitive, reinterpretting the Iberian stressed infinitive marker -ar as an -a with high tone, as in tapá ‘to cover’ vs. tápa ‘cover!’ (Munteanu 1996:185). This is one of many examples of usually high Spanish influence in Papiamentu grammar which render it much closer to its lexifier than, for example, Ndjuka is to English, and have led many creolists to classify it as a semi-creole (this term is situated within the central argument of this paper in §3.4). Other examples include its retention of an adjectival past participle, a present participle, and remnants of the Spanish gender system (Römer 1983:90, Munteanu 1996). These features are due to unusually high contact between whites and blacks, as well as heavy Spanish-Papiamentu bilingualism, in colonial Curacao (Holm 1989:314).
tone in the lexifier easier to perceive and retain than they would have been to learners speaking languages more distantly related to the lexifier.

Yet even in these cases, the learners have starkly reduced the lexifier's tonal system. Consider Kituba, a creole variety of the Kimanianga dialect of Kikongo, Kwa, Mande, and West Atlantic language speakers were among its originators in the late 1800s, but speakers of Kikongo dialects also played a prime role, and they have since, along with speakers of other closely related Bantu languages of the region, been its main stabilizers (Samarin 1990). Despite most of Kituba's speakers speaking languages closely related to Kimanianga Kikongo, Mufwene (1997b:176) notes that 'Kituba has a predominantly phonological tone or accent system, instead of the lexical and/or grammatical tone system attested in ethnic Kikongo and in most Bantu languages', and that 'moreover, unlike in ethnic Kikongo, tone alone may not be used for tense/mood/aspect distinctions'. Another example is Sango, based on a reduction of the Ubangian language Ngbandi partly by West Africans and Kituba speakers, but also by speakers of closely related sisters of Ngbandi, which have continued to be spoken alongside it throughout the twentieth century. Lexical tone in Sango is limited to a dozen or so pairs (Helma Pasch, p.c.), and tonal morphosyntactic contrasts are very few (Pasch 1996:223).

If tonal systems are reduced to this extent even by speakers of closely related tone languages, then we can reasonably suppose that such systems would be even further reduced by speakers of more distantly related tone languages. Data on the fate of inflection in contact languages support this indirectly but strongly: even when all of the groups in a contact situation speak highly inflected languages, a pidgin or creole resulting from this contact nevertheless usually has little or no inflection. For example, the Native Americans who most used Chinook Jargon all spoke fearsomely inflected languages, and yet the pidgin was completely analytic, even in creole varieties which developed (Grant 1996); Mobilian Jargon was nearly devoid of inflection despite being developed by speakers of highly inflected Musko-gelan languages (Drechsel 1997).

As to the time required for internal development, the use of tone alone to distinguish identical monosyllabic lexical items generally results from phonetic or morphological erosion (Hombert et al. 1979). In the Tibeto-Burman language Jingpho, for example, in one stage final consonants condition contrasting tonal distinctions on preceding consonants, but erode in a later stage, leaving the tones to carry the contrastive load alone.

(3) Jingpho (Hock 1991:98)

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<tr>
<th>Eastern dialect</th>
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It is therefore predictable that in the rare cases where we encounter such a contrast in the creoles in our sample, the contrast can be shown not to have existed when the language emerged, but to have resulted from subsequent internal developments. In Saramaccan, dá with high tone is 'to give' while da with low tone is 'to be'. However, da 'to be' developed from an original dâti 'that' with high tone, and only lost this high tone as the result of reanalysis as a copular item,
the lowering of tone following the loss of stress typical of items reanalyzed as copular (McWhorter 1997a:93–103).

Similarly, the use of tone to encode syntactic contrasts is also a derived phenomenon, generally resulting from the erosion of affixes and particles. In the Grassfields Bantu language Fe̱tfe̱t?, the possessive marker is simply a high tone which is assigned to the vowel to the left, as in the underlying nse̱'?teeth of', which surfaces as nse̱? This is historically derived from an erstwhile particle which has left behind its high tone, as is visible in its close, more conservative relative Mankon, in which the possessum is followed by a particle with high tone mš (Hyman & Tadadjeu 1976).

Thus it follows that where Saramaccan has a few uses of tone to encode morphosyntactic contrasts, they are relatively recent developments, traceable to diachronic evolution of original constructions in which tone was of no contrastive import. In modern Saramaccan, a is the third person pronoun while á, with high tone, is the predicate negator (Kófì ã wáka 'Kofi does not walk'). However, historical analysis reveals that in the original grammar, the negator was ná; with no high-tone á contrasting with the low-tone pronoun a. The negator á resulted from the fusion of a preceding pronoun a and a following negator ná in topic-comment constructions (McWhorter 1996c).

(4) STAGE 1 STAGE 2 STAGE 3
Kófì, a ná wáka Kófì, â wáka Kófì â wáka.
 'Kofi, he doesn't walk' 'Kofi, he doesn't walk.'
 a wáka 'he walks' a wáka 'he walks' a wáka 'he walks'

Thus the modern tonal contrast between the pronoun a and the negator á is a recent development, in a grammar within which lexically and syntactically contrastive use of tone is distinctly marginal—there are no tonal syntactic contrasts that are not readily analyzable as recent internal developments rather than original endowments.8

We see, then, that the structural likenesses between languages known as creoles and Chinese (or Kwa languages, etc.) do not constitute a case against creole as a valid linguistic class. On the contrary, the comparison of so-called creoles and Chinese poses a question: are there languages other than the ones known as creoles which make little or no use of inflectional affixation and little or no use of tone to contrast monosyllables or encode syntax? This question has not been addressed by any scholar claiming that creole is merely a sociohistorical term.

In fact, languages of this type other than those known as creoles are rare, certain Mon-Khmer and Polynesian languages being among the few exceptions. Even these, however, are readily distinguishable from languages called creoles.

2.3. Derivation. Mon-Khmer languages, for example, display rich paradigms of derivational affixes alien to any language known as a creole, and more importantly,

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8 In Papiamentu, the tone on ta varies with its function: as a present marker it has fixed high tone (Bûnchì tâ kõmê ‘Bunchi is eating’); as a presentative marker in emphatic constructions it has fixed low tone (Ta Bûnchì tâ kõmê ‘It’s Bunchi who is eating’); while as a copula it takes the tone opposite to that of the following syllable (Sidnû tâ kõntûtu ‘Sidney is happy’ but Sidney ta mâdû ‘Sidney is bad’) (Römer 1996: 479–85). All three reflexes are derived from the same etymon, estú, however, and the intimate semantic, syntactic, and diachronic relationship between copulas, present and progressive markers, and presentative morphemes is well documented (e.g. Holm 1980, Luo 1991, McWhorter 1992b). Indeed, Papiamentu is one of many languages, regular and creole, in which one etymon encodes two or all three of these functions. Thus it can be argued that these tonal behaviors serve to distinguish different uses of what is in effect a single item in the grammar. Given that the dissimilation from the following syllable is a general tonal rule in Papiamentu, the fixed tonal reflexes are most likely evolutionary developments along the lines of Saramaccan examples.
Mon-Khmer derivational affixation is highly irregular semantically. Rules for the semantic contribution of these affixes are rules of thumb at best; assuming a single original meaning for such affixes, semantic drift over time has created endless idiosyncratic lexicalizations. Chrau of South Vietnam has a causative prefix ta-. Its meaning is relatively clear when affixed to pu ‘to suck’ to create ta-pu ‘to suckle’, but the meaning has clearly narrowed in cases such as pâng ‘to close’ versus ta-pâng ‘to close unintentionally’ (Thomas 1971:152–53). This, however, is a relatively minor departure from the core meaning compared to, for example, the fate of the Khmer reciprocal prefix pr, used as in pr-cam ‘to wait for one another’, from cam ‘to wait’. As often as not, the reciprocal meaning is all but unrecoverable: kan is ‘to hold’, pr-kan is ‘to discriminate’ (Ehrman 1972:60). Jenner and Pou (1982:x1) declare the original function of the Khmer prefix k- to be beyond grasp: often used to create an animate (/meeŋ/ ‘to be inferior in status’, /k-meŋ/ ‘child’), it is also extended to substances (/thiŋ/ ‘to exude’, /k-thiŋ/ ‘coconut milk’), and even to vessels containing substances (/kiŋ/ ‘pound in a mortar’, /k-diiŋ/ ‘large mortar’) (Jenner & Pou 1982:xxxix–x1). In Palauang of Burma, the causative prefix is pan-, whose contribution is transparent in pan-vah ‘to make larger’ from vah ‘to be extensive’, or pan-.cam ‘to shorten’ from cam ‘to be short’. Much more abstract, however, is the progression from sōk ‘to be untidy’ to pan-s ok ‘to interrupt busy people’ (Milne 1921:73–74).

Inflection is generally marginal in Polynesian languages, and they do not have tone; however, they are quite unlike any creole in their derivation, which is evolved much like that in Mon-Khmer. In one of many examples, in Eastern Fijian, va’a is the causative prefix, as in vuli-ca ‘to learn’ and va’a-vuli-ca ‘to teach’ (Dixon 1988:50). However, it takes a certain metaphorical imagination to process its use as an adverbalizer as in levu ‘big’ vs. va’a-levu ‘greatly’ (109), and the causative semantics are quite lost in its equally frequent usage as general intensifier, as in taro-ga ‘to ask’ vs. va’a-taro-ga ‘to ask many times’ (51). (Many analyses of Polynesian treat derivational morphemes as separate particles; this, as well as analytic derivational processes in many other languages, is of course immaterial to my semantic observations here.)

In contrast, in languages known as creoles, derivation is generally semantically transparent; the evolved idiosyncrasy in languages like Khmer, Palauang, and Fijian is unknown. For example, the semantic contribution of the few derivational affixes in Tok Pisin is quite regular (Mühlhäuser 1985b:599, 609–10, 625–26), as in pasin from ‘fashion’, which renders a constituent abstract.

(5) Tok Pisin -pasin (from Mühlhäuser 1985b:625)

  gut ‘good’  gut-pasin ‘virtue’
  isi ‘slow’  isipasin ‘slowness’
  prout ‘proud’  prout-pasin ‘pride’
  pait ‘fight’  pait-pasin ‘warfare’

Haitian is similar, where the inverse prefix de-, to take one of various examples, with few exceptions transforms a word into its precise opposite.

(6) Haitian French Creole de- (from Brousseau et al. 1989:9)

  pasyäte ‘to be patient’  de-pasyäte ‘to be impatient’
  rcespekt ‘to respect’  de-rcespekt ‘to insult’
  grese ‘to put on weight’  de-grese ‘to lose weight’
  mare ‘to tie’  de-mare ‘to untie’

Indeed, the facts are thus in all of our eight sample languages: the above two, plus Ndjuka (Huttar & Huttar 1994:538–39), Saramaccan, St. Lucian (Carrington 1984:49–50), Mau-
ritian, Fa D’Ambu (Post 1995:195–56), and Negerhollands (in which derivation appears to have been quite marginal [Van Rossem & Van der Voort 1995:xiv–xv]).

Again, the exigencies of rapid acquisition combine with lengthy incubation requirements to ensure this situation in creoles. Derivational apparatus, be this affixes or particles, tends to be semantically irregular and, especially in affix form, less salient than free, stressed items; therefore, it tends to be eschewed by creole creators or incorporated in fossilized form. Meanwhile, the way derivation typically emerges in language is via gradual grammaticalization. For example, derivational affixes often emerge via compounding when one item in a compound gradually grammaticalizes, as in the compounding in English of adjectives like *free* ‘free’ with the erstwhile full noun *dom* ‘state, realm’ as *freo-dom*, with *-dom* eventually evolving into a grammatical affix (Hopper & Traugott 1993:41). The semantic irregularity of derivation arises from the inevitable processes of semantic drift and metaphorical inference, which ensure that over millennia, the original meaning of such an affix will be obscured in many if not all of its uses. For example, *re-* in *referre* in Latin encoded its core meaning of return, creating a word meaning ‘to carry back’. In its modern Romance descendants, the meaning of the prefix is long obscured: a term once describing return to a source has been extended to apply as well to a first appeal to said source, the first appeal generally entailing the same actions and goals as subsequent ones. The same kinds of processes lead to the irregularities described in Mon-Khmer.

To be sure, semantically irregular derivational affixation is not unique to Mon-Khmer; it is found in all regular languages (cf. the verbal prefixes in Russian). My point, however, is that even though these Mon-Khmer languages lack inflectional affixes and lexically or syntactically contrastive use of tone, their semantically irregular derivational affixes remain to distinguish them starkly from languages known as creoles. This is notably also the case in English, sometimes argued to have possibly been transformed into a creole by contact with French after the Norman Conquest (e.g. Bailey & Maroldt 1977). For one, while rather low in inflection, English does retain eight inflectional affixes. In addition, however, it is crucially distinct from creoles in its semantically evolved derivation. In cases like *awful*, semantic drift has relegated the very status of *-ful* as a suffix to the margins of spontaneous perception. Moreover, there also exist analogues to the Khmer *k-* whose original semantics are now virtually opaque in a synchronic representation of the lexicon, such as *with-* in *withhold* and *withstand*, the former reflecting the original etymon’s meaning of ‘against’, while the latter reflects the gradual evolution of this into the meaning of ‘away’ or ‘from’.

At this point, then, we have arrived at a purely synchronic characterization of the languages known as creoles. Specifically, creoles are the only natively spoken languages in the world that combine all three of the following traits:

1. little or no inflectional affixation
2. little or no use of tone to lexically contrast monosyllables or encode syntax
3. semantically regular derivational affixation

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9 My claim is not that there will be semantic nuances in combinations of roots and derivational affixes in a creole. In Saramaccan, for example, the fact that *gi-hdti-u-móni-ma* ‘give-heart-for-money-man’ means ‘someone obsessed with money’, rather than ‘miser’ or ‘pauper’, must be specifically learned. Similarly, a degree of idiosyncratic development was obviously necessary for *těl-mańa-ma* ‘take-man-man’ to specifically connote ‘a woman who gets picked up frequently’ (data from Veenstra & Smith 1994). These slight conventionalizations notwithstanding, the fundamental semantic contribution of *-ma* as an animate agentive marker is quite clear in all of its uses, in contrast to the opaque relationship between the various uses of derivational affixes in Mon-Khmer, Polynesian, and other regular language groups.
Because there exist no languages combining these traits other than those with the creole sociohistorical profile, we can conclude that creole is indeed a linguistic, typologically identifiable class as well as a sociohistorical one.

We can be sure that after a long period of time, as the development of inflection, high-functional-load tonal contrast, and/or semantic irregularity in derivation have taken their toll upon the fundamental transparency of these grammars, creoles will indeed be indistinguishable from regular languages. Today, however, they are readily distinguishable, because they are the only languages combining the three traits we have discussed.

It must be clear that we are in no way stipulating that creoles are in any way 'rudimentary' languages or 'baby talk', awaiting entree into the realm of 'true' language. On the contrary, creoles are invaluable in demonstrating that the rich and nuanced linguistic expression we associate with 'regular' languages is possible without inflection, lexically or syntactically contrastive tone, or derivational paradigms. For all their structural and expressive richness, such things are ultimately but inexorable accretions over time, arising and eroding in an endless cycle like mountain ranges, and with no more inherent necessity.

I will refer to a language combining the three traits in question as the creole prototype. Because of observations that many features often found in creoles also cluster in regular languages, the notion of a 'creole prototype' is highly suspect to many creolists, though a more extended examination of the data has shown that this discomfort is unwarranted. An argument that no creole prototype exists is incomplete without the explicit identification of a regular language—one not created recently via rapid acquisition by non-native speakers—which combines all three of these traits.

3. A CLOSER EXAMINATION OF THE SUPERSTRATIST FRAMEWORK. As noted in the introduction, the French superstratist model and the founder principle hinge on a series of assumptions leading to the conclusion that creole is not a valid empirical class of language, extended to an additional stipulation. The assumptions are as follows:

1. Early plantation slaves spoke not creoles, but close approximation of the lexifier.
2. Even creoles are simply varieties of their lexifiers.
3. Nothing distinguishes creoles from other varieties which have undergone extensive language contact.
4. Creole is not an empirically valid classificational term.
5. One language cannot be more or less creole than another.

We have refuted the fourth, and central, claim. In this section, I will show that even the first three assumptions, while increasingly influential in creolist thought, in fact do not stand up to the actual evidence, and finally that the refutation of the fourth contention leaves the fifth unsupportable as well.

3.1. ASSUMPTION 1: Early plantation slaves spoke not creoles, but close approximations of the lexifier. This seemingly neutral claim is in fact a key component in the superstratist denial of creole as a valid class. Most writers see the difference between creoles and their lexifiers as evidence of a break in transmission of the latter. This hypothetical non-native approximation is the first bastion in the superstratist depiction of creoles as a gradual, unbroken series of "transformations" of a lexifier.

Indeed, since whites and blacks worked side by side in equal number in the early decades of most plantation colonies, it is a natural deduction that early slaves would have developed not creoles, but relatively full varieties of the lexifier, and that creoles would only have developed later as slave importation increased. Plausibility is not
always truth, however, and historical documentation roundly contradicts this reconstruction.

For example, Martinique was colonized by the French in 1635, and white indentured servants and blacks worked in relatively equal number on small farms there well into the 1670s (Munford 1991:505). In 1664, 529 out of 684 farms had fewer than six slaves, and there were often fewer slaves than white family members (Chaudenson 1992:95). According to the superstratist models, we would expect that slaves in Martinique at this time would have spoken non-native but relatively fully transmitted varieties of French.

This prediction is not borne out. In 1990, a text of unequivocal French Creole from 1671 was discovered (Carden et al. 1990). Superstratist work has continued in mysterious neglect of this text, for which reason I will cite a selection in its entirety.

(7) Moi miré bète qui tini Zyeyux, tini barbe, tini mains, tini Zépaules
I see animal REL have eyes have beard have hands have shoulders
tout comme homme, tini cheveux et barbe gris, noir et puis blanc,
all like man have hair and beard gray black and then white
moi na pas miré bas li parce li té dans diau, li sembe
I NEG look under him because he ANT in water he seem
pourtant poisson. Moi té tini peur bète là manger monde.
however fish I ANT have fear animal DET eat person
Li regardé plusieurs fois, li allé devant savanne, puis li caché
he look many time he go in front of meadow then he hide
li dans diau, puis moi pas voir li davantage.
him in water then I NEG see him more

‘I saw an animal that had eyes, had a beard, had hands, had shoulders just
like a man, had hair and a beard that were gray, black, and white. I
didn’t see the bottom part of it because it was in the water; however, it
looked like a fish. I was afraid the animal ate people. It looked several
times, it went in front of the meadow (part of the island), then it hid
itself in the water, then I didn’t see it anymore.’

The text contains several shibboleths of Caribbean French Creole, such as fossilized determiners (Zyeyux, diau), postposed determiner là (bète là), bare reflexive pronoun (li caché li), postposed pronoun as possessive (bas li), and conventionalization of té as anterior marker (moi té tini peur). Furthermore, a variety this stabilized surely existed long before the text was recorded, in the 1660s at the latest.

This document is thus counterevidence to the claim that creoles were not spoken by early plantation slaves. To be sure, it is quite plausible that because access to whites’ speech was rich on such small farms, slaves acquired relatively fully transmitted varieties of the lexifier alongside the creole (McWhorter 1998). Indeed, other speakers recorded in the 1671 Martinique text speak varieties closer to French. However, the text is unequivocal demonstration of a creole already in slaves’ repertoire even on small farms.

If there were only one such case, we might dismiss it as a fluke, but such cases are

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10 This manuscript was discovered at the library of the University of South Carolina by Shirley Brice Heath, who brought it to the attention of J. L. Dillard, who passed it on to William Stewart, who passed it to Guy Carden and Morris Goodman. It was presented to the Society for Pidgin and Creole Linguistics in 1990, but other than in brief citation by William Jennings (1995), subsequently languished until its appearance here.
common. While Sranan English Creole has been the lingua franca of Suriname for over three centuries now, the English in fact controlled the colony for a mere sixteen years, from 1651 to 1667, when the Dutch took over. More to the point, it was the Dutch who established a thriving sugar plantation system there. Under the English, Suriname was firmly ensconced in what Chaudenson has termed the socia"eté d'habitation stage: Africans were primarily distributed among small plantations of twenty people each on average (Voorhoeve 1964:234–36), where indentured servants were as numerous as Africans and worked alongside them (Rens 1953:58–61).

The superstratist models predict that slaves at this point would have spoken a non-native but viable approximation of English rather than a creole. Records of Sranan do not begin until sixty-seven years after its founding, when large plantations were well established. Yet it can nevertheless be firmly deduced that Sranan had already developed by 1667, on these small farms. First, an English-based creole is unlikely to have developed under Dutch hegemony, and since the Dutch took over Suriname in 1667, this automatically places the birth of Sranan before this.

The second piece of evidence is Maroon Spirit Language of Jamaica, spoken under possession by descendants of escaped slaves. As it happens, Maroon Spirit Language and Sranan are varieties of the same creole (Smith 1987:92). Example 8 gives a sentence in both varieties.

(8) a. Maroon Spirit Language
Cha in go na da bigi pre, kya in go na indi.
carry him go LOC the big place carry him go LOC inside
'Take him to that big place, put him inside.'

(Bilby 1992:9)

b. Sranan
Tja en go na a bigi presi, tja en go na ini.
carry him go LOC the big place carry him go LOC inside

The correspondences extend to vast lists of idiosyncratic departures from vowel harmony (e.g. both have naki for knock, dagu for dog, etc.), a battery of identical idiosyncratic grammaticalizations, and an entire paradigm of innovated interrogative markers (see Smith 1987:98 and McWhorter 1996b:4–6 for details).

The presence of early Sranan in Jamaica is crucial to dating the emergence of Sranan, because slaves were brought to Jamaica from Suriname in 1671 (Bilby 1983:60). Given that Maroon Spirit Language had already stabilized the above-mentioned departures from vowel harmony, grammaticalized items, and paradigm of interrogatives, it is sure to have existed in Suriname long before 1671. In order to give the variety enough time to have gelled to such an extent, we are forced to place the birth of the Sranan well back into the 1660s at the very least. To both do this and place the birth of the language on plantations, we would have to place its birth after the Dutch arrival in 1667, since only they established plantations. But the MSL system certainly needed more than a mere four years to develop, and this thus places the birth of Sranan in the English period, in the early 1660s or before, on their small farms.

The third indication that Sranan existed even long before 1667 comes from the history of its sister creole, Saramaccan. These two creoles correspond so intimately on all levels that there can be no doubt as to their common origin. The sentence in 9 combines several idiosyncratic correspondences between them which, along with many others, are discussed in more detail in McWhorter 1996a:463–70.
Sranan: Odi granman ben sabi taki mi ben njan en ([fæm el])
Saramaccan: Undí gaamá bi sábi táá mi bi njan en ([fæm el])
which chief ANT know COMP I ANT eat it

‘Which chief knew that I ate it, then?’

Odi and undí stem from an original ‘which-this’, part of an interrogative paradigm
unknown in the Caribbean outside of the Suriname creoles and, significantly, Maroon
Spirit Language.11 The use of taki (> táá in Saramaccan) as complementizer and the
conventionalization of now as ‘then’ are similarly unique to Suriname creoles. Most
striking is the epenthetic [m], which appears only between a closed class of verbs with a
final nasalized vowel and a following phonetically brief vowel-initial item. The specific
conditioning of this [m] varies slightly among the three main Suriname creoles (Voor-
unknown outside Suriname. The list of other similar correspondences is vast, including
specific interactions between copulas, adjectives, and reduplication (Winford 1997:
291–95), idiosyncratic uses of copular items and oblique pronouns, and a number of
highly particular choices of etymon in various grammatical functions.

It is significant, then, that Saramaccan ultimately traces back to the 1660s. While
fundamentally an English-based creole, Saramaccan has a heavy Portuguese component
in its lexicon. This resulted from the partial relexification of an early form of Sranan
by Portuguese, when Portuguese planters who emigrated to Suriname bought Sranan-
speaking slaves from the English in the 1660s and 1670s (Goodman 1987:375–82,
Smith 1987).12 Once again, a particular sociohistorical window reveals a historical
‘footprint’ from Sranan. By 1675, the English, making way for the Dutch, had with-
drawn all but fifty aged slaves from Suriname (Arends 1995:238). This means that for
Sranan to have been brought to the Portuguese plantations, as the vast correspondences
between Sranan and Saramaccan require to have happened, it must have been between
the Dutch takeover in 1667 and before 1675, by which time almost all English slaves
were gone or bought. It thus follows that Sranan already existed by this time.

All the evidence points to Sranan having already emerged in the 1660s, on small
farms amidst heavy black-white contact. Once again, the superstratist prediction that
early slaves spoke close approximations of their lexifiers fails.

Further examples include Louisiana French Creole, which is explicitly documented
in the mid-1700s, at which time even the few large farms in the region had only twenty
slaves, most slaveholders having only one or two: in other words, a classic societé
d’habitation (Klingler 1992:56–57, Speedy 1995:102). Meanwhile, all evidence sug-
ests that Palenquero Spanish Creole developed among slaves living in extensive and
intimate contact with Spaniards (Böttcher 1995:38–40). For one, the creole has been

11 This paradigm is also found vestigially in Sierra Leone Krio (McWhorter 1998), which I have traced
to a line of development which began as Sranan, was exported to Jamaica as Maroon Spirit Language, and
was then brought to Sierra Leone with transplanted Jamaican maroons in 1800 to become Krio.

12 There are contemporary accounts of a mixed English-Portuguese pidgin spoken on Portuguese planta-
tions, called Djutongo in one (Goodman 1987:377–82). A word list in this Djutongo (Smith 1987:125–28)
confirms that this was indeed the precursor to Saramaccan (see McWhorter 1996a:469, 488 for further
discussion). Meanwhile, Smith (1987) demonstrates that systemically, the Portuguese lexicon in Saramaccan
has been phonologically reinterpreted according to different rules than the English-based component. This
shows that Saramaccan is indeed an encounter between two separately stabilized contact languages.
widely argued to have been based upon a Portuguese pidgin or creole which the original slaves brought with them from São Tomé (Schwegler 1993:670–71, McWhorter 1995a: 229–31), eliminating the possibility that they developed Palenquero from the ground up within the colony itself. Second, its speakers are documented to have spoken Spanish alongside the creole from an early date (Bickerton & Escalante 1970:255, Schwegler 1996:26–28). The creole English of Pitcairn developed on a tiny island amidst nine English speakers and nineteen Polynesians. Hawaiian Creole English was created by children who were not only surrounded by an indigenized but full variety of English, but were even being educated in English as they created it (Roberts 1998). In short, the historical record clearly shows that despite the initial plausibility of the idea that creoles would not have yet existed before blacks outnumbered whites in European overseas colonies, they in fact did.

At this writing, this question is a significant conundrum in creole studies, and has been addressed in various ways. Hancock (1969, 1987), Cassidy (1980) and McWhorter (1995b) have argued that a single English-based creole was transplanted throughout the Caribbean, rather than a new one emerging independently in each major colony; Parkvall (1995) makes a similar argument for French Caribbean creoles. This would mean that slaves imported from a previously established colony would have spoken the creole variety that had developed there, even before demographic disproportion had set in in the new colony. Other evidence suggests that creoles existed in the pre-plantation phase even of colonies established so early that no plantation colonies existed yet to transplant a creole from (McWhorter 1996b, 1998). For this reason, among others, some analysts have argued that the English creoles of the Caribbean stem ultimately from a single English pidgin ancestor born on the West African coast (Hancock 1969, 1986, McWhorter 1996b, 1998). Meanwhile, Klinger (1992:56–57) and Parkvall (1995) suppose that creolists may have simply overestimated the degree of demographic disproportion necessary to produce a creole, proposing that creoles may well have simply emerged on small farms.

Whatever analysis one chooses, the fact remains that the keystone superstratist contention, that slaves on early plantations spoke not creoles but simply non-native but close approximations of their lexifiers, is contradicted by an overwhelming volume of evidence.

3.2. Assumption 2: Even creoles are simply varieties of their lexifiers. This superstratist assertion is based on two claims. One is that creoles would look much less divergent from their lexifiers if more consistently compared to the regional varieties actually spoken by colonists, rather than standard varieties. The second is that no pidginization occurred during the emergence of the creole, and that the traditional conception of creoles as expansions of erstwhile pidgins is mistaken. To the extent that Chaudenson acknowledges any divergence between regional lexifier varieties and creoles, he supposes that this was due to the fact that the slaves were exposed to a koine of regional dialects rather than only one, and to relatively nondisruptive second-language ‘approximation’. Mufwene (1996b) adds that the creole may have diverged further from the lexifier when lexifier features grammaticalized in ways they had not in the lexifier itself.

Of course, viewed broadly, whether one calls a creole a variety of its lexifier or a new language is a matter of perspective, inherently unamenable to any absolute metric. However, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the superstratist depiction of creoles as mere varieties of their lexifiers requires a highly selective presentation of data. When
the creole data are viewed more liberally, the superstratist claim takes on a different perspective.

3.2.1. LANGUAGE VERSUS SENTENCE. Generally favoring exposition over example, superstratist arguments typically refer to sentences such as 10.

(10) Mauritian Creole
Zot ti pe ale.
they PAST PROG go
‘They were going.’

Indeed, such a sentence has a clear source in regional French eux autres étaient après aller, especially when unmonitored pronunciation is considered.

When sampled less selectively, however, creoles are much less plausibly viewed as simply slightly ‘approximated’ extensions of regional lexifier dialects, and furthermore, creoles contain clear signs that their origin involved a break in the transmission of the lexifier; i.e. pidginization. Consider, for example, a representative piece of Sranan English Creole (Adamson & Smith 1995:231).

(11) Te den yonkuman fu wrokope yere na tori dis,
when the-PL young man for workplace hear LOC story this
dan den e lafu. Dati na wan bigiman srefisrefi.
then they PROG laugh that COP a big-man self-self
Basedi srefi ben e lafu tu nanga ala den tifi
Master Eddy self ANT PROG laugh also with all the-PL tooth
di blaka fu sosu tabaka. Noo a ben de na en yuru.
REL black for only tobacco now it ANT PROG LOC his hour
‘Whenever the boys at work heard this, they would burst out in laughter
‘That’s one hell of a guy’.’ Even Master Eddy would laugh too,
baring all of his teeth which were black from pure tobacco. Now it was his turn.’

Clearly there are features here derivable from regional English dialects, such as den from them as plural demonstrative. Clearly there are approximations of English, such as the elimination of plural inflection, the prevalence of CVCV structure, the overgeneralized plural tifi from teeth. One could easily make a superstratist case for Sranan via isolated sentences like Den (g)jo waka ‘they will walk’.

But other features are utterly foreign to even the most hardscrabble dialect of English, and extremely difficult to conceive of even as ‘approximations’ thereof. Copula na is an internal development derived from that, not any form of be (Arends 1989, McWhorter 1995b:299–305), and one would look in vain for any English dialect with such a usage. The use of self (srefi) as an emphatic marker is extended in Suriname creoles far beyond anything conceivable in English of any kind (Rountree & Glock 1977:133–34).

Under Mufwene’s founder principle, these two developments are presumably explainable as independent grammaticalizations (1996b). Other features, however, are outright transfers from West African languages, not simply independent grammaticalizations. The postposition of dis (< this) is a West African inheritance (Bruyn 1995a: 111–24), as is the use of di (< disi ‘this’) as a relative marker (Bruyn 1995a:111–24, 1995b). Such features are in no way treatable as continuations of English. They are inheritances from other languages, and in grammatically central functions. Indisputable substrate transfer of this kind is so prominent in the grammar of Sranan and other
creoles that it has even been argued that creoles are outright relexifications of West African languages (e.g. Lefebvre 1993). While most creolists have been skeptical that transfer has played a role quite this dominant in creole genesis, the very fact that such analyses have been proposed strongly questions the marginal, or at best convergent, impact superstratists claim substrate languages to have had on plantation creoles.

Other features specifically suggest that English was pidginized, not simply transmitted. For example, the internal development of the copula na entails that Sranan emerged with no expressed copula. Elimination of the copula is a diagnostic feature of pidgins, whose source in interrupted transmission of a lexifier is uncontroversial.

These realities are unclear in superstratist arguments which, demonstrated via isolated sentences like Mauritian zot ti pe ale, risk misleading the uninitiated into supposing that such sentences are even reasonably representative of creole grammars as a whole. Certainly, nothing strictly rules out a scholar insisting that even in view of the data I have shown, Sranan is a variety of English. Clearly, however, with these data presented, such an insistence takes on a certain light. When actually seen in the context of whole grammars of a representative range of creoles, the approximation mechanism is in fact only applicable via tenuous, ad hoc extension, and as Baker (1996) crucially observes, this leaves no distinction between approximation and pidginization as traditionally conceived.

The only sustained superstratist acknowledgment of Sranan is Mufwene (1996a: 94–96), who argues for Suriname as an unusual case, leaving the superstratist model generally intact. He proposes that because of the brevity of the English tenure in Suriname (1651–1667), slaves there had unusually little exposure to English and thus developed a variety unusually divergent from it.

We must recall, however, that these slaves worked on small farms alongside whites, and that the superstratist model stipulates that they would have developed non-native but relatively viable English. Mufwene would appear to imply that sixteen years was not long enough for the slaves to do so, but without a principled justification, it is unclear why.

In any case, there is other evidence that Sranan is not an unusual case. Other creoles just as tenuously treated as varieties of their lexifiers have arisen in more conventional circumstances, when speakers of the lexifier were available for over a century. Fa D’Ambu is one of four closely related varieties of Gulf of Guinea Portuguese Creole (Holm 1989:277). Example 12 is a sample (Post 1995:203).

(12) Se amu bila-oio tela-mu Ambu. Amu na xonse pe-mu-syi
  CONJ I open-eye land-my Annobón I NEG know father-my-DEM
  pali mu-f. Se amu sxa ma mavida ku me-mu.
  bear me-NEG CONJ I PROG take suffering with mother-my
  Amu na suku nge-syi zuda me-mu pa da ma xa pa
  I NEG have person-DEM help mother-my for give take thing for
  amu bisyi-f.
  I wear-NEG

‘I was born in my homeland Annobón. I did not know who my father was
and I suffered with my mother. I had nobody to help my mother to offer
me something to wear.’

Again, it is difficult to view this language as merely a variety of Portuguese. The postposition of the pronoun to encode the possessive, the postposition of the demonstrative (pe-mu-syi), the serial verb construction da ma ‘give-take’, and the postposed
negator -f (< original fa) are unequivocal West African inheritances (Ferraz 1976), the latter even lacking a Portuguese etymological source. As with Sranan, far from being scattered or marginal, such transferred features are nothing less than central to the grammar.

Also as in Sranan, other features specifically indicate pidginization rather than simple transmission of Portuguese. A Portuguese dialect eschewing its subject pronouns in favor of dative-marked possessive adjectives is unconceivable (amú from a meu ‘to my’). In contrast, pidgins typically generalize a tonic pronominal, and in Portuguese plays of the fifteenth through nineteenth centuries, Africans speaking rudimentary pidgin Portuguese are even depicted as saying a mí (Naro 1978:328–29). Similarly, progressive marker sxa is derived from a combination of sa from são ‘they are’ and xa from ficar ‘to stay’, neither lexical source used as a progressive marker in Portuguese. Both exemplify the tendency in pidgins to innovate aspect markers by remodelling lexical items in ways unknown in the lexifier (cf. Tok Pisin progressive marker stap from ‘stop’). Furthermore, both sa and xa (< ka) can appear alone in other Gulf of Guinea Portuguese creoles (Günther 1973); their combination into one marker is an internal innovation in Fa D’Ambu, rendering sxa even more alien to any lexifier source. In short, the superstratist analysis begs the question as to which Portuguese dialect included sentences like a meu são ficar sufrir ‘I used to suffer’.

Thus Fa D’Ambu is no more ‘Portuguese’ than Sranan is ‘English’, and yet it was created under conditions in which Portuguese speakers were a dominant presence for generations. Annobón, the island where Fa D’Ambu is spoken, was settled with slaves from nearby São Tomé in 1503 (Holm 1989:283), and the sisterhood of Fa D’Ambu and São Tomense therefore suggests that the latter existed by the first decades of the 1500s. The existence of São Tomense by this early date is further indicated by the fact that another of the Gulf of Guinea Portuguese creole speech communities, Principe, was also seeded from São Tomé in the early 1500s (Holm 1989:280–81). This date of emergence is significant because at this time, blacks had yet to vastly outnumber whites either in the São Tomé population as a whole or on individual plantations. During the large stretch of time between the large-scale settlement of São Tomé in 1493 and the mid-1500s, its plantations typically harbored only fifteen or so slaves at a time (Brásio 1954:33–45) and were few in number; there were only two sugar mills, for example, as late as the 1510s (Hodges & Newitt 1988:19–20). In the meantime, crucially, interaction between whites and blacks on São Tomé was especially intimate: marriages between Portuguese settlers and Africans, as well as between Iberian Jewish refugees and Africans, were encouraged and predominant (Ferraz 1979:15–16).

The damage to Mufwene’s attempt to explain Sranan as the result of unusually brief contact with English is clear. Furthermore, this situation continued for over a century, until the downfall of the colony in the early 1600s—and yet the result was a creole as divergent from its lexifier as São Tomense (as well as its transplanted sisters). Ferraz’s

13 The initial settlement of Annobón was rather small in scale and vigor; it was not until the second half of the 1500s that a vital plantation system was transplanted there from São Tomé (Hodges & Newitt 1988:18). By this point, in São Tomé large-scale plantation agriculture had been established, conditioning the disproportion of black to white which superstratists, along with other creolists, would expect to have led to deep restructuring of Portuguese. It is possible that São Tomense was not transplanted to Annobón until then, in which case the distance of Fa D’Ambu itself from Portuguese would not prove that its parent, São Tomense, emerged amidst intimate interracial contact. However, Principe, home to a closely similar dialect, was settled from São Tomé as a thriving sister plantation economy from its outset at the turn of the 1500s, when plantation agriculture—and thus sharp black/white disproportion—on São Tomé was still embryonic.
surmise that these marriages were significant in the development of the creole is supported by the firm documentation of the emergence of Portuguese creoles from similar intermarriages in Asia.

Thus regarding the claim that creoles are simply varieties of their lexifiers, Fa D’Ambu and its sister dialects are not only just as dire as Sranan linguistically, but also sociohistorically. Mufwene’s strategy of setting aside Sranan as the result of unusually brief exposure to a lexifier is inapplicable in the Gulf of Guinea, where Portuguese speakers were available as planters and even husbands in extenso. Again, examples continue, another being Tayo French Creole of Caledonia, quite clearly the result of the severe reduction of French followed by a reinterpretation thereof deeply influenced by substrate interference from Melanesian languages. It was created not via a brief encounter with French, but amidst unions between Melanesian women who spoke non-native, but by no means pidginized, French, and Melanesian men, all living in a settlement with French-speaking missionaries (Corne 1995). We are forced to conclude not only that many creoles do not lend themselves to treatment as simply varieties of their lexifiers, but also that this was unrelated to whether their creators’ exposure to Europeans was brief or prolonged.

3.2.2. The Approximation Mechanism. Even the fundamental conviction behind the ‘creoles as mere dialects’ idea, that a creole could plausibly have developed gradually from a lexifier via a series of incremental approximations, is questionable. Typical of superstratist arguments, Chaudenson’s demonstrations (1992:156–67) of how approximation would produce a creole are outlined less in citation and diagram than in text block, tending to spare linguistic demonstration in favor of extended sociohistorical extrapolation (Baker 1996:117). When we get down to cases and attempt a sustained linguistic engagement with the approximation scenario, we find that it is in fact difficult to generate a creole without a break in transmission.

Chaudenson claims for example that the absence of inflection in creoles is traceable to regional dialects in which inflectional paradigms were much more eroded than in European standards (1992:158–62). The point that vernacular French dialects have often radically reduced the number of inflections in the present tense -er verb paradigm, for example, is well taken, and demonstrates the tendency for such erosions to proceed more rapidly in colloquial varieties relatively unconstrained by prescriptive impulses (cf. Kroch 1978). Table 1 illustrates this point.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ENGLISH</th>
<th>STANDARD FRENCH</th>
<th>COLLOQUIAL FRENCH</th>
<th>HAITIAN CREOLE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I talk</td>
<td>je parle</td>
<td>je parle [parl]</td>
<td>m pale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>you talk</td>
<td>tu parles</td>
<td>tu parles [parl]</td>
<td>ou pale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>he talks</td>
<td>il parle</td>
<td>il parle [parl]</td>
<td>li pale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>we talk</td>
<td>nous parlons</td>
<td>on parle [parl]</td>
<td>nu pale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>you (pl.) talk</td>
<td>vous parlez</td>
<td>vous parlez [parle]</td>
<td>nu pale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>they talk</td>
<td>ils parlent</td>
<td>ils parlent [parl]</td>
<td>zot pale</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Comparison of -er verb present tense paradigms.

French creoles, however, did not generalize [parl], but [parle]. This could be derived either from the second person plural or the infinitive. In reference to the first alternative, Chaudenson gives examples of some grammatically marginal vernacular overgeneralizations of the first person plural inflection (Chaudenson 1992:158–59), but this is not germane to his thesis; presumably there are no examples of the overgeneralization of the second person plural ending, which would be a highly unusual diachronic development given the tendency for the third person singular to be the source of generalization.
(Watkins 1962, Hock 1991:220–22). Indeed, what the regional French dialects offer is a source for overgeneralization of the third person singular—but this is exactly what French creoles did not do. A search for a regional French that used only the infinitive would be similarly futile.

However, overgeneralization of the infinitive is a diagnostic of pidginization. Note, for example, that an unequivocally pidginized French, Tày Bái of Vietnam, overgeneralizes the infinitive, not the third person singular (Toi napas savoir monsieur aller où? ‘You don’t know where the man went?’ [Schuchardt 1888, cited in Holm 1989:360]). This suggests that there was indeed a break in the transmission of French in the birth of Haitian Creole. A similar case is zero copula in French creoles. Regional French speakers have never omitted the copula: *je φ pêcheur or *Moi (regional [mwe]) φ pêcheur ‘I am a fisherman’. On the other hand, zero copula is diagnostic of pidginization (Ferguson 1971, Ferguson & Debose 1977, Foley 1988:165).

In addition to these problems, the approximation scenario is even less plausible when applied to European languages which, even in regional varieties, are more richly inflected than French. To be sure, it is tempting (albeit, as we have seen, mistaken) to view French-based creoles as a mere step beyond reduced paradigms like those in Table 1, but approximation proponents have neglected the fact that there were no such levelled paradigms as sources for creoles lexifield by more richly inflected varieties. Table 2 contains an example from Palenquero Spanish Creole (Colombian Spanish based on Lipski 1994:213–14; Palenquero data from Schwegler 1998:256).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ENGLISH</th>
<th>COLOMBIAN SPANISH (PACIFIC COAST)</th>
<th>PALENQUERO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I walk</td>
<td>yo camino</td>
<td>i kaminá</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>you walk</td>
<td>vos caminas</td>
<td>bo kaminá</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>he walks</td>
<td>él camina</td>
<td>ele kaminá</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>we walk</td>
<td>nosotros</td>
<td>suto/ma hende kaminá</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>you (pl.) walk</td>
<td>ustedes camináis</td>
<td>utere kaminá</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>they walk</td>
<td>ellos caminan</td>
<td>ané kaminá</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Verbal paradigms in Spanish and Palenquero.

As we have seen, the approximation scenario, while preliminarily plausible, does not explain as much data as the conventional pidginization account. The fact that creoles as inflectionally stripped as the French ones have developed even from inflectionally rich languages would appear to deal the coup de grâce to approximation as a valid creole genesis model.

In sum, despite the vital role that regional constructions play in creole genesis, the fact remains that creoles also present a mass of data that are neither traceable to evolved regional dialects nor plausibly treated as the product of a series of approximations. The claim that creoles are varieties of their lexifiers must be evaluated in view of the data in this section.

3.3. Assumption 3: Nothing distinguishes creoles from other varieties which have undergone extensive language contact. The cluster of three traits that defines the creole prototype directly belies the claim that creoles are indistinguishable from other speech varieties with heavy language contact in their histories, because our three traits do not cluster in these ordinary heavy-contact varieties. This is because these traits are the legacy of former pidginization, and heavy-contact varieties like Romanian and Yiddish did not arise via pidginization and subsequent reconstitution as creoles did. Romanian, for example, has a heavy Slavic lexical component and
Balkan Sprachbund structural features which distinguish it from other Romance languages (e.g. the postposed determiner: *omul* ‘the man’). Its rich inflection, though, instantly distinguishes it from Haitian Creole or Tok Pisin, and like all regular languages, its derivational affixation is often semantically irregular: the core meaning of the prefix *de-* is inverse as in *degrada* ‘to degrade’, but this meaning is obscured in words such as *deprinde* ‘to habituate’ from *prinde* ‘to take’ or *desemna* ‘to designate’ from *semna* ‘to sign’. The same could be said of Yiddish, Singapore English, Maltese Arabic, or myriad other speech varieties that have undergone heavy language contact.

### 3.4. Assumption 4: One language cannot be more or less creole than another. Continua of lects ranging from English to creole have been studied for decades (DeCamp 1971; Bickerton 1975; Rickford 1987); similar creole continua have been identified elsewhere (Bhattachariya 1994, Staudacher-Valliamée 1994); Thomason and Kaufman (1988) elegantly and rigorously argue for contact-induced interference as a gradient process. Yet as a consequence of his claim that creole is not a valid classification, Mufwene has argued that there is an ‘absence of a structural yardstick for measuring linguistic creoleness’ and that the classification of a language as more or less creole than another is inappropriate (1994b:71, 1997a:42).

The creole prototype however, is precisely the structural yardstick Mufwene seeks, and the notion of creoleness as a matter of degree follows naturally from the identification of this prototype, since entities naturally conform to any prototype to gradient degrees.

Our prototype is a creole with no inflectional affixes, no use of tone to contrast monosyllables or encode syntax, and derivational affixes whose semantic contribution is consistently transparent. Along these lines, the most creole of creoles include Ndjuka and Haitian Creole, which fulfill all three qualifications. Saramaccan, with its occasional contrastive uses of tone, and Fa D’Ambu, with its occasional use of the suffix *-du* to form participial adjectives (xaba ‘to finish’, xabadu ‘finished’ [Post 1995:195–96]), depart slightly from the prototype. All of these creoles, however, have long been considered among the ‘deepest’ creoles by most scholars. The uncertain light in which super-stratist models like Mufwene’s founder principle place this characterization is eliminated under my framework.

Other creoles depart somewhat more from this prototype. For example, Nubi Arabic Creole has clearly drastically reduced the grammar of its lexifier, having eliminated all nonconcatenative morphology and developed new derivational morphology from compounds (Heine 1982:29, 41–42). It does, however, encode a few morphological and syntactic distinctions via tone, generating deverbal nouns (kárabú ‘to spoil’, karáb ‘spoiling’) and resultatives (*úo seregu kalamóyó* ‘he stole a goat’, *kalamóyó dë seregu* ‘the goat was stolen’) (Heine 1982:41–42).

Often, departures from the prototype result when source languages have been retained alongside the creole. Guinea-Bissau Portuguese Creole has a causative marker *ntVl*: sibi ‘to climb’, sibinti ‘to make climb’ (Kihm 1989:372) which is inherited from a pattern in local languages like Manjaku (*-lenp* ‘to work’, *-lenpandan* ‘to make work’). Palenquero, spoken in a code-switching relationship with Spanish for centuries, has not only the two inflections *ma*- (plural) and *-ba* (past marker)

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14 Attributions of some features of Romanian (and other Balkan Sprachbund languages) to contact have been contested; few however, would question the basic validity of the Sprachbund analysis as a whole.
productive dive retains origin: (albeit 810 creoles clearly import. and lexically Negerhollands.

tions founder while, them and Swahili. Shaba Kituba for?

creole distinctions treated Negerhollands Dutch's

disproportionate impact on a creole at its origin: Gbe speakers were so numerous in early colonial Suriname that Saramaccan retains some tone sandhi patterns directly inherited from Fon. One that could be interpreted as a syntactic marker: tone sandhi is blocked between verb and object.

Slight differences in 'creoleness' of this sort, however, are of minimal theoretical import. Nubi Arabic Creole, Guinea-Bissau Portuguese Creole, and Palenquero have clearly reduced, and then restructured, their lexifiers to the extreme degree that defines creoles as distinct and interesting languages. Other contact varieties have reduced their lexifiers so much less extremely than Ndůka or Haitian that they stand out as intermedi- ate cases, traditionally called semi-creoles. Afrikaans is a classic case, having reduced morphological paradigms to a degree unknown in regional Dutch dialects, but by no means eliminating them entirely like Haitian Creole.

Mufwene (1997a:59) has argued that the term semi-creole is vacuous, but this follows from the superstrate impression that creole is an invalid classification:

Should Afrikaans and African-American Vernacular English be called 'semi-creoles'? Again, in the absence of a structural linguistic definition, what do we learn from this label? Or, what do we need it for? What criteria justify this new category?

The creole prototype, however, contains exactly the criteria in question. Afrikaans, for example, has significantly reduced the inflectional affix paradigms of Dutch, but inflection nevertheless plays a robust role in its grammar. Furthermore, it retains Dutch's derivational morphology in much of its evolved idiosyncrasy. In contrast, Negerhollands Dutch Creole had virtually no inflectional affixes, and what derivational morphology it had was semantically regular. For precisely this reason, we can confidently classify Afrikaans as a semi-creole, in contrast to the Dutch creole Negerhollands.

Along these same lines, we can resolve a long-standing ambiguity over the classification of Bantu-based contact languages like Kituba, Lingala, and Shaba Swahili. Nida and Fehderau (1970:147–48) classify Kituba as a pidgin and Lingala and Shaba Swahili as koines (152–53). Holm (1989:552–55) considers none of them pidgins, treating all three as intermediate between dialect and pidgin. Mean- while, Mufwene once approached the first two along the lines of Holm but considered Shaba Swahili to be a regular language (1986b:146–47, 1989). Of late, under the founder principle, he instead rejects any notion of gradient creoleness among these languages (1997a:46–47), proposing for instance sources for the direct inheritance of Kituba features from Kimanianga Kikongo rather than treating them as pidginiza- tions thereof (1994c). As the result of these conflicting analyses, the Bantu-based contact varieties hover at the edges of most creolist discussion; meanwhile, linguists outside of creole studies are often perplexed that Lingala, in particular, is even treated as a creole at all.

With our creole prototype identified, we can resolve this conundrum. In all three of these varieties, the affix paradigms of the lexifier are slightly reduced, as are tonal distinctions where the lexifier had any (Swahili is not tonal). However, the grammars of all three bristle with allomorphic affix paradigms, and Kituba and Lingala retain lexically and syntactically contrastive usage of tone (note Lingala's tonally indicated subjunctive):
(13) Kituba
Mbóma ná Kanìki kèle ba-nduku... túka ya bó vand-áka b-ána.
Mboma and Kaniki COP PL-friend since of they be-PAST PL-child
‘Mboma and Kaniki have been friends since they were children.’
(Holm 1989:558, p.c. from Mufwene)

(14) Lingala
Péte lo a-yók-í molun gi. A-ke-i na ebale mpó á-sokol-a nzóto.
Peter he-perceive-PF heat he-go-PF to river for he-wash-SUBJ body
‘Peter felt hot. He went to the river to wash himself.’
(Holm 1989:560, p.c. from Mufwene)

(PF = perfective, SUBJ = subjunctive)

(15) Shaba Swahili
Paka i-le baati mungu a-ri-ku-kubar-i-a njo i-le tuu.
just CL-DEM fortune God he-PAST-you-grant-APP-FIN COP CL-DEM just
‘Only the good fortune God has granted you, only this.’
(De Rooij 1995:183)

(CL = nominal classifier prefix, APP = applicative)

The creole prototype developed here readily classifies these as semi-creoles, in comparison to Ndjuka or Haitian. Instructive is a direct comparison of Lingala with its lexifier, rare in the literature, in a sample few would consider unrepresentative. (Mufwene 1994c has independently noted that the degree of pidginization in Lingala is noticeably light.)

(16) a. Bobangi
Ngai, na-ko-ke o mboka no-tonga ndako.
Me I-FUT-go to village INF-build house
(Dzokanga 1979:6, cited in Samarin 1990:63)

b. Lingala
Ngáí, na-ko-kenda na mbóka ko-tónga ndako.
me I-FUT-go PREP village INF-build house

‘Me, I’m going to the village to build a house.’

The obvious difference in degree of reduction between these languages and their lexifiers compared to Ndjuka and Haitian and their lexifiers speaks against the claim that sociohistory is the only thing substantially distinguishing the Bantu-based contact languages from plantation creoles, and that there exists no synchronic cline of creoleness.15

Indeed, the sociohistories differ crucially: plantation creoles were created by West Africans transported across the world to encounter languages entirely unrelated to their own; the Bantu-based semi-creoles were stabilized more or less where the Bantu lexifier was spoken, largely by people from nearby regions speaking highly similar languages. What the data show is that these SOCIOHISTORICAL differences conditioned clear SYNCHRONIC differences: specifically, a difference in the degree of reduction of the lexifier.

There are surely no distinct lines between the classes creole, semi-creole, and regular language. The inherently gradient nature of language restructuring is such that it would be quite futile—and ultimately of unclear utility—to propose any metric of creoleness. This, however, no more invalidates the terms of their usefulness than the nondiscrete nature of growth invalidates the terms PUPPY and DOG. My intention is to suggest that

15 Kituba, Lingala, and Shaba Swahili have all only recently come to be spoken natively. Because in practice, creolists have tended to resist calling languages creoles until all of their speakers were native, I propose (McWhorter 1997b) the alternative term SEMI-PIDGIN as equally appropriate.
the data do not support a collapsing of creole genesis under ordinary language contact, and that creoles indeed represent the end of a cline of lexifier reduction. It is inherent to a cline that intermediate cases will arise, and inevitable of human cognition to process these cases as such (cf. Thomason 1997). A natural label for these cases will be SEMICREOLE, a term appropriately applied to Réunionnais French, Afrikaans, Kituba, Lingala, and Shaba Swahili.16 In practice, precisely where each linguist draws the terminological lines will differ according to frame of reference: this is unobjectionable and even beneficial. What this analysis puts into question is a taxonomic reconception that would eliminate the creole as a synchronic class together, and obscure the gradient nature of the process which created them.

4. CONCLUSION. The purpose of identifying a creole prototype is to demonstrate that there exists a class of languages that cluster around a set of three synchronic traits, and that these traits are not an arbitrary conglomerate, but the direct result of severely interrupted transmission of a lexifier, at too recent a date for the traits to have been undone by diachronic change. Over millennia, these traits will certainly gradually disappear, rendering these languages indistinguishable from others synchronically, their sociohistories only perceivable from sociohistorical documentation—inflections and/or tones will develop via well-documented process of language change, while after derivational mechanisms develop via similar processes, semantic drift will gradually obscure the original semantics of their markers.

As an unremarkable result of the fundamental gradience of the effects of language contact, some languages hew more closely to this prototype than others. Therefore, this analysis does not predict that every creole language will display all three of the traits in their purest form, but simply that some will (Nджuka, Haitian). Certainly and remarkably, various factors make it inevitable that some creoles will depart slightly from the prototype. Importantly, what this analysis also predicts is that even these languages will nevertheless, like the ‘pure’ cases, have also been born amidst recent pidginization followed by reconstitution into full language (Saramaccan, Guinea-Bissau Creole Portuguese), rather than having ‘regular’ histories. To the extent that a language departs further from this prototype and yet has perceptibly less inflection, lexical and syntactic tone, and semantically evolved derivation than regular languages, it is predicted that there will be lesser, but significant, pidginization in the language’s history (Réunionnais French, Lingala). Heavy inflectional affixation and/or use of tone in the functionally central usages described will be the most usual indications that a language has a regular history; in the occasional cases where these are absent, semantically evolved derivation will be a crosslinguistically defining legacy of regular, as opposed to interrupted, diachronic development.

To be sure, the fundamental insight here is a traditional one. The status of creoles as resulting from a break in the transmission of a lexifier has long been intuited by thinkers such as Hymes (1971a), Kay and Sankoff (1974), Bickerton (1977), Mühlhäusler (1980), and Seuren and Wekker (1986), and is a matter of common consensus among most workers in creole studies. The superstratists have usefully challenged this assumption in seeking to better square creole genesis theory with the actual demographic

16 Some of the discomfort with the notion of semi-creole is traceable to Bickerton’s proposal of a mathematically calculable ‘pidginization index’ (1984:176–78), ranking creoles according to degree of lexifier breakdown. While Singler (1986) convincingly showed that the formula made too many false predictions to be maintained, this simply demonstrated that the inherent messiness of sociohistory does not yield to rigid mathematical formulas. Bickerton’s central insight was correct.
trajectory of colonial plantations, in reexamining the definition of creole in view of other contact varieties, and pushing theoretical implications to stimulating extremes. In the final analysis, however, the data ultimately dictate that we maintain the conception of creoles as a unique language type, born from the pidginization and subsequent reconstitution of a lexifier, within a context of rich transfer from substrate languages.

The superstratist model of creole genesis has the ironic potential to assassinate the very subfield it addresses. The identification of a synchronically definable creole prototype confirms the insights into Universal Grammar, language change, and language contact that the study of creole languages will yield.

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