



**S**tudies in  
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# IN PRAISE OF BASTARD LANGUAGES (MODERN ENGLISH AS A CREOLE)<sup>1</sup>

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## 1. Why English does not belong to the Germanic family of languages

English does not belong to the Germanic family of languages. It is not a relative of German, Dutch or Swedish, but it is a rather close friend of pidgins and creoles, such as Tok Pisin, Kamtok, Papiamentu, and Hiri Motu. This statement, which some may find unacceptable and perhaps even offensive at first, is just one of many surprising conclusions which can be drawn from the application of an interesting new proposal in the field of linguistics: the predominance of interlinguistic contact.

The historian M. I. Finley used to teach his students not which answers to give, but rather which questions to ask. Therefore, if we apply the same logic, the very first question we need to ask here is which question to ask first. As it stands, the statement "English does not belong to the Germanic family of languages" actually begs the question, "To which family of languages does English belong?" Yet, as we will attempt to demonstrate, this is really not a question that should be asked, since English does not belong to *any family* of languages, for the simple reason that languages in general do not belong to families.

In response, many would perhaps concede the point, while arguing that the word-family is not to be taken literally in this context, that it is simply a harmless metaphor used to express the idea that one language may be simi-

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<sup>1</sup> The present work reproduces in large part the text of a lecture given in Soria (Spain) on April 13<sup>th</sup>, 2000 during the conference "Lenguas e Interculturalidad", organized by the Facultad de Traducción e Interpretación de Soria (University of Valladolid).

lar to other languages, which also happen to share a common history. However, this metaphor is, quite frankly, inappropriate and far from harmless, since it can distort, and historically has distorted the degree of affinity which exists between different languages. Furthermore, the concept of *linguistic family* is not only misleading, but also much less effective for the explanation of linguistic change and evolution than the alternative theory of interlinguistic contact—a theory which is conceptually more exact and much more productive, especially in regards to the diachronic aspects of linguistic change, which have been the central justifying pillar of the traditional concept of the *linguistic family*.

## 2. A Bit of Historiography: The Branch vs the Wave

The existence of these two different models of linguistic evolution, that of family and that of contact, has been formally recognized since at least the 19th century. When attempting to establish the developmental trajectory of Indo-European languages, the founders of historical and comparative grammar presented the various Indo-European languages as progressive and successive separations from an original base language. This theory was visually expressed by means of complex tree diagrams, in which the *trunk*, taken to represent the base language, divided into several major *branches*, which then in turn divided into ever smaller and smaller branches. This model, literally known as the Family Tree Theory (*Stammbaumtheorie*), was formulated in essentially diachronic and temporal terms. However, the limitations of this model soon became evident, especially in regards to the explanation of obvious interlinguistic influences, such as lexical *borrowing*<sup>2</sup>. To account for these influences, the evolution of languages was presented in essentially synchronic and spatial terms, which meant that innovations, the principal components of linguistic evolution, could also be transmitted waves on the surface of a pond. In fact, this model came to be known as the Wave theory (*Wellentheorie*).

For the majority of researchers, these two models were understood to be complementary, allowing for both vertical and horizontal propagation of linguistic innovation, by means of inheritance and interlinguistic contact,

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<sup>2</sup> Another unfortunate metaphor. Languages do not "borrow" anything from other languages. They simply take and use certain elements, without depriving the other language of anything. That is, they simply "copy".

respectively<sup>3</sup>. However, this theoretical complementarity was generally not put into practice. The tree model was far more widely applied, while the pond model was either totally ignored or reserved as a poor substitute or secondary solution for marginal and atypical cases, since it was believed that horizontally produced linguistic change was merely superficial and did not affect the true *heart* or *spirit* of the language. Metaphorically speaking, the pond was thought to be too shallow to transmit any important core vocabulary. As a result, the argument of linguistic contact was only applied to 'light-weight' lexical residue: scattered words and phrases that fell into the pond and created brief ripples on the surface, before floating off to some linguistic backwater.

### 3. A Trunk with Many Branches

The relatively infrequent application of the contact, wave or pond model was motivated by a number of factors. First of all, many linguists truly believed that the majority of linguistic innovations, and certainly the most important and fundamental ones, were transmitted vertically by inheritance<sup>4</sup>. These would also, of course, include changes in morphology, which was considered at that time to be the essence of language. Vocabulary, on the other hand, was fallaciously thought to be superficial and therefore more easily copied, although we now know that everything in a language<sup>5</sup>, including morphology, can be copied<sup>6</sup>.

In contrast, the *tree* and family model met with much more success among linguists, in large part due to the compatibility of these two metaphors and the intuitive appeal of the family *tree*—an equally metaphorical concept which elevated languages to the realm of biblical bloodlines, heroic lineages and royal dynasties. However, this new trend also led to a much more rigid and linear view of linguistic development, in which every lan-

<sup>3</sup> It can also be observed that, in literate societies, contact can also be produced diachronically when a linguistic element is taken from a previous stage. In contrast, inheritance, by definition, is always diachronic.

<sup>4</sup> Fuster (1995: 114): "el problema fundamental en la representación genética de las lenguas indo-europeas mediante diagramas arbóreos fue no calcular las consecuencias del contacto".

<sup>5</sup> For example, the majority of languages contain xenophonemes, phonemes which come from other languages and which have been incorporated within the existing linguistic heritage. There are abundant examples in Sala (1998: 61-128). For obvious reasons related to the regular number of units of linguistic levels, in relative terms of assimilation, the copying of 5 phonemes could result in 500 items of vocabulary. The copying of lexis, therefore, is not only more perceptible, but also much more tolerable.

<sup>6</sup> There are good examples of morphological and syntactic copying in Sala (1998: 129-228). Another case which can be cited is that of the language spoken by Armenian gypsies. The grammatical structure is Armenian, while the lexical base is Gypsy (Sala 1998: 39); More documentation in Dixon 1997: 20-22 and *passim*.

guage had to be assigned a particular place or *branch* within the linguistic family tree. Just as one had to know that Herakles was the son of Zeus (and not the son of Abraham, Julius Caesar or Napoleon), one also had to know the exact parentage of a given language to find its proper place within the larger linguistic family. And just as male, female, first-born and second-born children could not change their places within royal families, so languages could not jump from branch to branch or spontaneously separate themselves from one family tree and splice themselves onto another. Such erratic, unpredictable behaviour was fine for monkeys that spent their time jumping randomly from branch to branch and from tree to tree, but languages at that time were not usually compared to monkeys.

#### 4. The Monkey and the King

Having said that, this language-as-monkey metaphor, although not without its attendant complications, is actually quite opportune for the purposes of our discussion, since it leads us to an interesting paradox, implicit in the traditional *arborescent* perspective in linguistics, especially in regards to Indo-European languages. The family tree approach actually borrowed a number of ideas from Darwinian evolutionary theory, although perhaps not the most appropriate ones, since languages are not living organisms, like monkeys, tortoises, or iguanas, that are born to grow, reproduce, and die. That is, languages are not biology, or at least not exclusively. At the same time, traditional linguists tended to ignore other aspects of Darwin's theories, in particular those related to mankind's *arboreal* origins and gradual *de-arboreal* evolution.

Operating as they often do with rather late chronologies, traditional historical linguists generally took for granted that *the family tree* was the basic model to be applied and the most logical explanation for linguistic evolution. From the earliest ages of antiquity, from the Bronze Age, or at most the Copper Age, onwards, there seemed to have been the most luxurious blooming of new linguistic branches and buds, a veritable explosion of language diversity. Further confirmation of the model was also found in historical times in the supposed *fragmentation* of Latin into the various romance languages. This view of linguistic change tended to perpetuate the supposed predominance of inheritance over contact, of the tree model over that of the pond, of family and blood over proximity and contagion, of genetics over ecology. Traditional historical linguistics could not even contem-

plate the thornier questions —coming back once more to Finley— of whether this same situation had been valid for the majority of human linguistic history<sup>7</sup>, of whether inheritance had always prevailed over contact.

One of the major problems in answering these questions is that it is quite difficult to find a model case in which both inheritance and contact have had equal opportunities to exert their influences upon a given linguistic population. In a small, compact, isolated community, such as that which existed on Iceland for centuries, we could control for the effects of inheritance, but there would be little chance for any alloglottic or intercultural contact. Similarly, in a multi-lingual association of translators and interpreters, we might be able to observe the effects of contact, but not the role of inheritance, for obvious reasons. What we need is a wide, open space and a long period of time where we can offer similar conditions to both inheritance and contact. Under such ideal circumstances, if distinct linguistic families failed to develop, we could then safely conclude that contact rather than inheritance is the dominant factor in linguistic evolution.

## 5. The White Glove: Australia

Australia is one of the few places in the world that meet the necessary requirements of space and time for research into linguistic contact, since the continent was populated under extremely stable conditions for at least 50,000 years, without any significant external contact before the arrival of European explorers and settlers. As a result, Australia has experienced perhaps the world's longest period of cultural and ecological equilibrium<sup>8</sup>. What is more, according to specialists, all of the various aboriginal languages of Australia can be said to constitute a single linguistic family, albeit a rather special one, with its numerous members existing under very diverse circumstances.

<sup>7</sup> According to various measures, there is a general consensus that around 40,000 BCE man was completely capable of speaking languages roughly similar to those of the present-day. Paleoanthropological studies have demonstrated that the organs involved in speech, including the brain, were perfectly prepared to handle such a task at that time (Mühler 1990: 115). The emergence of ornamentation, the first evidence of artistic expression, or the developments in stone technology are clear indications that man also possessed the symbolic capacity necessary for speaking a language with a level of conventionality and symbolism similar to that of today. It is therefore perfectly justifiable to operate upon the basis of the hypothesis that early man could have begun to speak "modern" languages, at least some 35,000 years before the Bronze Age.

<sup>8</sup> See Dixon (1997: 68). In Dixon's opinion, languages would evolve very slowly during stable periods of equilibrium, and very quickly during periods in which there was an *interruption of equilibrium* (1997: 70). The periods of equilibrium would be long, and the interruptions brief (1997: 4, 67). During periods of equilibrium, linguistic diffusion would prevail and there would be a tendency towards convergence, while inheritance would be more predominant during periods of interruption, leading to linguistic divergence (1997: 5; 70ff).

To begin with, the aboriginal languages of Australia do not fit easily into the same kind of tree diagram as the Indo-European languages supposedly do. We say *supposedly* because, when examined carefully, a diagram of the traditional Indo-European genealogy does not really look much like a typical tree, with intermediate forks, and then branches and then twigs. In fact, it looks more like a candelabrum, or perhaps a palm tree, with one central trunk that divides all at once into at least ten major branches, without any intermediate forkings at all (Dixon 1997: 28; 53). In addition, the actual placement of certain groups, such as the Anatolian languages, is extremely problematic. In the end, the often puzzling and somewhat arbitrary distribution of more ancient branches and sub-branches of the Indo-European family tree—and nearly all possible combinations have been postulated—would seem to be yet another indication of the inadequacy of the traditional language family model<sup>9</sup>.

In the case of the aboriginal languages of Australia, where typical trees and branches cannot be located, the pond or wave model is actually much more useful. In Australia, “if two languages come into contact, and there is little vocabulary in common, they will gradually borrow in both directions and this figure will rise until it reaches about 50%, where it will stabilise” (Dixon 1997: 26). In fact, the majority of the Australian languages share “a 50% vocabulary score with at least one neighbouring language” (Dixon 1997: 27 n14). These areas of overlap would seem to correspond to obvious ecological and geographic parameters, such as proximity or ease of communication, since cultural factors were comparatively uniform for the whole continent. In addition, there was a proportionally large number of different languages for a very small number of inhabitants. However, upon examination, it seems that what we actually have is not a number of radically different languages, but a long chain of closely related dialects and transitional forms, running along the lines of communication between different areas.

This *concatenation* or succession of true dialects can also be found in another geographical area with an ecosystem that is quite different from that of Australia: the archipelago of the New Hebrides or Vanuatu (Tryon 1999: 112-6). Consequently, the basic principle of linguistic concatenation, which is reminiscent of the metaphor of waves moving outward on the surface of a pond, would not seem to be a direct result of geography and ecology, since

<sup>9</sup> *Smiliter* Dixon (1997: 29): “the family tree model, while appropriate and useful in many circumstances, is not applicable everywhere and cannot explain every type of relationship between languages”; and Trask (1999: 173): “I am beginning to have a few doubts about the general validity of our venerable family-tree model of linguistic descent, and I am beginning to suspect that we have underestimated the importance of diffusion across language boundaries”. Naturally and by their very nature languages do not respect political boundaries.

we can find almost exactly the same pattern in the dry plains of the Australian continental inlands, as in the wet valleys of the Micronesian coasts of the New Hebrides. However, the circumstances under which this principle operates are obviously different, as are the end results of its application. For example, where there is less intercommunication, there should be a greater average of linguistic variety.

Upon their arrival in Australia, the first Europeans were surprised by the large number of aboriginal languages, which at that time could be classified into roughly 200 different groups, with approximately 3 variations per group. Similar circumstances were encountered on the island of New Guinea, which is much smaller than Australia (800,000 km<sup>2</sup>), but has a notably larger population (approximately 5 million inhabitants). The aboriginal inhabitants of New Guinea speak more than 800 different languages, which gives us a ratio of 8 languages for every 50,000 inhabitants. By manner of comparison, the ratio in Europe is one language for every 10 million inhabitants.

Statistics similar to those of Australia and New Guinea can also be found in other island groups. For example, in the archipelago of New Caledonia, we find over 30 languages for every 50,000 inhabitants, and in the archipelago of the New Hebrides we find more than 100 languages for 150,000 inhabitants, with a resulting ratio of 1 language for every 1,500 inhabitants (Lynch-Tepahae 1999: 278). Nevertheless, many of these languages are spoken by fewer than 300 native speakers, and only a very small number of them are spoken by more than 3,000 people. The only exception would be Beach-la-Mar, the official language of the islands, which is a pidgin language based on English and spoken by practically the entire population. The rest of the languages spoken are either Austronesian or Polynesian (Tryon 1999: 109). These ratios, although they may seem surprising at first, are actually not all that unusual for hypo-technological societies. In fact, languages rarely reach a total of more than a million native speakers in the absence of a formal state organization or centralized administration. However, since all of these figures correspond to documented situations, it cannot be argued that one particular situation is more *natural* than another. Each figure is natural and normal in its own particular cultural and ecological context. What would be surprising, however, would be to find European ratios in the New Hebrides, or vice-versa.

In any case, it would seem that the traditional arboreal model is clearly insufficient to explain such wide differences in the ratios of languages per number of inhabitants, since there are no demonstrated *genetic* factors that



would impel Papuans or New Caledonians to speak more languages than Europeans. To date, no one has discovered a gene that encodes or transmits specific information about one particular language, and it seems very unlikely that one will ever be found. If such a gene *did* exist, we could expect to find cases of Spanish toddlers babbling in the Celtiberian language of their ancestors, or Italian children who spontaneously begin to spout words and phrases in Latin. Similarly, if specific languages were genetically coded, it should be easier for a child to learn a certain language simply because his/her great-great-grandfather was a native speaker. Obviously, no such cases have ever been documented. On the other hand, what we do tend to find are cases of generalized linguistic pathologies caused by birth defects, cranial traumas or degenerative diseases (Bernárdez 1999: 182ss)<sup>10</sup>. Therefore, it seems more logical to assume that the enormous linguistic diversity of New Guinea has less to do with genetics, and more to do with external factors, such as the abruptness of the country's geography, with its deep, forested valleys and its peaks of more than 4,000 meters, which have historically impeded contact and have led to hostilities between neighbouring groups<sup>11</sup>.

## 6. A radical application: different languages, distant languages

Distance and geographical barriers reduce the amount of contact between different linguistic groups and it has been observed that in general "a language with no immediate neighbours is likely to change relatively slowly" (Dixon 1997: 9). The theory of linguistic contact and diffusion also predicts that, in circumstances which *do* allow for cultural communication, brusque changes are most easily explained as chronological oddities. That is, the fact that present-day or historically neighbouring languages differ from each other more than current or historical contact would lead us to expect, is normally owed to the fact that the linguistic contact in question has occurred at an inopportune moment, or has not continued over a sufficient period of

<sup>10</sup> There are also no cases of bilingual parents whose children are born with a genetic predisposition for speaking a mix of both languages, for example, with the grammar of one and the lexis of the other. This point seems obvious but it is often overlooked. Individual languages are not transmitted to a child in a 50-50 split from his/her mother and father because they are not encoded in their DNA, once again we must underline the fact that individual languages and language varieties are not biologically or genetically based.

<sup>11</sup> In honor of the etymological origin of the word "rival", we can mention the case of the mutually hostile tribes living along the banks of the Yetni river — a formidable natural barrier which can only be crossed with great difficulty. However, in neighbouring valleys, such as the Hiagaima and the Iлага, where communication and contact are relatively unimpeded, the tribes of the area practise exogamy and the dialects are mutually intelligible (Harrer 1976: 172). It would be more surprising to find ancestral enemies living in well-communicated valleys and speaking similar dialects, or tribes that practice exogamy with alloglottic neighbours who live on the other side of a dangerous river.

time. In much the same way, this theory predicts that if we were to take 10 native speakers of 10 different languages and abandon them on a desert island, each of them would end up speaking one common language, and under conditions of absolute equality, this new language would theoretically exhibit an equal balance of the various characteristics of the 10 original languages<sup>12</sup>. A corollary of this theory would explain the existence of different linguistic groups as the result of linguistic isolation. That is to say, isolation is what provokes the formation of different language groups, and not vice-versa<sup>13</sup>.

Contact then, is the most determining factor in linguistic convergence, while separation leads to linguistic divergence. Basque, for example, should not be considered an isolated language because it does not have any modern linguistic *relatives*, but rather the other way around: it does not have any modern linguistic *relatives* because it was historically isolated from its present-day neighbours. As a result, we can conclude that different languages are generally distant or isolated languages. In this respect, some degree of correlation between language and genetics is predictable, since the processes of contact and separation are central to both linguistic and genetic evolution<sup>14</sup>. The wide expansion of the Indo-European languages which linguists found so noteworthy in the 19<sup>th</sup> century is not anomalous or strange, nor is it necessarily the result of invasions by warrior peoples, such as Atilla and the Huns, in the specific case of Hungary. The anomalous cases are the isolated languages, like Hungarian or Basque, that have no apparent *relatives*, which leads us to conclude that their linguistic isolation is likely to be a product of a spatial and temporal separation<sup>15</sup>.

<sup>12</sup> In fact, this is similar to what is believed to have happened on the island of Erromango (Vanuatu), where 5 or 6 languages gave way to one new language, which seemed to be combine elements of two of the original languages (Lynch-Tepahae 1991: 278, 280).

<sup>13</sup> Linguistic isolation can also lead to social and political isolation. For example, in the case of Catalanian, there has been a proposal to replace the word *balonmà*, which is very similar to the Spanish word *balonmano*, with the English equivalent *handball* (with foreign phonemes and phonotaxis). The need to distinguish oneself from others also tends to manifest itself rather abruptly in spelling changes. In the case of Dutch, it was decided to write the sound /k/ as <ck>, rather than as <ck>, which is how it is written in German. At the same time, the Flemish prefer to use <ck> rather than <c> to differentiate themselves from the Walloons (Coulmas 1991: 260). Writing tends to be less susceptible to convergence than the spoken language. Conspicuous examples of this would be the languages of Serb/Croatian and Hind/Urdu. In these two cases, the same language is spoken by both groups, but it is written differently, and the speakers of these languages also show little interest in mutual standardization.

<sup>14</sup> Cavalli-Sforza (1999: 219): "A lo largo de la expansión del hombre moderno, regiones y continentes nuevos fueron ocupados por grupos que se separaron de sus comunidades de origen [...] El aislamiento de los numerosos grupos que se formaron dio lugar a dos fenómenos inevitables: la aparición de diferencias genéticas y la aparición de diferencias lingüísticas. Los dos fenómenos han seguido su propio camino [...] pero la historia de las separaciones, que son causa de la diferenciación, es común a ambos".

<sup>15</sup> But, of course, Basque and Hungarian are not free from contact. In Basque, for example, we can find numerous examples of copying, first from Celtic languages, then from Latin, and later from Romance languages (see Lakarra 1995: 189-200).

## 7. Negative Consequences of the Family Tree Theory

Whether consciously or unconsciously, the view of linguistic change as primarily a product of inheritance, with only the occasional influence of contact, has historically led, in our modest opinion, to a series of colossal errors. For example, a superior status was generally given to languages with developed writing systems<sup>16</sup> and a documented body of literature, while lesser value was placed on purely oral languages. A developed grammar with explicit rules and hundreds of documented exceptions was also taken to be the hallmark of a 'real' language. As a result, any languages which met those criteria were considered to be more 'complete' and therefore 'superior', while those which did not measure up were relegated to the second-class status of 'primitive languages', 'inferior dialects' or 'imperfect versions' of other more 'correct' languages. This rather unfair situation led some proponents of more dialectalized languages to set up their own sets of rules and standards and to regularize their languages at all costs. Political and practical pressures have also encouraged some groups to create one single, uniform state language. The underlying message here is that unilingualism is more natural than multilingualism<sup>17</sup>.

In consonance with these attitudes, there has been a tendency to view languages as essentially static entities which may at times be disturbed or corrupted by catastrophic changes, and comparisons have often been drawn between 'legitimate' and 'illegitimate' languages, especially in regards to lexical and morphological 'purity'. Such comparisons also gave rise to the ideology of 'one language, one people' — a ridiculous proposal from a linguistic point of view, but one which has had far-reaching and often tragic implications around the world. In such a restricted, binomial system of classification, all languages must be solomonically assigned to one linguistic family and one particular nation, or else coarsely labelled as regional dialects of one language or another. However, there are always certain languages that resist being pigeonholed. For example, should we consider the languages of the Canary Islands to be dialects of Portuguese or dialects of Spanish? Is

<sup>16</sup> In fact, the original Greek term γραμματική actually means *literatura*. The writing of a language generally entails a loss of important contextual cues, such as gestures, volume, tone and intonation and indirectly make it necessary to organize the written language in a much more precise way (Bernárdez 1999: 217).

<sup>17</sup> Sala (1998: 12): "la actual visión de los lingüistas de considerar el unilingüismo como regla y el bilingüismo o plurilingüismo como fenómeno excepcional, no concuerda con la realidad".

Aranés to be labelled as Catalanian or Gascon? How much ink, or worse, has been spilled in the resolution of such Bizantine questions? For languages, of course, political borders make about as much sense as they do for ants, moles, birds or even forests, as Wislawa Szymborska, winner of the Nobel Prize, reminds us so ingeniously in her poem *Psalm* ("Oh, how porous are the boundaries of man-made states!" *et quod sequitur*).

## 8. How the anomalous became normal

In linguistics, the generally negative attitude towards the inclusion of foreign elements in a given language is patently evident from the number of derogatory terms used to refer to this phenomenon, such as *babble*, *chapurraeo*<sup>18</sup>, *jargon*, or *patuá(s)*, although many of these so-called 'mixed languages' do not even have an officially recognized name, a fact which is often a result of their social and scientific marginality<sup>19</sup>. Condemned for their lack of 'pedigree', these 'contaminated' or 'koiné' languages have only recently begun to receive more attention, while in the past they were generally viewed by traditional linguists<sup>20</sup> as interesting oddities, anomalies, anecdotes, or linguistic 'loose threads' to be tied up at some later date.

The first signs of a change in attitude came with the recognition of linguistic substrates and their effects on language development. At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, G.I. Ascoli was perhaps the first to address the issue seriously, and after him came the linguistic leagues (*Sprachbünde*). Before the

<sup>18</sup> In the North-East part of the province of Teruel in Spain, there is a language which is traditionally known as "chapurreao" (= babble) among its native speakers. The advantage of this name is that native speakers do not have to solomonically choose between calling their language Catalanian or Valencian.

<sup>19</sup> For obvious reasons, this is typical of creole languages; let us take for example the creoles of Cabo Verde, Casamance (Senegal), Copper, Guinea-Bissó, Haití, Jamaica, Luisiana, Malaca, Mauricio, Reunión, Seychelles, Tugu (Java). At the same time, in the absence of an official name, a language may have many names. The Portuguese creole of Malaca is called *bahasa geragau*, *malqueiro*, *malaquenho*, *malaquense*, *malaqués*, *papia cristao*, *português basu* and *serani* (Cunha-Cintra 1985: 16). Pidgin languages, on the other hand, are characterized by abundant copying and linguistic creativity. It has often been said that the word *pidgin* is actually an adapted form of the English word *business*. In the New Hebrides, the name of the pidgin *Beach-la-Mar* (also called *Bislama*) comes from Portuguese *bicho do mar*, which means 'creature from the sea'. *Police-motu* in New Guinea comes from the English word *police* and the local word *motu*. In Guayana and Surinam, the name of *Taquitaqui* comes from the English *talk*. *Rusenorske* was once also called *Moja Pa Tvoja* or 'my (language) in yours' in which *pa* is Norwegian and both *moja* and *tvoja* are Russian. The pidgin forms of Sango were called *sango ti turugu* or 'Soldier Sango', and *sango ti gala* or 'Market Sango' (Walker-Samarin 1997: 863). A simplified version of Malaysian is also called *pasar malayu* or 'Market Malaysian'. *Sabir* comes from the Spanish *saber* ('to know') and *Lingua Franca* means the language of the Franks, referring in general to the population of Western Europe for the non-European Mediterraneans during the Middle Ages.

<sup>20</sup> The hybrid name of *linguist* is not really all that appropriate. The patrimonial Latin term would actually be \**dingua* (cf. *tongue* in English). The change to *ll* comes from the Sabine dialects, while the *-ist* suffix is Greek. Therefore, these language purists should more correctly be known as *dinguers* (from \**dinguarii*), not as *linguists*.

Second World War, N.S. Trubeckoj y R. Jakobson were among the first to call for the study of these linguistic alliances, which spanned neighbouring territories and different ethnic groups. One such example is the Balkan Peninsula, where Albanian, Greek, Rumanian and various other Slavic languages, especially Bulgarian and Macedonian, clearly share common features of phonology, morphology, syntax, lexis and semantics. Quite some time later<sup>21</sup>, these were followed by creole languages<sup>22</sup>, considered by the more orthodox to be 'deviant' languages, or 'adolescent' languages that had not yet reached maturity, or 'civilized' languages in the mouths of 'savages' who were incapable of speaking them correctly. Finally, attention shifted to pidgin languages<sup>23</sup>, first viewed as disordered, 'infant' languages that hadn't yet reached even the adolescent stage of development attributed to the creoles<sup>24</sup>.

What is perhaps most extraordinary about pidgins and creoles is that they are the only languages whose *births* we have actually witnessed. Some of the youngest linguistic toddlers on the linguistic scene would be Ebonics and Spanglish in the United States. Unfortunately, there were no modern-day linguists in medieval England to take field notes about exactly how the Saxons combined their Germanic dialects with Celtic, Norman or Latin elements, but we would be ill-advised to assume that the development of pidgins and creoles is an exclusively "modern-day" phenomena. It would be more logical to assume that these hybrids have always existed and have even proliferated<sup>25</sup>, although under very different circumstances. In this respect, it is also important to mention that contact between distant languages was less common in ancient times, and even more so where communications were especially difficult or less developed. As a result, linguistic convergence between neighbouring languages, along the lines of the Greek koiné model, would have been much more extensive.

<sup>21</sup> It could be said that, until the work of Thomson and Kaufmann (1988), language blending was still considered to be something of an oddity.

<sup>22</sup> For example, Bozal in Cuba, Chabacano or Zamoanguéño in the Philippines, Krio in Equatorial Guinea, Gambia and Sierra Leone, Fa de Ambó in Anobón, Embugu or Maha in Tanzania, Sramaccam and Sranan Tongo in Surinam, Gulag in the United States, Palenquero in Colombia, Papiamentu in the Antilles, or Sango in the Centro-African Republic.

<sup>23</sup> For example, Fanakalo in South Africa, Michif in Canada and the United States, Rusenorsk in the Arctic, or Turcu in Chad. In Africa alone, we can find more than thirty pidgins and creoles (Wolff 2000: 326-8).

<sup>24</sup> Here the biological metaphor is acceptable, at least in the sense that languages can develop from pidgins into creoles, as was the case of sango (Walker-Samarin 1997: 861). At least potentially, all pidgins can develop into first or maternal languages.

<sup>25</sup> Moreno (2000: 70): "Las lenguas criollas han existido siempre".

## 9. The Time Factor

In the remote past, it would seem that there were no massive conquests, colonizations, emigrations, or expeditions, or else these occurred to a much lesser degree than what is traditionally supposed. If modern English is to be classified as an Indo-European language, it is because only Indo-European languages played the most important roles in its development, because in all other respects, English displays the prototypical characteristics of a creole language: lexical elements from multiple origins, morphological copies<sup>26</sup>, and both a simple and historically simplified grammar<sup>27</sup>, governed by a notably lax set of rules<sup>28</sup>, rapid evolution, and a tendency towards morpho-syntactic isolation, to name just a few examples. The lexical basis of English is largely Latin and Anglo-Saxon (approximately 25% of the latter), yet its phonology is typically Celtic, and here and there we can still detect some resistant elements of German morphology. Obviously, under these conditions, it would be incredibly simplistic to say that English is a Germanic language — at the very most we can say that *some of it once came from* a Germanic language. At the same time, it would be inexact to call English a Latin language, and a gross exaggeration to call it Celtic. Baudouin de Courtenay (1984: 365) considered that English was as mixed (*mieszany*) a language as Rumanian. In the end, the most probable explanation is that English is a creole, or to be more exact, it began its life as a creole, and later came to be recognized as a distinct language in its own right.

English also evolved under conditions which are now regarded as stereotypical of creole languages, including: development in plurilingual communities (including plurilingualism in the substrate language) and scarce access to the language of the superstrate (see Lefebvre 1998: 1-3). English even shares the typically creole trademarks of maritime or insular surroundings<sup>29</sup> and an historical isolation from neighbouring groups. In addition, it would also appear that, as in the case of so many creoles, a mixture of diatopic, di-

<sup>26</sup> For example, English took the personal pronoun *they* from Scandinavian in much the same way as Papiamentu took the equivalent pronoun *nan* from an African base language (Munteanu 1996: 295).

<sup>27</sup> For example, medieval English omitted the grammatical distinctions for gender, as does Papiamentu.

<sup>28</sup> Note the use of 'to do' in negative sentences and transparent tense formation *à la créole*. Leiss (2000: 232): "Charakteristisch für Kreolsprachen ist die Herausbildung transparent kodierter Verbalkategorien wie Aspekt, Tempus und Modus [...] Es liegt nahe, die massiven Umbauprozesse wie man sie in der Geschichte der romanischen, slavischen und germanischen Sprachen beobachten kann, mit Kreolisierungprozessen zu vergleichen".

<sup>29</sup> Creoles on the islands of Cabo Verde, Copper, Cuba, the Philippines, Guinea (Anobón, Príncipe, Santo Tomé), Jamaica, Mauricio, Pitcairn, Reunion, Seychelles... In particular, the *two* varieties of creole on Cabo Verde are known as *Criollo de Barlovento* and *Criollo de Sotavento* ('Windward Creole' and 'Leeward Creole'). It is also logical that pidgins are somewhat more typical in archipelagos (Solomon, New Hebrides). Sabir was also spoken principally among sailors and in maritime ports during the Middle Ages. Even today, spontaneous pidgins are spoken among the poly-ethnic crews of merchant ships.

astratic and diastylistic elements, such as differences in register (oral vs written; lay vs religious; formal vs colloquial) were involved in the process of linguistic fusion that eventually gave rise to Modern English (see Fuster 1997: 199-213).

Similar patterns of linguistic divergence and convergence can also be found among other modern languages. For example, the majority of Spaniards can understand Galician almost perfectly, but both Spaniards and Galicians may have problems understanding the variety of Portuguese spoken in Lisbon, despite the fact that Galician purportedly belongs to the same linguistic family as Portuguese. At the very most, we should say that it *once belonged* to the same family, and only if we mean that at some time in the past these two languages came into close cultural contact with one another. In much the same way, Valencian and Provençal would have been much more similar to each other a few centuries ago, although one of them now appears to be more similar to Spanish while the other seems to take more after French. Looking farther afield, we can also cite the example of Okinawan, a dialect of Japanese which became a separate language in the 6~century, after a prolonged period of isolation. However, in the 20th century, under the influence of renewed contact with Japanese, Okinawan reverted to its original status as a dialect (Dixon 1997: 60ss).

## 10. Ecology vs Genetics

In the study of Indo-European languages, the forces of academic dogma and/or inertia, have historically imposed the model of inheritance and linguistic families, although contact and diffusion now appear to be the determining factors in linguistic evolution and diversification. What is more, the contact model allows us to include all language varieties without resorting to discriminatory classifications that differentiate between 'real' or 'pure-bred' languages and 'corrupt' polyglottic languages. Contact helps to explain these apparently anomalous 'jumps' from one branch or family tree to another, and can actually subsume the inheritance model. If there is a linguistic family, then there is pristine contact. on the other hand, it seems logical to find greater diversity within a linguistic group in heavily forested or poorly communicated areas than in flat, open territories<sup>30</sup>. Similarly, it is normal to

<sup>30</sup> Dixon (1997: 89) with examples from Australia, New Guinea, and South America. Areas with homogeneous ecosystems and good intercommunication are linguistically more homogeneous than those areas with heterogeneous ecosystems and difficult intercommunication.



find a greater degree of linguistic isolation in geographically remote areas, such as the Caucasus mountains, or on islands like Iceland or Japan, where there is little or no alloglottic contact<sup>31</sup>. Where this postulate does not hold true, it is most probably due to Dixonian “interruptions of equilibrium”, such as epidemia, colonization, war, invasion, or massive migration.

As was stated earlier, languages fall within the sphere of ecology, rather than genetics, and are best viewed as examples of environmental adaptation; and the same is also true for genetics, lest we forget. In other words, languages are motivated by necessity, and as Tovar (1990: 29) pointed out, a language is not differentiated in its ‘life’ from other aspects of culture, and as an essentially cultural trait, language is open to cultural diffusion (Dixon 1997: 19). For that reason, when it comes to languages, nothing is more natural than bastardy and hybridization, because languages tend to adopt in order to adapt — that is, they will adopt whatever is necessary in order to adapt to their cultural surroundings, and they will be as pure or impure, as legitimate or illegitimate, as chaste or promiscuous as the circumstances warrant.

## 11. Bastardy vs Legitimacy

Individual languages are not genetically based and as a result they do not pass on a fixed glottogenetic heritage to their descendants. On the contrary, languages can trade their linguistic heritage indiscriminately with neighbours and friends, as well as with descendants, and can even provoke intergenerational linguistic changes in their ‘parents’ or ‘forebears’. Languages are also not restricted to only one linguistic family until the end of their days. Since making oneself understood to family, friends and neighbours is one of the most natural of human tendencies, it seems logical that one of the most important vehicles for linguistic change would be social contact and intercultural communication, expressed linguistically through the processes of pidginization and creolization. If this is the case, then perhaps the most ‘natural’ languages of all would not be the supposedly legitimate or pure ones, but rather the bastards — the pidgins and creoles<sup>32</sup>.

<sup>31</sup> The degree of ecological dependence could be even greater if we consider the theory proposed by Cartford (1997: 62f, 65, 70f), who proposes that there is a connection between implusive consonants and tropical heat, and between ejective consonants and altitude.

<sup>32</sup> Certainly the traditional difference between them — the creole’s status as a mother tongue — or other technical differences which can be described, do not constitute fundamental divisions, since the processes involved in their genesis or formation are essentially the same (Lefebvre 1998: 4 and 15-29 *passim*; 1999: 139).



For this very reason, pidgins and creoles should be reserved a special place in the field of linguistic research, since they most clearly reflect the essential characteristics of human languages. When two or more languages are superimposed, the more unusual or idiosyncratic elements tend to be eliminated, while the common or universal—the most simple—elements are reinforced (McWhorter 2001: 125-66). Free from the normative pressures of prescriptive grammar, pidgins and creoles can also be more creative and spontaneous, and since they tend to evolve more quickly, they allow us to verify new hypotheses in a much more time-effective manner<sup>33</sup>. However, to be completely fair to other languages, we should remember that all languages are essentially equal in regards to the processes that govern their genesis and evolution<sup>34</sup> as well as their other principal characteristics. Only the dates of birth and the rates of growth are different. Some languages will be “younger” than others, and some will “grow up” faster, but in the end, all languages are bastards<sup>35</sup>. And quite naturally so.

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<sup>33</sup> For example, the traditional theory of the linguistic spiral which anticipates the evolution of isolating languages to agglutinative languages could be verified in examples from Beach-la-Mar, where prepositions give way to prefixes, as *log aus* => *l-aus* ‘at home’ (Whaley 1997: 136ff). To reach similar conclusions, this seems much more feasible and economical than examining the evolution of Egyptian over the course of millennia, for example (Hodge 1970: 17).

<sup>34</sup> Moreno (2000: 71): “no encontramos ni una sola característica de las lenguas criollas que no esté en las lenguas consideradas no mixtas”. *Similiter* Lefebvre (1999: 139). For example, compound expressions in Haitian Creole such as *dèyè-kou* ‘nape’, from the French *derrière* and *cou* — ‘behind neck’), *kalbas-tèt* ‘cranium’, from the French *calebasse* and *tête* — ‘pumpkin head’), *plim-je* ‘eyelash’, from the French *plume* and *œil* — ‘feather eye’), *po-beach* ‘lip’, from the French *peau* and *bouche* — ‘skin mouth’; Lefebvre 1998: 335). These are comparable to compounds in Cayapa (Ecuador), such as *nebulu* ‘knee’, from *ne* and *bulu* — ‘leg ball/head’), or *ryabalu* ‘elbow’, from *rya* and *bulu* — ‘arm ball/head’; Bernárdez 1999: 204). The use of a form of ‘give’ for the *dativ*e in the Portuguese Creole of Santo Tomé (*da mu* — ‘me, for me’; Moreno, 2000: 72) is comparable to the same construction in Yay, an isolating Austric language (*haŋku* ‘me, for me’; Whaley 1997: 130).

<sup>35</sup> Moreno (2000: 73): “La mayoría de las lenguas del mundo presentan algún grado de mezcla [...] todas las lenguas del mundo son criollas”. Fuster (1995: 115): “En realidad, el argumento de la pureza no es propiamente lingüístico [...] las lenguas son sólo relativamente cercanas o lejanas [...] Admitamos el hecho incontestable de que el crecimiento léxico mediante recursos ajenos es una constante en la historia de las lenguas”. Yes, let us admit this point, but not only for lexis.

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