Estandarización de lenguas criollas y la educación en comunidades criollas

PROBLEMS IN THE STANDARDIZATION OF CREOLE LANGUAGES [4]

PROBLEMAS EN LA ESTANDARIZACIÓN DE LAS LENGUAS CRIOLLAS

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Resumen

La autonomía estructural de una lengua criolla sobre la lengua de prestigio de una comunidad dada, juega un papel muy importante cuando se trata de la estandarización del criollo. En la mayor parte de las comunidades de habla bilingüe o multilingüe, existen esfuerzos hacia la estandarización del criollo, especialmente allí donde se presentan situaciones de diglosia. En cambio, la ausencia de cualquier actividad de planificación o estandarización lingüísticas es patente en situaciones en que existe un continuo criollo. Lo que puede cambiar en estos últimos casos es la apreciación del criollo como vehículo de comunicación y la expansión de sus dominios de uso.

Otras diferencias entre situaciones de autonomía del criollo y de continuo criollo respecto a la estandarización son que en los últimos casos, la creación de una ortografía resulta más difícil y que casi no existen obras de referencias que puedan servir de gramática normativa.

En algunos casos, las políticas lingüísticas pro-criollas se han basado en el concepto de códigos restringidos de Bernstein (1971), sin considerar que presentar los criollos correspondientes como sistemas deficientes les hace más daño que bien. En gran medida, la complejización de los idiomas criollos no es una cuestión del paso del pidgin al criollo postulado por la criollística tradicional, sino de la expansión funcional de los criollos. Sin embargo, los criollos caribeños también poseen por ejemplo una gran cantidad de conjunciones subordinativas originales.

En esta exposición, parto del principio de que la estandarización es un proceso complejo que afecta no solamente su forma y su estructura lingüísticas sino abarca también lo social y cognitivo. Además, las relaciones entre lengua estándar, lengua nacional y lengua oficial quedan por resolver en muchas comunidades de habla criolla.

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4 Text written by Angela Bartens based on the recording of the presentation of Mervyn Alleyne.

Problems in the Standardization of Creole Languages

There is a clear correlation, in creole-speaking societies, between some kind of linguistically measured structural distinctiveness or autonomy, on the one hand, and speakers' perception of such autonomy and distinctiveness on the other. Language planning activities —of which standardization is a major component— also figure into this correlation. It is also clear that the feature autonomy in the Stewart (1962) and Fishman (1967) functional typology does not apply uniformly for all languages called creole. (This suggests that "creole" may no longer be properly one single type in a functional typology.) In bi- or multilingual situations (e.g., the ABC islands and Suriname), and particularly in the latter, there is a great deal of language planning activity, and the standardization process is well under way. But this process is still rather tentative in Suriname because the ethnic character of Sranan inhibits its role as a national language. St. Lucia and Dominica both have very strong creole revaluation movements although they are not officially supported (except some years ago when a politically progressive party was in power in St. Lucia). All diglossia situations show strong standardization processes, particularly in Haiti, where codification has been going on apace with implementation in education and elsewhere. In contrast, it is a characteristic of all Caribbean continuum situations that there are no language planning or standardization efforts. In these situations, all that one can note as recognition of the importance of the creole language is an expansion in the domains of creole usage as the population comes to recognize it as a symbol of national identity and becomes more aware of its communicative effectiveness. The domain of mass media advertising has been one of the biggest gains, although even here the asymmetrical relations between creole and English, diglossic relations if you prefer, continue to be manifested in the kinds of products that are advertised in each of the two codes. The result is an element of caricature in creole language advertisements that tend to perpetuate the stereotype of that code as the vehicle for grossness, coarseness, and jocularity.

It may be that in these continuum situations a de facto norm of creole is emerging, but at present there has been no research to uncover such normalization. Jamaica already has the basis for an orthographic norm in the Cassidy and LePage (1967) Dictionary of Jamaican English. But the usual problem that affects all standardization programs in creole communities —that of the orientation or underlying principles for spelling words— is much more acute in continuum situations. In contrast, Papiamentu and Sranan have sucessfully abandoned the prestandardized spelling conventions based on Dutch principles and have adopted what I call a pragmatic phonemic principle. Similarly, in Martinique and Guadeloupe, the autonomy protagonists —that is, those who see spelling as a tool to express and reinforce the autonomy and separateness of the language vis-a-vis French— have triumphed over the transitionists, those who view creole only in terms of a transition to French in areas of literacy and literature.

In situations of creole autonomy, there have been more grammars and dictionaries that, though descriptive and scientific in their approach, can still serve as the basis for prescriptive reference or as teaching grammars. In contrast, in atypical continuum situation Bailey's (1966) Jamaican Creole Syntax remains the only work of any scope, and it is quite unsuitable as a standard grammar. For the other continuum situations, there is nothing.

As mentioned earlier, in situations of creole autonomy, there are emerging de facto norms, that is, norms of usage that, though uncodified, are accepted by the community. While I was conducting research in Haiti and St. Lucia, I was constantly introduced to people recognized by the community and thought to "speak the language well". These were individuals whose competence could be used as a check on standards. However, this does not address the question of whether different registers exist within creole and how these registers are characterized phonologically, lexicosemantically, morphosyntactically, and idiomatically. During the early years of creole language study, it had generally been implicitly or explicitly assumed that registers did not exist (which seems reasonable, given that creoles were generally used only in informal contexts). But with domain expansion taking place virtually everywhere, the assumption can no longer be uncritically accepted.

Adhering to the notion of creole language as simplified and restricted both linguistically and communicatively, some language plans have resurrected Bernstein's (1971) concept of restricted codes to describe creole language situations. Not surprisingly, the interpretation of restricted codes as an example of cognitive or expressive deficiency, rather than as a manifestation of class relations, has had a deleterious effect on standardization movements. The only usefulness that Bernstein's dichotomy of elaborated and restricted codes could have (and it is not altogether clear what Bernstein intended or what is a fair interpretation of this dichotomy) is if his restricted code were itself severely restricted to usage styles or strategies of discourse and did not refer to the language system itself. Otherwise, this general notion of restricted code only reinforces those interpretations of creole systems as simplified systems, effectively doing more damage to the status of creoles and to their standardization possibilities.

Some creole styles and strategies of discourse may have been severely restricted by nonlinguistic forces. For example, the socioeconomic and political status of speakers marginalized them in terms of governmental and institutional practices. Consequently, creole speakers generally have not had the chance to develop styles, registers, or strategies of discourse, such as political speech making or presentation of papers before professional societies or before corporate board meetings, all of which require planned, deliberate discourse. Thus, to use the Western European model of formal, planned registers (which are characterized by structural features such as the use of complex sentence structure and discourse mechanisms) as a model to determine the "sophistication" of creole languages is faulty. Creole linguistics has suffered from the limitations of theoretical syntax. In addition to shying away from full grammars of languages because of the logistic difficulties, syntacticians consider the simple sentence to be the universe of analysis, except for a few dependent structures like relativization. In contrast, it is generally assumed in the orthodox but questionable pidgin-creole formula that pidgins use parataxis and that in the development of a pidgin to a creole a kind of discourse strategy gives rise to a new syntax, some degree of hypotaxis, through a process of grammaticalization. The classic case is the relative marker ia in Tok Pisin. Since we remain anchored to the pidgin-creole formula, it is assumed that there was no old syntactic strategy for the new one to replace, in which case it is a question of grammaticalization with reanalysis. This may be true of Tok Pisin. But it is very doubtful if it is also true of Caribbean creoles, where there are a wide array of subordinating complementizers not attributable to any grammaticalization where previously there was no syntax. For example, in Saramaccan, gbe exists as a sentence complementizer taken from Ewe. In Jamaica, se is not simply a reanalysis of the serial verb say of English but is a general complementizer in such forms as even if se, or any time se. This does not mean that creole languages express a full range of logical relations in complex sentence structures based on hypotaxis. The work to clarify this simply has not been done, although some is under way.

Implicit in some of the arguments outlined in this essay is a definition of standard and standardization that goes beyond language form and language structure, one that goes beyond the code into social and cognitive functions. It is necessary to distinguish between code-related activities in standardization (i.e., codification in the form of spelling conventions, grammars, dictionaries) on the one hand and function- and status-related activities on the other. When these two are conflated, the assumption of planners and citizens is that codification is itself an objective endeavor irrespective of people's rights and claims to language. The question that this raises is whether the purpose of codification is solely to serve adult literacy and the first years of elementary education, as is the case in some creole standardization programs. Is it merely to provide a consistent means of writing down oral folk literature?

This in turn raises questions about the usefulness of distinguishing among the standard, the national, and the official language. It may be useful to envisage the possibility of a language becoming standardized and fulfilling the functions of a national language without it being the official language, or at least without it fulfilling de facto official functions. One could envisage a progression from standard through national culminating in official status, and this would resolve some of the objections to and difficulties in standardizing a creole language, where standardization is assumed to be synonymous with making the language official. There

are real linguistic, economic, and psychological difficulties to be overcome in making a creole language official, difficulties that do not exist at other stages of the progression (i.e., at the stages of standard and national language). In many cases the role of national language is already achieved even without standardization and officialization. Standardization will have the effect of enhancing the role of national language, since prestige, enhancement, pride, and loyalty are some of the attributes and functions of a standard language in a broader definition of standardization.

In this essay I have dealt with broader issues rather than the mechanics of codification. It is equally important to deal with issues such as the representation of morphophonemics in spelling, word boundaries for compounds, conventions for clitics, principles of word formation, and stability versus

flexibility or variability in the standard norm. Status-related issues, such as attitude studies and promotional campaigns to ensure a receptive population for a newly standardized language, represent other problem areas. Still others I have had to gloss over, such as which level of the creole continuum to standardize. In some cases, the basilect would seem to be the best choice, but in many respects basilectal forms are becoming archaic and are losing speakers, and that would pose still other problems in standardization decisions.

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