

Aymeric Daval-Markussen (Aarhus University):

On the complexity of creoles

In the past decade, the axiomatic equicomplexity of languages formulated by Hockett (1958: 180-181) stating that all languages are overall equally complex has been challenged numerous times and shown to be unsubstantiated (e.g. McWhorter 2001, Dahl 2004, Shosted 2006, Miestamo et al. 2008, Sampson et al. 2009). In the context of creole languages, Parkvall (2008) demonstrated the simplicity of creoles in relation to older languages. The author measured the relative complexity of a number of morphosyntactic features taken principally from WALS (Dryer & Haspelmath 2013) and which were readily quantifiable (e.g. the presence vs. absence of numeral classifiers or the number of genders). Parkvall's data were then used in a recent paper establishing the typological distinctiveness of creoles (Bakker et al. 2011). One of the criticisms that Bakker et al. (2011) met was the claim that the data used for their analyses reflected the relative simplicity of creoles rather than proved that creoles were a typologically coherent group of languages.

The goal of this paper is twofold. Firstly, we will perform a PCA (Principal component analysis) on the data used in Bakker et al. (2011) to show that the clustering of creoles observed by these authors is not an artefact created by the original purpose of the selected data. Secondly, using two different data sets, we will assess the relative complexity of creoles compared to a wider sample of languages of the world following a similar approach to Parkvall's. For the first sample, we selected a subset of the features shared between WALS (Dryer & Haspelmath 2013) and APiCS (Michaelis et al. 2013) which were quantifiable (resulting in a different sample than Michaelis et al. 2013) and for the second sample, a selection of 34 stable features (identified by Wichmann & Holman 2009) comprising 45 creoles based on a wide range of lexifiers as well as 197 languages from the WALS form the basis of the analysis. We will show that the results of both analyses are not as clear-cut as Parkvall's (2008) and provide tentative explanations as to why our results were not as unambiguous as Parkvall's.

References

- Bakker, Peter, Aymeric Daval-Markussen, Mikael Parkvall & Ingo Plag. 2011. Creoles are typologically distinct from non-creoles. In Parth Bhatt & Tonjes Veenstra (eds.), Special issue of *Journal and Pidgin Languages*, 26(1): 5-42.
- Dahl, Östen. 2004. *The Growth and Maintenance of Linguistic Complexity*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Dryer, Matthew S. & Martin Haspelmath (eds.). 2013. *The world atlas of language structures online*. Leipzig: Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology. wals.info/
- Hockett, Charles F. 1958. *A Course in Modern Linguistics*. New York: The Macmillan Company.
- McWhorter, John H. 2001. The world's simplest grammars are creole grammars. *Linguistic Typology*, 5(2-3): 125-166.

- Michaelis, Susanne Maria, Damián Blasi & Martin Haspelmath. 2013. *Some quantitative aspects of contact languages: APiCS meets WALs*. Paper presented at the Workshop Creole and pidgin language structure in cross-linguistic perspective, Leipzig, August 18-19.
- Michaelis, Susanne Maria, Philippe Maurer, Martin Haspelmath & Magnus Huber (eds.). 2013. *The Atlas of Pidgin and Creole Language Structures online*. Leipzig: Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology.
- Miestamo, Matti, Kaius Sinnemäki & Fred Karlsson. (eds.) 2008. *Language Complexity: Typology, Contact, Change*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Parkvall, Mikael. 2008. The simplicity of creoles in a cross-linguistic perspective. In Matti Miestamo, Kaius Sinnemäki & Fred Karlsson (eds.), 265-285.
- Sampson, Geoffrey, David Gil & Peter Trudgill (eds.). 2009. *Language Complexity as an Evolving Variable*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Shosted, Ryan K. 2006. Correlating complexity: A typological approach. *Linguistic Typology*, 10: 1-40.
- Wichmann, Søren & Eric W. Holman. 2009. *Temporal Stability of Linguistic Typological Features*. München: LINCOM Europa.