

Variation and change in the Eastern Maroon Creole

The analysis of linguistic variation in Creoles has traditionally focused on functional elements such as the copula, pronouns, TMA markers and to a lesser degree on phonological aspects (Young 1973, Rickford 1979, Winford 1980, 1993, Escure 1982, Patrick 1999, Migge 1996). Investigations focused on these kinds of structural elements to demonstrate that Creole grammars are linguistically distinct from that of their European lexifier. The findings from these studies successfully showed that the variation between the European language (acrolect) and the Creole (basilect) is not continuous as claimed by supporters of the creole continuum theory (DeCamp 1961, 1971 Bickerton 1971). Instead it was found that creole continua are made up of two or more linguistically and socially clearly distinct systems. The variation observable in these settings is largely due to socially conditioned contact between these systems. While this research has provided much insight into the structural relationship between Creoles and their erstwhile lexifier, it has led to the assumption that Creoles have few if any internal varieties and that these varieties essentially differ from each other on the structural level.

The aim of this presentation is to challenge this view by exploring the linguistic styles or varieties recognized by Eastern Maroons (EMs) in French Guiana and Suriname. The investigation reveals that EMs recognize a range of different linguistic varieties. Some of these varieties appear to be ethnic or regional varieties, others are social or situational varieties while yet others are foreigner varieties. Varieties are most saliently differentiated on the discursive level (e.g. turn-taking, speech rhythm) and on the lexical level. Structural differences mainly play a salient role in distinguishing non-native speaker varieties from native speaker varieties. Discursive and lexical differences are traditionally not of great interest to structural linguistic investigations but they are much exploited in everyday interaction to manage social relationships and identities. This study argues that in order to get a more comprehensive insight into the sociolinguistic nature of Creoles, research needs to pay greater attention to speakers' categories and has to employ a greater range of investigative methods.

The data for this study comes from three different sources. First, a corpus of recordings carried out in a range of social settings in the Pamaka community and in the Ndyuka community. It includes recordings among EMs and between EMs and non-EMs. Second, participant observation in rural and urban settings among members of the Pamaka and Ndyuka community. Third, informal discussions with members of these communities and guided interviews with EMs and non-maroon in French Guiana (Léglise & Migge 2006). The paper employs linguistic descriptive methods and discourse analytical methods.

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