Substrate, Superstrate, and Universal in Louisiana Creole

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Besides the dialects of the Creoles and the Acadians there has been developed in Louisiana a patois which is spoken by many colored people, and which has undergone so many violent changes that it is virtually unintelligible to one who is quite at home in Standard French. Some white natives of Louisiana, it is true, speak good French, Acadian, and the negro-French patois with almost equal facility (Read 1931).

Introduction

The study of pidgin and creole languages has much to contribute to our knowledge of language in general. Specifically, to understand how the mind creates language and how human language came to be the way that it is, we must look more deeply into those languages whose creation we have been able to witness more directly than any others: the creoles. Research on creole universals may be the most direct contribution to this process, but before we can truly understand what is universal, we must look more deeply into the external factors that exert an influence on the creole languages. The purpose of this paper is to present an overview of problems in separating the influences of substrate, superstrate, and universal in studies of Louisiana Creole French. The Louisiana writer/journalist Lafcadio Hearn encouraged researchers to pay more attention to Louisiana Creole very early on, because of its importance to our understanding of human language (Oukada 1979), and it is as important to pay attention to it today as it ever was, especially since the language seems to be in a serious state of decline. Thus, to illustrate
the main problems and areas of research in the field, I will compare some features of Louisiana Creole with features of vernacular North American French in order to determine which features are in fact unique to the French-based creoles. I will also discuss the effects of the African substrate languages on the Creole.

Problems in Louisiana Creole Studies

The terms Pidgin and Creole are not easy to define. As with the terms Language and Dialect, it is almost impossible to draw a line between them. In general, the term Pidgin may be used to describe “any language that does not have native speakers” (Bickerton 1990: 120-21), but it has often been used, more specifically, to refer to ‘the kind of speech produced by the first generation of speakers in contact situations’. So when does a pidgin become a creole? It was once thought that a pidgin became a creole only when an entire generation of children spoke it as their native language. It is now well known that this phenomenon, called Radical Creolization, is in fact rare. More often, a pidgin does not acquire large numbers of native speakers in the second generation of a contact situation. It may continue to be spoken only as a second language for several generations or more and may thus develop into a true language very gradually, borrowing structures from other languages that influence it in any way (Bickerton 1990).

Another common view is that a creole language develops out of a pidgin. But now that we know that languages can creolize gradually, it seems possible that a language may not even have to be reduced to the point of pidginization in order to become different enough from the lexifier language to be given the name ‘creole’. Valdman (1974), in his study, ‘Le parler vernaculaire des isolats français en Amérique du
Nord’, attempts to undermine the traditional understanding of creole origins by demonstrating that many of the types of simplification present in the French-based creoles are very similar to those found in North American French dialects, especially the more isolated varieties. Indeed, in situations in which a creole language coexists with its lexifier language, one may often see a continuum, with the lexifier language—the ACROLECT—at one end and the most highly creolized variety—the BASILECT—at the other. In between are any number of MESOLECTS. For example, the type of Louisiana Creole seen in nineteenth-century texts is the basilect of that particular creole, and the French dialect known as Cajun is the acrolect. (Mesolectal varieties are the subject of most modern studies of Louisiana Creole.) This continuum is often taken as proof that Louisiana Creole is undergoing a process of DECREOLIZATION, losing those features that are farthest away from those of the acrolect and replacing them with more ‘standard’ features. But some researchers have claimed that these basilectal and mesolectal varieties of Louisiana Creole are not new, i.e. that some varieties of Louisiana Creole were closer to the acrolect than others throughout the history of the language (Rottet 1992).

In this area, many varieties of French and Creole French co-exist, but they can be categorized into three main currents. A fairly standard French is spoken by descendants of the first French settlers in Louisiana, who began to arrive in the area in 1699. Cajun French is spoken by the descendants of exiles from modern-day Nova Scotia, who were driven out of their homeland by the English in 1765. And finally, the Louisiana Creole French is spoken by descendants of slaves from Africa who were brought to Louisiana to work on plantations in colonial times (Ancelet 2002). These three main varieties have been in such close contact that, according to Ancelet (2002: 1), ‘Cajuns along the Bayou
Teche are as likely to speak Creole as their black Creole neighbors, while black Creoles living out on the southwestern prairies tend to speak what amounts to modern Cajun French. Many move effortlessly and even unconsciously between dialects according to the context.

Louisiana Creole had approximately 60,000 to 80,000 speakers in 1985, mainly in St. Martin Parish, New Roads, and Edgard, Louisiana, as well as in parts of eastern Texas and even in Sacramento, California. At one time, the language was spoken over a much larger area, covering most of southern Louisiana, as well as parts of Mississippi and Alabama (Klingler 2000). Although it is said that the language resembles those creoles spoken in parts of the Antilles (Ancelet 2002), researchers have found that it may not be mutually intelligible with other French-based creoles for monolingual speakers. Still, the vast majority of Louisiana Creole speakers, especially the younger generation, are bilingual, and many even prefer English. Only about five percent, consisting almost entirely of older people, are monolingual speakers of Creole (Grimes 1996).

In Louisiana, there has been even more confusion about the use of the term Creole than elsewhere. This is because the term was used in the state with different meanings before the linguistic meaning was introduced. It was first applied to the French-speaking elites of Louisiana, who ‘resented the association of Creole with a Black man’s baragouin, for they did not want anyone to mistake the dialect as theirs’ (Oukada 1979: 11). French was the dominant language in Louisiana, even for official purposes, until the beginning of the nineteenth century, but after the Louisiana Purchase in 1803 and statehood in 1812, the people of Louisiana were under enormous pressure to speak—and act—English. After the Civil War, the educated, French-speaking elite began to send
its children to school to learn English (Ancelet 2002), although, as I know from personal experience, many of them remained bilingual well into the twentieth century. It took longer for Cajun and Creole speakers to attempt to conform to Anglo-American culture and speech. English-speaking farmers from the Midwest began to settle in Louisiana in the last twenty years of the nineteenth century; after the turn of the century, they were followed by oil workers and developers from Pennsylvania, Oklahoma, and Texas. Cajun and Creole were stigmatized, and Cajun and Creole children were punished for speaking their own languages when they went to school, up until World War II, when it was realized that these languages were worth preserving and efforts were made to turn the decline around (Ancelet 2002). However, both Cajun and Creole were maintained only as oral languages, so that there was very little literacy in either. Cajun, of course, can be written in something very similar to standard French orthography, since it is not different enough to require its own spelling system. Creole, however, which qualifies as a separate language, requires its own writing system, so that it may be recognized as a separate language and not viewed simply as a ‘corrupted’ version of French (Oukada 1979).

The precise origin of Louisiana Creole remains unknown (Oukada 1979). Scholars are divided on the matter of whether it evolved just once, on eighteenth-century plantations along the Mississippi River, only later spreading to other areas and diverging, or whether the different varieties of Creole spoken in Louisiana had separate origins to begin with. Louisiana Creolist Thomas A. Klingler (2000), in a recent study, concluded that the language most likely originated only once, later developing into differing varieties. The researcher postulated that if Louisiana Creole really did have more than
one origin, then one should be able to trace some of the regional differences in speech to separate sources. Other researchers have asked themselves how much of an influence the Caribbean Creoles might have had on the language. Large numbers of slaves from Martinique, Guadeloupe, Saint Kitts, and especially Saint-Domingue (Haiti) are known to have been brought to Louisiana around the time that a creole language was being formed there (Orem 2000). Therefore, Klingler (2000) examined the demographic and linguistic clues to disprove the idea proposal that MIS and TEC had separate geneses and that TEC was influenced by Haitian Creole. It may be impossible to determine, however, how much difference would have to be present to prove the multiple-genesis hypothesis to be true. This problem is closely related to several larger issues. The French-based creoles, as a group, have a large number of features in common, but linguists have not yet been able to reach any agreement on whether these languages had separate origins. In addition, Cajun French has been influencing Louisiana Creole for a long time, and vice-versa. Klingler (2000), accordingly, also attempted to determine whether any of the differences between the two Creole ‘dialects’ might be due to Cajun influence. He determined that neither the linguistic nor the demographic evidence supported the idea that there was more than one genesis for Louisiana Creole.

It was long believed that the only African influence on Louisiana Creole consisted of a few words such as ‘gumbo’. This was also believed about the other French-based creoles. At that time there had been no systematic comparisons of the structures of the creoles and their substrate languages (Harris 1973). As early as 1931, however, Read (1931: 118) was already writing that ‘The Negro-French patois is composed of a highly corrupt French vocabulary, some native African words, and a syntax for the most part
essentially African’. At this time, there can no longer be any doubt that African languages have helped to shape the creole in many subtle and not-so-subtle ways.

Harris (1973) stresses that many Louisiana Creole structures cannot be traced back to any form of French. It is still unknown just how much African languages have contributed to Louisiana Creole, but it is beyond doubt that features of those African languages are present. What remains is to identify them. It may not be possible to do so with absolute certainty, especially when they are similar to structures that exist in French. However, we can attempt to establish a level of probability (Harris 1973).

On the other hand, it easy to seen the vernacular varieties of New World French have much in common with the French-based creoles. Valdman (1974: 44) divides the ‘francophone’ languages and of the Americas into five groups:

1. les parlars créoles en contact direct avec le français et en relation de diglossie avec lui tells que ceux d’Haïti et des D.O.M. antillais;

2. les parlars créoles servant de vernaculaire par rapport à l’anglais—Dominique, Sainte-Lucie et autres îles des Petites Antilles;

3. les parlars laurentiens et acadiens du Canada qui bien que soumis à l’influence de l’anglais par l’adoption de normes culturelles anglo-américaines par leurs locuteurs, s’appuient sur des institutions de langue française profondément enracinées telles que l’église, l’école et l’administration;

4. les parlars de la Nouvelle-Angleterre et ceux de la Louisiane acadienne qui évoluent face à des institutions qui privilégient l’anglais comme voix officielle mais qui ont toutefois conservé un certain contact avec le français standard et d’autres parlars vernaculaires français par un apport humain ininterrompu et par des relations culturelles continue ;

5. enfin, les isolats linguistiques évoluant dans un environnement linguistique anglophone et dont les liens avec les autres communautés francophones sont demeurés coupés.

Hull (1968) also carried out a comparative study of the French-based creoles and the North American French dialects, going so far as to try to reconstruct a hypothetical
‘Maritime French’ that may have been in use at the time when Louisiana Creole was
being formed. In the survey of Louisiana Creole features presented below, I will use
Valdman’s (1974) evidence from Frenchville, Pennsylvania, evidence from an earlier
study that I completed on Newfoundland French (Herrick 2000), and various other
examples from popular and vernacular French to determine which features of Creole do
not have to be attributed to processes of creolization. I will also attempt to determine
which features may be attributable to African influence and which are most likely creole
universals or the result of natural processes of simplification.

The town of Frenchville is, according to Valdman (1974) the most isolated
French-speaking community in the New World. Populated by several hundred people,
the town is located in Clearfield County, Central Pennsylvania, and was founded by
lumberjacks and farmers coming directly from France, mainly from the départements of
Haute Marne, Haute-Saône, Vosges, and Haut-Rhin. Immigration to Frenchville was
quite late compared to the migrations to other French-speaking areas such as Canada,
Louisiana, and the Antilles, which took place in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries
(Valdman 1974). Due to the geographical isolation of the town, Frenchville residents had
little contact with English-speaking settlers outside of the community for many years and
didn’t, until recently, feel the need to give up French in favor of English, although they
did borrow English words from time to time (Pitzer 1991). For the last thirty years,
however, schools and television have led to a decline in the use of the French dialect,
although according to Pitzer (1991: 68), ‘you can hear the old speech still, from villagers
named Roussey, Rogeux, Habovick, and Plubell’. 
A problem associated with attempting to isolate particular influences on a language or dialect is that a great deal of information is necessary before one can even begin the process. Until recently, dialectologists were in the habit of attempting to establish precise geographical origins for particular words and phonological features of dialects in the Americas. But this, according to Valdman (1974), is a dangerous game. The most that we can do, in many cases, is to establish that a particular origin is possible or likely. Many features that are now non-standard were once perfectly standard. Therefore, a great deal more research will have to be carried out before we can be sure that specific features originated in particular areas of France, for example. Valdman (1974) stresses, specifically, that the similarities that he has found between vernacular French varieties and French-based creoles in the New World cannot be linked directly to particular regions in France. In fact, many of these traits are so widespread in France and elsewhere that it would be ridiculous to try to localize them at all (Valdman 1974).

These vernacular varieties of French and the French Creoles have together been referred to as **ADVANCED** varieties, because of their tendency to analytical structure (Valdman 1974). It has been proposed by Vintila-Radulescue and R. Chaudenson that the advanced nature of these dialects/languages is due to their isolation from standard French. This distance from institutional and literary standards allows them to develop freely and rapidly toward an economy of structure not found in standard French. The French-based creoles, of course, take this process much farther than any of the vernacular varieties of French (Valdman 1974).

Still, the similarities are undeniable. The Haitian creolist Jules Faine, therefore, has hypothesized that there was once a sort of nautical lingua franca used among, at the
very least, sailors in the French ports through which emigrants to the New World would pass. This language may have consisted of features common to many regional varieties of French. To facilitate communication, speakers would have tended to use analytical structures and to reduced morphophonological variation as much as possible. Hull (1968: 256) reminds us of the ‘enormous length of time, by our standards, which it took ships in the 18th century to cross the Atlantic’. Scholars have no indisputable proof, as yet, that such a lingua franca actually existed, but it does not seem unlikely. What is easy to see is that many of the advanced features present in the Frenchville and Newfoundland French dialects are shared with many other advanced varieties of New World French (Valdman 1974) to an extent that cannot to due to pure chance.

It is even clearer that creole languages in general, and the French-based creoles in particular, have a number of features in common. Once we have determined which of these features are due to superstrate influence and which are due to substrate influence, we may begin to consider how the others may be attributed to universal rules governing human language and to natural processes of reduction and simplification.

Creoles in general are classified as ‘isolating’ or ‘analytical’ languages, meaning that in them, information is transmitted by way of free rather than bound morphemes. Accordingly, Rottet (1992: 261) argues that ‘one of the syntactic correlates of creolization is the elimination of (some) overt movements of lexical categories to functional/inflectional categories’. Various types of simplification occur. For example, the French-based creoles show the following types of simplification/reduction compared to standard French:
(1) loss of verbal inflection, replaced by periphrastic constructions and autonomous, preposed particles to mark tense, aspect, and mood;

(2) loss of gender distinctions in nouns;

(3) loss of obligatory plural marking, replaced by an enclitic marker;

(4) simplification of the pronominal system by the loss of distinctions between subject/object pronouns and tonic/atonic forms;

(5) replacement of relative pronouns by parataxis (Valdman 1974).

Some Features of Louisiana Creole

Phonological Features

Many books could be written on the phonology of Louisiana Creole. Phonology, however, is the least reliable form of evidence in identifying linguistic affinities, and it will suffice, for the purposes of this paper, to give just a few interesting examples:

In Louisiana Creole, the affricate [č] results from the palatalization of [k]. For example, the possessive pronouns mo-quinne, to-quinne, so-quinne, nous-quinne, vous-quinne, and ye-quinne are pronounced [sočĕn], [točĕn], [sočĕn], and so on, for some speakers:

English: It’s mine.
French: C’est le mien.
Louisiana Creole: Se mo-quinne. [se močĕn]

English: Here’s yours.
French: Voici le tien.
Louisiana Creole: Tiens to-quinne [čĕ točĕn] (Louisiana Creole Grammar, 2002).

This is a feature common to most of the creole languages. The same feature exists,
however, in Newfoundland French (Herrick 2000) and in Canadian French, as well as throughout northern France, and was ubiquitous in the 17th century (Hull 1968), showing either that it existed in the superstrate or that it is a natural phonological process:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Standard French</th>
<th>Newfoundland French</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>cuisine</td>
<td>tchuisine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>paquet</td>
<td>patchet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aucun</td>
<td>autchun</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Broussard (1942) claims that Creole *quenne* is actually from French *tienne*. Whether or not this is true, the similarity to Newfoundland French remains, as some instances of [č] in that dialect derive from Standard French /tʃ/:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Standard French</th>
<th>Newfoundland French</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>moitié</td>
<td>moitché</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tiendre</td>
<td>tchinder</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(archaic) (Herrick 2000).

Another phonological feature present in Louisiana Creole is the nasalization of the vowel [e] after a nasal consonant:

Donnez-moi ce livre et cette pomme.  
*Donne-moin liv'-là et despomme-là.*  
(Ancelet 2002).

This same feature is found in Canadian French. The use of the Old French pronunciation [we] for ‘oi’ is also shared by Canadian French and Louisiana Creole (Hull 1968).

**Lexicon**

Various words in Louisiana Creole have different meanings from the ones that they have in standard French. For instance, *courri* (from French *courir*) is used in the place of *aller* (to go), and *gain* (probably from *gagner*) is used in place of *avoir* (to have) (Ancelet 2002).
There are a limited number of African loan words in the creole. One example is *niame-niame* ‘food/to eat’. Read (1931) traces this word back to the Bantu languages, in most of which *nyama* or *inyama* means ‘meat’. Gullah uses the same expression for ‘to eat’: *nyam* or *nyam-nyam*, and Afro-Cuban Spanish uses ſami-ňami to mean ‘food’. The author suggests that this word may have come into Louisiana Creole and Louisiana French through Cuban Spanish, if not directly through the Bantu languages.

Some expressions shared by Louisiana Creole and many vernacular varieties of French are the temporal expressions *asteure* [aste’] (à cette heure) ‘now’ and *taleure* [tale’] (tout à l’heure) ‘just now’. The form *asteure* is also found in Newfoundland French (Herrick 2000).

**Grammar**

Louisiana Creole displays most or all of the features generally associated with creole languages, although it is said to be less deeply creolized than some of these. There is no doubt that the mesolectal varieties often exhibit evidence of decreolization that the basilectal varieties do not possess. These include preposed definite determiners (determiners are postposed in the basilect), the limited existence of gender in nouns, and the use of the copula (which is deleted in the basilect), the existence of short and long verb stems, and the use of the French *que* as a subordinator (Rottet 1992).

**Nouns**

A striking feature of the Creole that is not found in any vernacular varieties of French is the agglutination of an article, partitive, or consonant of a frequent liaison onto the noun (Louisiana Creole Grammar Louisiana Creole Grammar 2002). A large number, though certainly not all, Louisiana Creole nouns possess this feature:
French:  
une chaise  
après-midi  
dans l’après-midi  
um oeuf  
um homme  
ume pomme  

Creole:  
ein lachaise  
laprèmidi  
d laprèmidi  
ein désé  
ein nomme  
ein despomme  

(Louisiana Creole Grammar 2002: 9).

According to Broussard (1942: 6), ‘There seems to be no definite rule for these agglutinations, except the general rule that the Negro took his word from the form he heard most frequently. Nouns most frequently heard with a partitive retained the partitive; some retained the article; others the consonant of a common liaison’.

There is no grammatical gender in Louisiana Creole. The sex of animate objects can be specified, in certain cases, by adding mal ‘male’ or fimelle ‘female’ before the noun. In addition, some nouns for people retain the feminine endings, although only the masculine article is used; e.g. ein nèg / ein nègresse ‘a negro’ vs. ‘a negress’ (Valdman 1974).

New World vernacular varieties of French also have reduced gender distinctions. For example, in Newfoundland French, some adjectives, such as français and neuf, have no feminine form (Herrick 2000). According to Valdman (1974), both Cajun French and popular French show the same tendency to invariability in their adjectives. Also in Frenchville, there is most often no masculine/feminine distinction made in the third-person plural subject pronoun. So one might say, Eux ont écrit (Ils ont écrit) ‘They have written’, and also Eux parle pas français (Elles ne parlent pas français) ‘They don’t speak French’ (Valdman 1974). It is conceivable that this might be due to, or reinforced by, the influence of English.
On that same note, Newfoundland English possesses only one form of the third-
person-plural pronoun as the object of a preposition (standard French has the masculine
and feminine forms *eux* and *elles*). This form is *ieusses* [joes] (Herrick 2000), which is
very similar to the invariable third-person-plural pronouns used in the French-based
Creoles.

In contrast to the North American French dialects, Louisiana Creole nouns used in
an inclusive way do not require an article:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Le nègre n’aime pas le manger du blanc.} \\
\text{Nég laime pas manger blanc.}
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{On ne sait jamais ce qu’on veut.} \\
\text{Moune (le monde) jamais connain ça l’olé}
\end{align*}
\]

(Broussard 1942 : 6-7).

Nouns in the creole have no gender. Although gender distinctions may be
reduced in vernacular varieties of French, they are not eliminated entirely.

It cannot be pure chance that so many creole languages form the plural of nouns
by suffixing the third-person-plural pronoun (yé in Louisiana Creole). Only in the
English-based creole of Surinam does the plural marker precede the noun; e.g. *dem hoso*
‘the houses’. In the French-based, Spanish-based, and Dutch-based Creoles, it is suffixed
to the noun, as in Louisiana Creole *nomme-yé et fomme-yé* ‘the men and the women’. It
is almost certain that this structure is an analogy to that used in some of the African
substrate languages. For example, in the Ewe language of West Africa, *atiwo* ‘trees’ is
formed by adding *wo*, the third-person-plural pronoun, to the noun *ati* ‘tree’. Similar
constructions can be found in other West African languages (Harris 1973).
Verbs

In basilectal Louisiana Creole, as in other creole languages, there is no verbal inflection. Many varieties of New World vernacular French exhibit a greater or lesser degree of regularization in their verb conjugations. Newfoundland French, for example, shows no agreement in the first-, second-, or third-person singular (Herrick 2000). And in Frenchville, according to Valdman (1974), the simple root of the verb is used in free variation with a form ending in [e], and there is no inflection whatsoever. This simplification of verbal inflection is also found in Cajun French, as well as in popular French. It is likely that the inflections that exist in standard written French may soon cease to exist completely in most of all spoken forms of the language.

Another feature of Louisiana Creole verbs, however, shows divergence from vernacular French, namely that free morphemes placed in front of the verb serve as indicators of tense, mood and aspect. These preverbal markers can be strung together in order to produce subtle variations in meaning, but they must always occur in the order tense marker + mood particle + negation + aspect particle (Rottet 1992).

Rottet (1992: 264) adds, “In three specific contexts … a truncated form of the verb occurs which occupies a different syntactic position from the full stem that occurs everywhere else. The most common type of truncated versus full stem alternation is /-/ in verbs descended from French –er verbs, as exemplified by pairs such as mõzh/mõzhe ‘eat’, frem/freme ‘shut’, aret/arete ‘stop’, lem/leme ‘like’. Alternation is not limited to French –er verbs, however”. These short- and long-stem alternations in the mesolect mean that Louisiana Creole is more complex than most other creole languages in its treatment of verbs and have lead some scholars, such as Ancelet (2002) to believe that
Louisiana Creole has been undergoing a process of major decreolization. The long stem must take preverbal tense, mood, and aspect markers, as well as preverbal negation and preverbal VP adverbs. The short stem, on the other hand, must go with post-verbal negation, can take both pre- and post-verbal VP adverbs, and is never heard to co-exist with tense, mood, and aspect morphemes. Thus, in Rottet’s (1992: 278) words:

“Mesolectal Louisiana Creole thus seems to be caught in a struggle between two competing systems, one which inflects verbs with affixal morphology, and the other which indicates tense-mood-aspect with free morphemes. This tension between two competing systems is not surprising in view of the fact that mesolectal Louisiana Creole lies on a continuum between an inflectional language (French) on the one hand, and an isolating language (basilectal Louisiana Creole) on the other’.

Harris (1973) claims that the basilectal Louisiana Creole preverbal particles are another example of the linguistic hybridization of French with some of the West African languages spoken by the slaves who developed the creole. The author points out that in the West-African language Mandingo, preverbal particles are used in much the same way as in Creole to indicate tense, mood, and aspect.

**Articles**

The indefinite article, which is invariable because the Creole does not have grammatical gender, is *ein* (from French *un* ‘a’ or ‘one’). Unlike the definite article, it is placed before the noun. The definite article –*là*, which is postposed to the noun, covers the meanings of French *la* and *le*, as well as the demonstratives *ce* and *cette*. The plural definite article is
yé, which covers the meanings of both les and ces in French (Louisiana Creole Grammar 2002).

In some cases, a single feature may be due to both French and African influences, a phenomenon that Harris (1973: 91) calls ‘une sorte d’hybridation linguistique’. For example, in Louisiana Creole, the definite article can be used much in the same way as the French demonstrative particle –là, which is postposed to the noun as the definite article is in the Creole. This construction may have come directly from French, but it is interesting to note that in most of the substrate languages (Fula, Wolof, Mende, Songhay, Bullon, Ewe, Gan, etc.), the article, which also serves as a sort of weakened demonstrative, is suffixed to the noun. What’s more, in Ewe, the actual form of this article/demonstrative is –(l)a. Harris (1973) points out that it is not at all unlikely that the French form and the African form simply converged into one because of their phonological and semantic similarities.

**Pronouns**

Pronouns are also basically invariable in Louisiana Creole, although slight changes occur for purposes of liaison. Case is determined by word order, i.e. subject + verb + indirect object + direct object (Louisiana Creole Grammar 2002). Table 1 shows the subject pronouns of Standard French, Newfoundland French, Frenchville French, and Louisiana Creole.

Table 1: Subject Pronouns

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Standard French</th>
<th>Newfoundland French</th>
<th>Frenchville French</th>
<th>Louisiana Creole</th>
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The forms *vous autes* and *nous autes* (for Standard French *vous* and *nous*), used in many creole languages, are very common in popular and vernacular French. For example, in popular French, one might hear, *Nous aut’ on s’en fout* (Nous nous en foutons) ‘We don’t care’ (Valdman 1974).

**Demonstratives**

While the definite article overlaps with the demonstrative adjective ‘that’, the demonstrative ‘this’ is *sila*, which seems to be a preservation of the Old French demonstrative *cil* (Ancelet 2002). This form is also still used in Cajun French.

**Adjectives**

Another feature of Louisiana Creole is copula deletion with adjectives. This is most likely due to African influence and is also found in the English-based Caribbean creoles.

Most adjectives appear only in their masculine incarnations. An exception is *belle* (the feminine form in French), which is used in all cases in the creole, since *beau* is used exclusively as a noun meaning ‘beau’, ‘sweetheart’ (Read 1931).

**Comparison**

The use of *passé* in comparative statements is another feature of Louisiana Creole, and of some other French-based Creoles, that may be traceable to African substrate languages.
Zozo a chanté plis pase hiè. ‘The birds will sing more than yesterday’ (Harris 1973).

Li pli vye pase so frè. ‘He is older than his brother.’

Li mo bel pase so sè. ‘He is less pretty than his sister’ (Louisiana Creole Grammar 2002).

This structure is nothing more than a calque on an African one (Harris 1973).

**Negatives**

Like Cajun French, Louisiana Creole does not use *ne* in negation. Rather, the negative marker *pa* (French *pas*) is placed before the verb. Alternately, a speaker may use *pi* (French *plus*) to mean ‘no longer’ or *jamen* (French *jamais*) to mean ‘never’ (Broussard 1942):

\[
\text{Yé té pi capab danse.} \\
\text{(Ils/elles n’étaient plus capables de danser).} \\
\text{‘They couldn’t dance any more.’}
\]

**Question Words**

The question words used in Louisiana Creole are as follows:

- *ki*: who
- *ou*: where
- *ki sa, ki*: what
- *konmyen*: how much
- *ke*: which, who
- *kofè*: why (Louisiana Creole Grammar 2002: 8).

Harris (1973), in his study of Africanisms in Louisiana Creole, focused on possible sources of the word for ‘why’, *kofè*. The word is thought to be due to apocope of final sounds in the periphrastic expressive *quoi faire* or *à quoi faire*. Both of these expressions are found in the French *patois*. The form [kofæ(r)] is found in Cajun French, for example, but its form was probably influenced by the creole (Harris 1973). There is no
doubt that older or vernacular varieties of French in Louisiana constituted one important source for *cofè*. This must be so, since there are no analogous forms in the other French-based creoles. Harris (1973) finds it surprising, however, that French *quoi* survived only in this single form in Louisiana Creole. He therefore proposes a ‘double contribution’, French and African, to this structure. In some of the languages spoken by slaves brought into Louisiana, there were forms analogous to *cofè*. Two languages in the Kwa branch of the Niger-Congo family, for instance, use forms synonymous with *quoi* ‘what’ and *faire* ‘do/make’ to form expressions meaning ‘why’ (Harris 1973). The researcher searched for analogous forms in other Creole languages and found, in the English-based Creole of Jamaica, the expression *wa mek* (what makes) meaning ‘why’. Harris (1973: 102) concluded that African interrogative structures reinforced the vernacular French *quoi faire* in forming *cofè* in Louisiana Creole. He concludes by saying that, ‘en somme, s’il est légitime de penser qu’une double origine, française et africaine, pour *cofè* en créole louisianais est probable, il est tout à fait certain que la chose a été possible’.

**Conclusion**

According to Harris (1973), Louisiana Creole is fast disappearing. In many cases, it is being abandoned for English. The rest of the time, it seems that it is being decreolized by absorption into Cajun French. Thus, it is extremely important for more work to be done, especially more research in the field, before it is too late. First, it is crucial to determine just how fast the language is disappearing in Louisiana and elsewhere. This may vary widely according to both social and geographic factors. It would be interesting to know just where the basilectal varieties are to be found, and why. Closer comparisons of these
varieties with the mesolectal and acrolectal sort may afford more clues to the earlier
development of the language, which we can no longer observe directly. It may be
possible to have a better idea of whether the creole always displayed something like its
current level of variation, or whether the currently existing continuum is a recent
phenomenon. This knowledge, in turn, may lead to a better understanding of how creole
languages, and languages in general develop. In addition, research on the sources of
various Louisiana Creole features may help us to understand the universal features of
grammar in human languages.
References


