

Call for papers

Tenth Creolistics Workshop: "Innovations"

- with special attention to parallels between creole and sign language creation

Aarhus University, Denmark, 8-10 April 2015

<http://www.creolisticsX.dk>

Background of the Creolistics Workshop

The Creolistics Workshop, which has previously been held in London (UK), Amsterdam (NL), Giessen (D) and Aarhus (DK), has a long tradition for being a forum of exchange and inspiration in the creolistics community. For the tenth edition, the main focus will be on **innovations**, primarily in creoles and sign languages, but also in other types of languages where contact has played an important role.

Creole studies have traditionally focused on continuation and universals, discussing for instance the contributions of the lexifiers and substrates. In past decades, an important body of literature in creolistics has been produced with the goal of weighing the influences from the various contributing languages to creole formation. However, much less attention has been given to innovations, in particular lexical, semantic, syntactic and typological aspects that cannot easily be attributed to the known input languages.

Therefore, the aim of this workshop will be to shift the focus from a historical approach to creoles to a more cognitively-oriented framework whose primary goal will be to explain why certain strategies and structures are innovated and selected in the creation of new language varieties, while others are not.

As sign languages have been argued to show social and structural commonalities with creoles, special attention is given to Deaf Sign Languages.

Parallels between creole and sign language creation

The idea that sign languages can be considered creole languages is based on a variety of factors, and is often linked to the particular sociohistorical circumstances under which they emerged and evolved. Especially since the documentation of the genesis of Nicaraguan Sign Language (NSL), where researchers pointed out the sudden development of the language going through a process reminiscent of an initial pidgin stage with subsequent creolization, sign language students have looked at creole studies for inspiration. With few exceptions, this inspiration was more or less unidirectional. The time now seems ripe to cross-fertilize creole studies with research on Sign Languages.

There are several areas of similarity between creoles and sign languages: both are created and innovated from the bottom up, that is, the first generation of (new) sign language users modify, create and unify word signs and structures, just

as may have happened in the genesis of creole languages. 90% of deaf children are born in hearing families, which means that the children will be better signers than their parents – just like, at some point in history, children creole speakers were.

There are also structural similarities between signed and spoken languages, such as aspect-dominance, preverbal marking of tense-mood-aspect, the marking of existentials with a verb meaning possession and the use of a sentence-final completive marker.

Furthermore, there are sociolinguistic similarities in that both types of languages are minority languages with low prestige, often lacking recognition and whose speakers and signers themselves belong to stigmatized communities.

Finally, both creole languages and sign languages have been diffused between areas, even between continents, for instance American Sign Language has its roots in French Sign Language rather than being the result of a local creation. Similarly, West African Pidgin English and Caribbean English creoles are historically connected, and several other pidgins/creoles are known to have spawned several daughter languages (e.g. the different Melanesian Pidgin Englishes).

One goal of Creolistics X is to bring together the field of creole studies together with that of sign linguistics so as to establish possible connections between the two types of languages, centering around the theme of innovations. Specifically, the development from pidgin to creole as compared to that from home-signs to full-fledged sign language offers an interesting and potentially fruitful research venue, with possible implications for, among others, general theoretical linguistics and evolutionary linguistics.

Call for papers

For this workshop, we would like to invite contributions from scholars working on creoles and sign languages from a diachronic or synchronic perspective. We welcome especially papers that deal with outcomes of contact situations where innovative expansions of the grammatical system can be observed, compared to earlier stages or to the contributing languages. We define innovations here broadly so as to encompass any distinction that is found neither in the lexifier, nor in the substrate languages.

Particularly welcome are contributions which touch upon the commonalities between sign languages and creoles, so that possible underlying cognitive mechanisms common to both language types, regardless of the modality they use, can be identified. Other topics of potential interest include, but are not limited to, how innovations spread and diffuse within a community (from ontogeny to phylogeny), or studies that investigate possible links between creole language and sign language genesis.

In the traditional spirit of openness of preceding Creolistics Workshops, other topics in the area of pidgin and creole languages will also be welcome.

Abstracts

The length of abstracts should not exceed 500 words. Please send your anonymized abstract to creolisticsX@gmail.com - remember to provide the name(s) of the author(s) and affiliation in the mail itself, not on the abstract. The deadline for

submitting your abstract is on **October 1, 2014**. Notification of acceptance can be expected around **November 1, 2014**.

Homepage

<http://www.creolisticsX.dk>

On the homepage, you will find practical information in connection with the event, as well as a bibliography of studies linking sign languages and creoles.

Sign language interpretation will be available for presenters at the conference.

Local organization

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